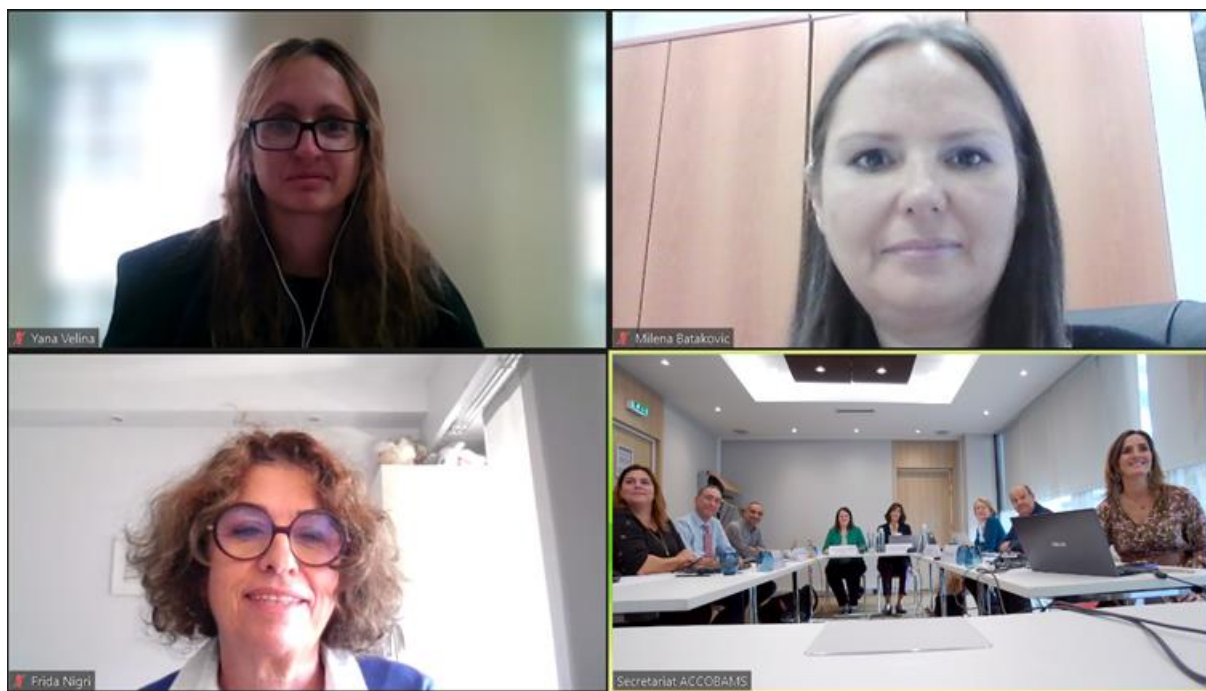


**REPORT OF THE FIFTEENTH MEETING  
OF THE ACCOBAMS BUREAU**



**Monaco, 22<sup>nd</sup> & 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2023**

## DRAFT REPORT OF THE FIFTEENTH MEETING OF THE ACCOBAMS BUREAU

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## 1. OPENING OF THE MEETING

1. The Fifteenth Meeting of the ACCOBAMS Bureau was convened in hybrid format: online and in the Principality of Monaco, at Novotel, on the 22<sup>nd</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2023.
2. The Meeting was attended in person by the ACCOBAMS Chairperson, Ms. Marie Thérèse Gambin, and the Vice-Chairs, Mr. Milad Fakri and Mrs. Marina Sequeira. The other Vice-Chairs: Mrs. Milena Batakovic and Mrs. Yana Velina attended online.
3. The Meeting was also attended by Mr. Simone Panigada, Chair of the Scientific Committee; by two experts assisting the Secretariat as Observers - Mr. Hervé Lethier (online), Mr. Chedly Rais, and by staff members of the ACCOBAMS Secretariat.
4. The full list of participants is shown in [Annex 1](#) to this report.
5. The Chairperson of the ACCOBAMS Bureau opened the Meeting at 9.00 a.m., on Wednesday 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2023.
6. She welcomed the participants, the ACCOBAMS Executive Secretary, and the Secretariat's team.

## 2. ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

7. The Chairperson introduced the provisional agenda (ACCOBAMS-BU15/2023/Doc01), alongside the provisional annotated agenda (ACCOBAMS-BU15/2023/Doc02), the list of documents (ACCOBAMS-BU15/2023/Doc03), as well as the provisional timetable (ACCOBAMS-BU15/2023/Doc04).
8. The Meeting adopted the agenda and related timetable. The agenda appears as [Annex 2](#) to this report.

## 3. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE 2023-2025 WORK PROGRAMME BY THE SECRETARIAT AND SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE

### 3.1 Report on activities by the Secretariat

9. Mrs Susana Salvador, Executive Secretary of ACCOBAMS, started by welcoming the Bureau members and reiterated her congratulations for their nomination. She also thanked the Authorities of Malta for hosting MOP8.
10. Referring to document ACCOBAMS-BU15/2023/Doc05 and emphasising that it covered the period from November 2022 to October 2023, the Executive Secretary informed the meeting about the implementation status of each action planned in the 2023-2025 Programme of Work. She also provided an overview about the cooperation with the Secretariats of other relevant Conventions and Agreements.
11. Following the presentation by the Executive Secretary, the Bureau members commended the efforts that have been done for the implementation of the Programme of Work activities, took note of the progress made and requested clarifications about some of the activities.

**Conclusion 1:**

The Bureau members commended the efforts that have been done by the Secretariat for the implementation of the Programme of Work. In relation to the web site of ACCOBAMS, the Bureau recommended an easier access to important ACCOBAMS documents in force (e.g Terms of Reference of the Bureau) as well as to the Decisions of the Parties. The Secretariat will assign DOI (Digital Object Identifier) to all relevant ACCOBAMS documents.

**3.2 Report on activities by the Scientific Committee**

12. The Chairperson of the Bureau thanked Mr Simone Panigada (Chair of the Scientific Committee) for providing a report on the activities of the Scientific Committee and invited him to present it to the meeting.
13. Referring to document ACCOBAMS-BU15/2023/Doc06, the Chair of the Scientific Committee indicated that during their first meeting (SC15) of the triennium 2023-2025, held in May 2023, the Scientific Committee members elected the Chair, the Vice-Chair and four Task Managers. He then informed about the main priorities for the Scientific Committee in the ACCOBAMS Work Programme for 2023-2025 and the main conclusions of the Fifteenth Meeting of the Scientific Committee.
14. The Chair of the Scientific Committee emphasised that the ASI is amongst the first priorities of the Scientific Committee and that the ASI special issue to be published in a specialised journal (Frontiers) is being finalised and financially supported thanks to a financial contribution from Italy.
15. He added that the Scientific Committee is preparing a draft handbook (*modus operandi*) to offer the Scientific Committee Members instructions on how to proceed in accordance with their mandate, including the facilitation of the information flow between the Scientific Committee members themselves, and also between the Scientific Committee and the Secretariat. The handbook is expected to be ready for submission to the next MOP.
16. During the debate that followed the presentation by the Chair of the Scientific Committee, the issue of impacts generated by military activities on cetaceans was raised, in particular in relation to how countries can be assisted in mitigating such impacts, since sometimes military exercises are not covered by any environmental legislation, while it is clear that some of these activities may generate negative impacts on cetaceans.
17. The Secretariat informed the meeting that the issue was addressed in the framework of ACCOBAMS through a workshop which gathered several national navies, and on the objective of further progressing through improving protocols on mitigation measures. Another workshop is to be organised in 2024 in close collaboration with ASCOBANS. To this end, the assistance of the ACCOBAMS National Focal Points will be very useful in identifying the relevant national authorities to be invited and involved.
18. The meeting also raised the difficulties of having an update of the IUCN status of Harbour Porpoise, while the conservation status of the species was recently evaluated by Portugal and Spain.

**Conclusion 2:**

The Bureau expressed its appreciation for the work done by the Scientific Committee and welcomed their initiative to prepare a handbook aimed at guiding Scientific Committee members to fulfil their role. The Bureau invited the Chair of the Scientific Committee to present the draft handbook at the next Bureau meeting.

**Conclusion 3:**

The Bureau invited the Secretariat to pursue its efforts regarding the mitigation of the impact of military exercises on cetaceans in close consultation with navies and to liaise with the National Focal Points to encourage them to identify the relevant military authorities that should be invited to the 2024 workshop.

**4. BUDGETARY MATTERS****4.1 Report on incomes and expenditures for 2022**

19. The Executive Secretary made a presentation in relation to document ACCOBAMS-BU15/2023/Doc07 on incomes and expenditures for 2022, as per 31<sup>st</sup> December 2022, recalling that the 2022 accounts had been validated by the management controller in June 2023.
20. The Bureau members requested that in the future the Secretariat indicates the specific amounts on expenditures effected on unspent voluntary contributions provided by the Parties, including whether it is a partial amount of the unspent voluntary contribution or otherwise.

**Conclusion 4:**

The Bureau approved the properly validated 2022 accounts, and commended:

- the financial support provided in 2022 by Monaco and Spain through voluntary contributions, in addition to the use of earlier voluntary contributions (Italy, Malta) and co-fundings (CTN Naval, MAVA),
- the work of the Secretariat to develop projects and activities supported by co-funding (EU projects, MAVA Foundation).

**4.2 Report on incomes and expenditures for 2023**

21. The Executive Secretary presented document ACCOBAMS-BU15/2023/Doc08 on the provisional report of incomes and expenditures for 2023, as of 30<sup>th</sup> September 2023.
22. She explained that since end of September 2023, Greece has paid its pending contributions and that during the Sixth Conference of South Mediterranean Countries (13-15 November 2023, Monastir, Tunisia) the Libyan delegate informed that he will do his best for Libya to pay at least part of their pending contributions.
23. The Bureau members also requested that in the future the Secretariat indicates the specific amounts on expenditures effected on unspent voluntary contributions provided by the Parties, including whether it is a partial amount of the unspent voluntary contribution or otherwise.

**Conclusion 5:**

The Bureau approved the provisional report on incomes and expenditures for 2023 and requested the ACCOBAMS Secretariat to invite Parties with unpaid pledges to settle their balance as soon as possible, in order to allow for the implementation of activities agreed by MOP8.

#### 4.3 Long-term pending Ordinary contributions

24. The Executive Secretary presented the note on long-term pending contributions - ACCOBAMS-BU15/2023/Doc09. She recalled that MOP8 requested the Bureau to propose to the next Meeting of the Parties a procedure concerning the management and the recovery of long-term pending contributions (Resolution 8.2, § 11 b). She informed that to date, 16 Parties paid their 2023 contributions, thus 8 Parties are still to make their respective payments.

##### **Conclusion 6:**

The Bureau advised the Secretariat to contact all the Countries with more than 3 unpaid annual contributions in order to consult them on how best to present their respective invoices: only one invoice with the total due amount or separate invoices on annual contributions.

##### **Conclusion 7:**

The Bureau favoured the approach of preserving good relationships with all Countries, despite the existence of long-pending ordinary contributions, as in order to progress towards ACCOBAMS objectives the involvement of all ACCOBAMS countries is necessary.

The Secretariat was requested to present a draft document to the next Meeting of the Bureau, taking into account the following aspects:

- a restriction of the right to vote and to the involvement as Bureau or Scientific Committee members for Parties which are three or more years behind in paying their annual contributions on the date of the opening session of the Meeting of the Parties (MOP), unless these Parties provide the Secretariat a formal letter explaining the “exceptional circumstances” originating the delay in payment, which is then to be deemed acceptable or otherwise by the MOP;
- a restriction to funding projects under the Supplementary Conservation Fund for governmental bodies from Parties which are five or more years behind in paying their contributions on the date of the opening of the MOP; however, national NGOs from these Parties are not to be affected by such restriction.

#### 4.4 Provisional list of activities and proposed expenditures for 2024

25. In accordance with Annex III “Terms of reference for administration of the budget” of Resolution 8.2, adopted by MOP8, the Executive Secretary presented document ACCOBAMS-BU15/2023/Doc10 on estimated expenditures for 2024 based on the adopted Work Programme and planned activities (in [Annex 3](#)).
26. She informed that the Sixteenth Bureau Meeting will be held in January 2025 since the Sixteenth Scientific Committee Meeting, which will deliver on scientific recommendations to the Parties, is to be held early December 2024.
27. The Chair of the Scientific Committee proposed to send the ToRs for the stakeholders’ Conservation Management Plan (CMP) workshop as soon as possible in order to better evaluate related costs. He advised to postpone it in case the existing funds are not sufficient to enable a presential format, as he considered that a hybrid format would prevent the proper delivery of the workshop objectives amongst stakeholders.

##### **Conclusion 8:**

The Bureau agreed with the proposed activities for 2024 and the estimated expenditures as reflected in [Annex 3](#) to this report; meanwhile, it encouraged the Secretariat to continue monitoring funding opportunities and to develop proposals for multilateral projects and co-funded activities.

## 5. INSTITUTIONAL MATTERS

### 5.1 Update on the Scientific Committee composition

28. As an introduction to this Agenda Item, the Chairperson recalled that during MOP8, Parties adopted ACCOBAMS Resolution 8.3, amending the Rules of Procedure of the ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee. The amendments aimed at ensuring a wider participation of ACCOBAMS Parties in the Scientific Committee, as a subsidiary key body to the ACCOBAMS work.
29. The Executive Secretary introduced document ACCOBAMS-BU15/2023/Inf02 providing details about the new composition of the Scientific Committee (SC), following MOP8 decisions. She emphasised that the role and the designation of SC members were established, as follows:
- up to 12 experts – as compared to the previous 9 – are designated as Regional Representatives, with this increase in number being on a trial basis;
  - all members of the Scientific Committee will be designated by the MOP, despite some are proposed by CIESM, IUCN, CMS and IWC;
  - the representative of ECS is no longer a member to the SC;
  - the SC Chair and Vice-Chair are elected amongst all SC members, excluding any additional members designated on a voluntary basis by the Parties; the SC Chair and Vice-Chair shall not be experts nominated by the same Organisation; a maximum duration of two consecutive terms for the SC Chair, Vice-Chair and Task Managers was introduced, starting from 2025.
30. The Executive Secretary recalled that the new composition of the Scientific Committee was adopted on a trial basis which is to be reassessed at MOP9, based on the experience gained in 2023-2025. She recalled that Italy offered to cover, during the triennium 2023-2025, the additional participation costs generated by the increased number of SC members, which is applicable for eligible countries.
31. Further to this, discussion and next steps still need to be considered during the next Bureau meeting in terms of the procedure to issue a call for SC nominations prior to MOP9.
32. Concerning the Scientific Committee members representing partner organisations, MOP8 appointed 8 members previously nominated by CIESM, IUCN, CMS and IWC, and decided to no longer consider the European Cetacean Society (ECS) as a SC member, based on its legal status as a private association.
33. At the first Scientific Committee meeting of the triennium (SC15), the contribution of ECS to their previous work was commended, as well as its future added value, and the Scientific Committee recommended that Parties reconsider the reintegration of ECS amongst the organisations invited to designate one representative to the ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee, based on a letter to be provided by ECS, which was meanwhile received at the Secretariat.
34. A substantive debate followed on the number of regional representatives with regard to the subregions' breakdown. Considering that countries belonging to more than one subregion may have candidates nominated as regional representatives in more than one subregion, the Bureau members stressed that this may lead to an unbalanced representativity of countries in the Regional Representatives composition of the Scientific Committee.

35. On the issue on whether a higher number of SC members would hamper the work of the Scientific Committee, it was indicated that in some organisations all Parties may participate in their respective Scientific body, which enriches the scientific debate leading up to sounder deliverables.
36. The Meeting debated the ECS participation through the nomination of a representative to the Scientific Committee. It took note of the recommendation of the Scientific Committee on this issue and decided to reconsider it again at the next Bureau Meeting.

**Conclusion 9:**

The Bureau decided to consider the effectiveness of the new composition of the Scientific Committee at its next Meeting and invited the Secretariat and the Scientific Committee to:

- prepare an examination on the subject that takes into account the functionality of the Scientific Committee and the budgetary implications linked to the increased the number of SC members;
- propose options for the designation of SC regional representatives to be appointed by the Parties.

**Conclusion 10:**

Concerning the participation of ECS as a member in the Scientific Committee, the Bureau agreed that the Secretariat would reply to the letter received from this organisation to inform that the matter is under examination by the Bureau. The Bureau meanwhile agreed to revisit the issue at its next meeting.

## 5.2 Italian proposal to amend the rules of Procedure for the Meeting of the Parties

37. During MOP8, Italy introduced a proposal to amend the Rules of Procedure for the Meeting of the Parties, adopted in 2013 by MOP5. The proposed modification aimed at increasing the number of Vice-Chairpersons up to a maximum of 6, instead of the current 4. Italy explained that their proposal envisaged a better representativity of the Parties in the Bureau given the difference in the number of countries in each of the 4 ACCOBAMS sub-regions. MOP8 concluded by mandating the Bureau to consider the Italian proposal during the intersessional period, and to submit their recommendation to MOP9.
38. The Executive Secretary presented the note received from Italy on 12 October 2023 regarding their proposal to amend the Rules of Procedure of the Meeting of the Parties (ACCOBAMS-BU15/2023/Doc11).

**Conclusion 11:**

The Bureau did not approve the Italian proposal and requested the Secretariat to prepare a document for the Sixteenth Bureau Meeting, with information on the composition of similar subsidiary bodies in other intergovernmental organisations.

## 5.3 ACCOBAMS Strategy 2014-2025

39. The Executive Secretary recalled that the current ACCOBAMS long-term Strategy covering the period 2014-2025 was adopted by Resolution 7.4. which amended Resolution 5.1 (ACCOBAMS-BU15/2023/Inf03). MOP8 included in the Programme of Work for 2023-2025, the review of ACCOBAMS Strategy (2018-2025) based on which a new Strategy for 2026-2037 should be drafted. A call for Voluntary Contributions was launched in July 2023, including this activity. Nevertheless, to date, no funds were received to develop such activity.



**Conclusion 12:**

The Bureau requested the Secretariat to launch another invitation for Voluntary Contributions, explaining the urgent need of funds to develop an effectiveness assessment of the current ACCOBAMS Strategy (2018-2025), based on which a new Strategy for 2026-2037 would be drafted for submission to MOP9.

The Bureau agreed that unless sufficient funds were received prior to February 2024, there would not be enough time to assess the 2018-2025 Strategy and to draft a new one. In such case, they proposed to extend the ongoing Strategy for another 3 years.

## **6. PROGRESS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE NEXT SYNOPTIC BASIN-WIDE SURVEYS IN THE ACCOBAMS AREA**

40. Referring to Document ACCOBAMS-BU15/2023/Inf04, the Executive Secretary recalled that through ACCOBAMS Resolution 8.10, Parties requested *“the Scientific Committee and the Secretariat, in collaboration with the ASI Steering Committee and other relevant experts, to prepare, for the next basin wide survey, a detailed technical document in the form of a project proposal, with a description of the different work packages, time-frame, budget and a SWOT analysis”*.
41. She also recalled that the ACCOBAMS Resolution 8.10 invited Parties to (i) *“provide voluntary contributions in 2023 so to meet the expected internal funding in view of undertaking synoptic basin-wide surveys in the ACCOBAMS Area in 2024-2026”*, (ii) *“to commit to providing in-kind support for the next synoptic basin-wide surveys”* and (iii) *“to appoint a national contact person to participate in a LTMP Contact Group to define implementation conditions and protocol for logistics (research platform, human means, equipment, training, etc.) and administration (survey restrictions, permits, etc.) related to undertaking basin-wide synoptic surveys based upon the experience gained from ASI1, taking into account the guidance provided in Recommendation 14.1 of the Scientific Committee”*.
42. Concerning progress made in the preparation of the next basin-wide synoptic survey in the ACCOBAMS area, the Executive Secretary informed that they have invited the National Focal Points to inform the Secretariat, before 31 December 2023, about (i) the amount of voluntary contributions and/or in-kind support that their country could provide for the implementation of the next basin-wide survey, and for the following surveys, as foreseen in the LTMP, and (ii) the name and details of their national contact(s) to integrate the LTMP Contact Group. The LTMP Contact Group would hence have their first online meeting, on Monday 29 January 2024, afternoon, so to enable a first discussion and to examine and discuss responses that would have been received meanwhile, in particular on voluntary contributions, and in-kind proposals, as well as the next steps of the fundraising initiative.
43. Mr. Herve LETHIER, Consultant to the Secretariat, presented the main elements of the project proposal for the next synoptic survey. He emphasised that the project is based on the ASI legacy (balance and post evaluation). He also presented the following milestones of the project implementation:
- by March 2024: Coordination personnel and Scientific coordinator are recruited.
  - by May 2025: The Survey methodology is finalised (Survey 1) (by May 2026/Survey 2) and teams are recruited, and their members are trained (Survey 1) (by May 2026/Survey 2).
  - by April 2025: All permits and authorisations are obtained (Survey 1) (by April 2026/Survey 2).
  - by September 2025: Regional Datasets are finalised (Survey 1) (by September 2026/survey 2).
  - by October 2026: Results of the preliminary survey are available (Survey 1) (by October 2027/survey 2).

- by December 2026: Recommendations are made available on interpretation of results for conservation and transfer of all data to the data management system.
- by June 2027: All result reports and presentations are completed.

**Conclusion 13:** The Bureau concluded that the next basin-wide synoptic survey in the ACCOBAMS area is a priority for ACCOBAMS. The Chairperson of the Bureau will send a letter through the Secretariat with a view to stress the need for the National Focal Points to inform the Secretariat about the elements requested in the Letter of the Executive Secretary of the 6<sup>th</sup> of October 2023 on the subject, in particular the designation of national contact(s) appointed for the LTMP Contact Group.

**Conclusion 14:** The Bureau agreed that the harmonisation and synergies with the other relevant programmes is important, in particular regarding surveys to be undertaken within the monitoring programmes under the EU MSFD and the EcAp/IMAP of Barcelona Convention.

In this context, they strongly invited the Secretariat:

- to establish contacts with the European Commission and the Secretariat of the Barcelona Convention.
- to follow up with further efforts for potential donors by organizing meetings.

## 7. ACCOBAMS PARTNERS

### 7.1 Programmes of Collaboration with the Secretariat for 2023-2025

44. The Executive Secretary introduced the information document ACCOBAMS-BU15/2023/Inf05 on the programmes of collaboration sent by 19 ACCOBAMS Partners to the Secretariat. The document was prepared according to Annex 2 (Rules and Commitments of ACCOBAMS Partners) of Resolution 7.9, adopted during the MOP7, *“ACCOBAMS Partners shall present, at the latest two months after each Meeting of the Parties, a programme of collaboration with the Permanent Secretariat during the triennium. The programme shall include all activities carried out in the frame of the partnership and related to the conservation plan and the support to the Permanent Secretariat”*.
45. Bureau Members raised the matter regarding the low number of collaboration programmes received by the Secretariat from the ACCOBAMS Partners (only 19 ACCOBAMS Partners provided collaboration programmes). In this regard, the Executive Secretary informed the Meeting that several reminders had been sent. She also informed the Meeting that despite not all collaboration programmes having been received, the information document does not reflect the actual commitment level of the individual ACCOBAMS Partners.

#### **Conclusion 15:**

The Bureau welcomed the information provided by ACCOBAMS Partners and requested the Secretariat to send reminders to all Partners which have not yet responded, and to request the assistance from the respective National Focal Points.

### 7.2 New request(s) for ACCOBAMS Partnership

46. The Executive Secretary introduced document ACCOBAMS-BU15/2023/Doc12Rev1 on the pending and new requests for ACCOBAMS Partnership, explaining that the Secretariat had received two new applications from “We Are Méditerranée” Association and “Notre Grand Bleu” Association, and that further to MOP8, Parties decided to postpone their decision concerning Delphis NGO so to further investigate the willingness and ability

of the latter to cooperate with ACCOBAMS, which in the meantime provided a Programme of Collaboration for 2023-2025.

47. She further informed the Meeting that all applicants provided the necessary paperwork in support of their applications for the status of ACCOBAMS Partner, as presented in the Annexes of document ACCOBAMS-BU15/2023/Doc12Rev1.
48. She finally recalled that according to Resolution 7.9, entities based in States Non-Parties to ACCOBAMS may be admitted by the Bureau, as done in the past, following the examination of the documentation received.

**Conclusion 16:**

The key role of the partnership network was recognised in improving the outreach of ACCOBAMS. The majority of the Bureau members decided to grant the status of ACCOBAMS Partners to Delphis NGO. The Bureau decided to grant the partnership status to “We Are Méditerranée” Association, and to “Notre Grand Bleu” Association, provided that no negative advice is received from the Tunisian National Focal Point to the Secretariat, regarding the latter.

**7.3 Review of the ACCOBAMS Partners status**

49. The Executive Secretary introduced the information document ACCOBAMS-BU15/2023/Inf06 which provides an overview on both the compliance of ACCOBAMS Partners on documentation requirements and their collaborative efforts in aligning their activities with the ACCOBAMS objectives and/or priorities.
50. She informed the Meeting that, following the request of the Fourteenth Meeting of the Bureau (Online, 18-19 January 2022), the Secretariat addressed an official letter to the 8 ACCOBAMS Partners that have been silent and non-collaborative for a number of years with ACCOBAMS, in order to advise them on the likely withdrawal of their current status of ACCOBAMS Partner. No reply from these 8 ACCOBAMS Partners has been received.
51. The Executive Secretary also recalled the amount of documentation requested to Partners, as reflected in Resolution 7.9, which represents a questionable added value when compared to the effective collaborative efforts by the ACCOBAMS Partners. An alternative approach could be to focus on their annual updates on projects and activities in relation to the ACCOBAMS work and priorities, as well as the integration of such information in the NETCCOBAMS Platform.

**Conclusion 17:**

The Bureau decided to withdraw the status of ACCOBAMS Partners to the entities listed hereafter and requested the Secretariat to inform them through an official letter:

- American Society of International Law - Wildlife Interest Group
- Association Ecologique Marine Barbarous
- Association protection des Cétacés et de l’Environnement Marin
- Cybelle Planète
- Dipartimento di Scienze della Terra dell’Ambiente e della Vita (DISTAV)
- Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes of Montpellier (EPHE)
- Spanish Cetacean Society (SEC)
- Whalecraft

**Conclusion 18:**

The Bureau requested the Secretariat to prepare, for the next Bureau Meeting, a draft proposal on a possible revision of the relevant annexes of Resolution 7.9 – especially in terms of lessening the administrative burden on Partners when reporting on their activities, and regarding a clearer procedure for how the Bureau decides on the withdrawal of ACCOBAMS Partners.

**8. ANY OTHER BUSINESS****8.1 Interactions with Killer whales**

52. The Executive Secretary recalled that during the meeting of the ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee, held in May 2023, members were informed that following the disruptive behaviour shown by some killer whale individuals of the Iberian Peninsula subpopulation, an informal Working Group on Atlantic Orca had been established gathering scientists from France, Portugal and Spain, with a view to collect information, and to address any possible solutions to cope with these unwanted interactions.
53. Moreover, the ACCOBAMS Secretariat has been approached by Partners who, mindful of the ACCOBAMS mandate and principles, consulted the Secretariat in face of a few videos appearing in social media, where crew members displayed a disregarding behavior towards these animals. A few reactions to these incidents have been published, such as an open letter ([Annex 4](#)) co-signed by 80 scientists, or statements issued by other entities.
54. A Bureau Member informed that some technical workshops were held in Lisbon and Galicia to discuss possible ways forward and that a Portuguese working group composed by representatives of the Navy, the National Cruising Association and experts in orcas and acoustics had been created to examine all data gathered and to propose solutions.
55. She also reported that an IWC/ICG workshop will be organised in February 2024 by the Spanish Ministry for the Environment. The main objective is to present and discuss all the data already collected on the interactions between orcas and vessels (including the presentation of the results obtained by the project financed by the Spanish government), and hence try to find solutions. Experts on orca biology, ecology, and acoustics will be invited, as well as representatives of the naval authorities from Spain and Portugal. The conclusions of this workshop will be presented at the next meeting of the Scientific Committee of the International Whaling Commission.

**Conclusion 19:**

The Bureau requested the Secretariat to:

- consult the Scientific Committee on this issue, especially in view of different approaches and guidance;
- consult the concerned countries in order to obtain the contacts of their responsible authorities - in Morocco, France, Monaco and Spain - in case any unwanted interactions occur in national waters and require crews to contact their authorities on applicable procedures to face such interactions.

**Conclusion 20:**

The Bureau agreed that the Secretariat would respond to any queries on the issue as follows:

- this specific issue is under examination by the ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee;
- according to the purpose of the ACCOBAMS Agreement, it is stated that *“Parties shall take co-ordinated measures to achieve and maintain a favourable conservation status for cetaceans. To this end, Parties shall prohibit and take all necessary measures to eliminate, where this is not already done, any deliberate taking of cetaceans and shall co-operate to create and maintain a network of specially protected areas to conserve cetaceans.”*

**8.2 Departure of project officer from ACCOBAMS Secretariat**

56. The Executive Secretary informed the meeting that Célia Le RAVALLEC resigned from her position as Project Officer at the Secretariat of ACCOBAMS and the post is vacant from mid-November 2023. In October 2023, the Secretariat issued a vacancy announcement and applications may be received until Sunday 31 December 2023, included.
57. She informed the Bureau that until the appointment of a new Project Officer, which was expected by March 2024 but could occur later, the workload of the Secretariat Staff members will be particularly heavy from now until the early months of 2024, which was aggravated by the move of the Secretariat premises scheduled for the week of 11 December. Consequently, some of the activities that had been planned beforehand were being reconsidered and, in some cases, would not be developed as planned, notably due to the lack of sufficient human resources at the Secretariat.

**9. DATE AND VENUE OF THE NEXT BUREAU MEETING**

58. Mrs Yana Velina informed the Meeting that Bulgaria proposed to host the next Bureau Meeting in Sofia.
59. Both the Chairperson and the Executive Secretary thanked Bulgaria for their kind proposal.
60. The Secretariat informed that the next Meeting of the Bureau is planned for the 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2025, after the 16<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee, planned for December 2024.

**Conclusion 21:**

The venue of the 16<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the ACCOBAMS Bureau will be further discussed between the Chairperson, the Bureau Members and the Secretariat, for decision.

**10. CLOSURE OF THE MEETING**

61. The Bureau Chairperson thanked all the participants and closed the 15<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the ACCOBAMS Bureau on Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2023 at 12:30.

## **ANNEXES**

[ANNEX 1](#) - List of participants

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**ANNEX 1 - LIST OF PARTICIPANTS****MEMBERS OF THE BUREAU****BATAKOVIĆ Milena (Online)**

Department for nature protection, monitoring, analysis and reporting  
 Agency for Nature and Environment Protection of Montenegro  
 IV Proleterske brigade br. 19  
 81000 Podgorica, MONTENEGRO  
 Tel: + 382 20 446 531  
[milena.batakovic@gmail.com](mailto:milena.batakovic@gmail.com)

**FAKRI Milad**

Director  
 National Centre for Marine Sciences-CNRS  
 P.O.Box 534, Batroun, LEBANON  
 P.O. Box 189, Jounieh, LEBANON  
 Tel: +961 993 4763 - +961 674 1580  
[milosman@cns.edu.lb](mailto:milosman@cns.edu.lb)

**GAMBIN Marie Thérèse**

*ACCOBAMS Bureau Chairperson*  
 Unit Manager Thematic | Biodiversity & Water  
 Environment & Resources Authority  
 Hexagon House, Spencer Hill  
 Marsa, MRS 1441, MALTA  
 Tel: +356 22923659  
[marie-therese.gambin@era.org.mt](mailto:marie-therese.gambin@era.org.mt)

**SEQUEIRA Marina**

Instituto da Conservação da Natureza e das Florestas, I.P.  
 Divisão de Gestão de Espécies da Fauna e da Flora  
 Av. da República, 16 – 16B  
 1050-191 Lisboa, PORTUGAL  
 Tel: (+ 351) 21 350 79 00  
[marina.sequeira@icnf.pt](mailto:marina.sequeira@icnf.pt)

**VELINA Yana (Online)**

Biological Diversity Department - National Nature Protection Service Directorate  
 Ministry of Environment and Water  
 22, Maria Luisa Blvd.  
 Sofia 1000, BULGARIA  
 Tel.: (+359 2) 940 6128  
[yavelina@moew.government.bg](mailto:yavelina@moew.government.bg)

**CHAIRPERSON OF THE SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE****PANIGADA Simone**

Tethys Research Institute  
 Viale G.B. Gadio2  
 20 121 Milan, ITALY  
 Tel: (+39) 02 7200 1947 – (+39) 02 6694 114  
[panigada@inwind.it](mailto:panigada@inwind.it)

**EXPERTS OF THE ACCOBAMS SECRETARIAT**

**LETHIER Hervé (Online)**

Ecosystem Management Conservation Consulting International (EMC<sup>2</sup>I)  
Le Belvédère  
Chemin de l'Observatoire  
1264, St Cergue- Suisse  
Tel : +41 (0)223601234  
[herve.lethier@wanadoo.fr](mailto:herve.lethier@wanadoo.fr)

**RAIS Chedly**

Menzah VIII  
Tunis, TUNISIA  
Tel: +216 98444629  
[chedly.rais@okianos.org](mailto:chedly.rais@okianos.org)

**ACCOBAMS SECRETARIAT**

**SALVADOR Susana**

ACCOBAMS Executive Secretary  
Les Terrasses de Fontvieille, Jardin de l'UNESCO  
MC - 98000 Monaco  
Tel: +37798 98 80 10  
[ssalvador@accobams.net](mailto:ssalvador@accobams.net)

**MONTIGLIO Camille**

Assistant to the Executive Secretary  
Les Terrasses de Fontvieille, Jardin de l'UNESCO  
MC - 98000 Monaco  
Tel: +377 98 98 20 78  
[cmontiglio@accobams.net](mailto:cmontiglio@accobams.net)

**NIGRI Frida**

Accounting & Programme Assistant  
Jardin de l'UNESCO, Les Terrasses de Fontvieille  
MC - 98000 Monaco  
Tel: +377 98 98 42 43  
[admin@accobams.net](mailto:admin@accobams.net)

**SALIVAS Maylis**

Programme & Project Officer  
Jardin de l'UNESCO, Les Terrasses de Fontvieille  
MC - 98000 Monaco  
Tel: +377 98 98 42 75  
[msalivas@accobams.net](mailto:msalivas@accobams.net)



**ANNEX 2 - AGENDA**

- 1. Opening of the Meeting**
- 2. Adoption of the Agenda**
- 3. Implementation of the 2023 - 2025 Work Programme by the Secretariat and Scientific Committee**
  - 3.1 Report on activities by the Secretariat
  - 3.2 Report on activities by the Scientific Committee
- 4. Budgetary matters**
  - 4.1 Report on incomes and expenditures for 2022
  - 4.2 Report on incomes and expenditures for 2023
  - 4.3 Long-term pending Ordinary contributions
  - 4.4 Provisional list of activities and proposed expenditures for 2024
- 5. Institutional matters**
  - 5.1 Update on the Scientific Committee composition
  - 5.2 Italian proposal to amend the rules of Procedure for the Meeting of the Parties
  - 5.3 ACCOBAMS Strategy 2014-2025
- 6. Progress in the development of the next synoptic basin-wide surveys in the ACCOBAMS area**
- 7. ACCOBAMS Partners**
  - 7.1 Programmes of Collaboration with the Secretariat for 2023-2025
  - 7.2 New request(s) for ACCOBAMS Partnership
  - 7.3 Review of the ACCOBAMS Partners status
- 8. Any other business**
- 9. Date and venue of the next Bureau Meeting**
- 10. Closure of the Meeting**

## ANNEX 3 - PROVISIONAL LIST OF ACTIVITIES AND PROPOSED EXPENDITURES FOR 2024

ACTIONS UNDER THE 2023-2025 PoW	FORESEEN ACTIVITIES	ACTIVITIES FUNDED THROUGH:		COMMENTS/UPDATE/STATE OF PLAY
		ORDINARY CONTRIBUTIONS (€)	VOLUNTARY CONTRIBUTIONS/CO-FUNDING (€)	
<b>MANAGEMENT OF THE AGREEMENT</b>				
<b>MA 1 – INVOLVEMENT OF KEY STAKEHOLDERS</b>				
<i>MA 1a - Strengthen involvement of all key stakeholders in ACCOBAMS's operations</i>				
Strengthen involvement of national representatives in formulating actions related to cetacean conservation, according to their national priorities	Organize the 16 <sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Scientific Committee	29 000€ (LB 2200)	-	<i>December 2024, as agreed during SC15 Meeting</i>
	Organize the 16 <sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Bureau	7 000€ (LB 2300)	-	<i>To be organized in January 2025</i>
	Initiate the preparation of the Ninth Meeting of ACCOBAMS Parties (to be held end of 2025)	3 000€ (LB 2100)	-	<i>November 2025</i>
Establish/strengthen partnerships and collaborations with all relevant IGOs, NGOs, and international/national entities	Participate Meetings and relevant fora (CMS Family, UNEP MAP Meetings,...)	14 000€ (LB 1502)	Financial support from ongoing projects where ACCOBAMS is involved	
Enforce communication within the ACCOBAMS community and strengthen exchanges of information on national and regional projects / activities / initiatives	Using NETCCOBAMS platform as sharing/consultation tool - Exchange of information on national reports and regional projects / activities / initiatives	15 000€ (LB 54)  10 000€ (LB 53)	20 000€  2023-2025 Monaco Voluntary Contribution	
<b>MA2 – ENSURE ADEQUATE FUNDING, IN PARTICULAR FOR CONSERVATION ACTIVITIES</b>				
<i>MA2a – Mobilizing and diversifying funding sources</i>				
Fund projects under the Supplementary Conservation Grant Fund (SCF) related to cetacean conservation	Launching a new ACCOBAMS call for proposals for projects under SCF	-	15 000€  2023-2025 Monaco Voluntary Contribution	<i>A new call could be launched at the end of 2024 if enough funds are secured (45 000 euros). Until now, only 15 000 € are secured through the 2023-2025 voluntary contribution of the Principality of Monaco.</i>

**MA3 – IMPLEMENTATION OF AND COMPLIANCE WITH ACCOBAMS*****MA3a – Improve the level of implementation of and compliance with ACCOBAMS Resolutions as well as the monitoring of its progress***

Revise the ACCOBAMS Strategy (2018-2025) and propose a new one after evaluating overall Agreement's effectiveness	Evaluate the overall Agreement's effectiveness  Prepare an ACCOBAMS Strategy (2026-2037) in collaboration with all ACCOBAMS bodies	-	?	<i>Until now, no funds are secured to revise the ACCOBAMS Strategy (2018-2025)</i>
Reinforce the involvement of National Focal Points	Organize the 6 <sup>th</sup> Meeting of National Representatives to develop the 2026-2028 Programme of Work by identifying actions related to cetacean conservation, according to national priorities	15 000€ (LB 2400)		<i>July 2024</i>
Propose remedy actions in cases of non-follow-up with ACCOBAMS Resolutions and infringements	Organize the Fourth Meeting of the Follow-up Committee	5 000€ (LB 2500)	-	<i>Tentatively first semester 2024</i>

**CONSERVATION ACTIONS****CA1 - IMPROVE KNOWLEDGE ABOUT THE STATUS OF CETACEANS*****CA1a- Cetacean population estimates and distribution***

Promote the implementation of the Long-Term Monitoring Programme	Organize a meeting with potential funders of LTMP	10 000€ (savings from ASI)	-	<i>Tentatively during the MoW in March 2024</i>
Promote the use of ASI data by increasing the visibility of ASI	Organize an online conference on ASI sharing data	2 000€ (LB 53)	-	<i>May 2024</i>
Promote data collection at sub-regional and national levels	Draft handbooks on standardized monitoring methods (aerial surveys, boat-based surveys, acoustic surveys,...)	2 500€ (LB 53)	-	
Promote data collection from multidisciplinary surveys	Organize an online workshop to explain the interest and methodology of multidisciplinary surveys	5 000€ (LB 53)	-	<i>To be organized ideally before SC16</i>

***CA1b- Population structure****CA1b - no actions planned for 2024*

<b>CA1c- Monitoring cetacean's status Cetacean population estimates and distribution</b>				
Develop/ revise/ implement relevant Conservation Management Plans (CMP) for cetacean species	Organize stakeholders' workshop(s)	7 000€ (LB 53)	5 000€ Previous Voluntary Contribution from France	<i>To be organized ideally before SC16 in hybrid format</i>
Facilitate the Development/ revision/ implementation of National or Regional Action Plans for cetaceans	Supporting the revision of the National Action Plans for cetaceans in collaboration with SPA/RAC and national authorities in 2 Countries	3 000 € (LB 53)	-	<i>To be initiated end of 2023</i>
<b>CA1 d - Functional stranding networks and responses to emergency situation</b>				
Set up /Reinforce official national stranding networks (with all national institutions concerned) as appropriate, and encourage collaborations among national networks of Parties	Support participation of expert during a necropsies training following the best practices on cetacean postmortem investigation and tissue sampling	3 000 € (LB 53)	-	<i>Training stranding network experts organized by Liege University (Summer 2024)</i>
Encourage collaboration among national networks of Parties	Organize the second online meeting of the ACCOBAMS Emergency Task Force for Stranding (AETFS)	1 500€ (LB 53)	-	<i>To be organized ideally before SC16</i>
	Continue developing tele-necropsy in the ACCOBAMS Area with continuous assistance in the pilot Country (Morocco)	3 000€ (LB 53)	-	<i>The initiative was initiated in 2023 with Morocco as pilot Country</i>
	Support MEDACES	-	-	<i>Usually supported by a Spanish Voluntary Contribution</i>
<b>CA2- Reduce human pressures on cetaceans</b>				
<b>CA2 a - Interactions with fisheries / aquaculture</b>				
Support countries in monitoring and mitigating depredation and bycatch situations, with urgent focus on harbour porpoise bycatch in the Black Sea	Sharing experience and results, including from past projects on interactions with fisheries: -Prepare a synthesis of MedBycatch results  -Support the continuation of partner activities under MAVA MedBycatch and Depredation projects on bycatch	-	20 000€ Remainings from MAVA MedBycatch and Depredation projects  (79 000€ from the 4 project proposals submitted in September 2023 if they are approved)	<i>ACCOBAMS Secretariat contributed to the development of 4 project proposals in September 2023 to different calls (please refer to BU5.Doc05).</i>

	and depredation monitoring and mitigation,			
	Collaborate with relevant entities: participation at the Fish Forum and at relevant meetings	4 000€ (LB52)	-	<i>The initially planned participation at the Fish Forum (February 2024) is no longer possible due to the departure of the project officer in charge.</i>
	Establish an Emergency Task Force to address the porpoise bycatch critical issue in the Black Sea	-	-	<i>To be established in close collaboration with the AETFS</i>
<b>CA2 b - Anthropogenic underwater noise</b>				
Encourage the monitoring of anthropogenic activities generating underwater noise	Gather data on anthropogenic noise in NETCCOBAMS in order to update noise maps	7 000€ (LB52)	-	<i>Maps to be presented during SC16</i>
Exchange of relevant information with competent authorities before military activities / exercises	Organise a second workshop with National Navies, in collaboration with ASCOBANS	-	15 000€ 2023-2025 Monaco Voluntary Contribution	<i>In fall 2024, tentatively in Toulon (France)</i>
<b>CA2c - Ship strikes</b>				
Monitor / assess high-risk areas for ship strikes (CCH) in the Mediterranean Sea	<p>Identify high risk areas for ship strikes (CCH) by encouraging studies that improve understanding of temporal and spatial distribution of shipping and of cetaceans (IMMAs), and supporting interactive map of areas with high risk of ship strikes for crews of relevant ships</p> <p>Develop cooperation on ships strike issue with other International Organizations:  -organize a side event during the CMS COP  -organize a side event during the MoW  -organize workshops with relevant stakeholders</p> <p>Follow and assist Parties in the PSSA project process in collaboration</p>	3 000€	15 000€ 2023-2025 Monaco Voluntary Contribution (400 000€ from the Shiprint project if the proposal submitted in September 2023 is approved)	<i>ACCOBAMS Secretariat sent a project proposal "Shiprint" to the Pelagos Initiative in September 2023 (please refer to BU5.Doc05)</i>

Promote the use of mitigation measures	Foster the development of incentive systems to shipping companies adopting suggested mitigation measures			
<b>CA2 d - Cetacean watching</b>				
Monitor status of WW activities	Revise the guidelines for commercial cetacean-watching	2 500 (LB52)	-	-
	Analyse existing national legislation	1 000 (LB52)		
Support the implementation of the HQWW certificate in the ACCOBAMS Area	Support trainings on HQWW	500€ (LB 52)	600€	-
	Re-deposit of the trademark HQWW		Previous France Voluntary contribution	
<b>CA2 e - Marine litter &amp; CA 2 f - Chemical &amp; biological pollution</b>				
Monitor the impacts of marine litter (ingested marine litter / microplastics / entanglements in ghost nets) on cetaceans	Organize the 2 <sup>nd</sup> workshop on Marine Litter in Adriatic (hybrid format)		3 000€	February 2024 – This workshop will conclude an initiative started in 2019
	Organize a 2-day workshop before the ECS : - Identify hot-spot areas for marine litter - Develop a proposal to use cetacean species as indicators of marine litter	8 000 € (LB 52)	13 000€	
			Previous Italian Voluntary contribution	
			Previous Italian Voluntary contribution	
<b>CA2 g - Climate change</b>				
<i>CA1g - no actions planned for 2024</i>				
<b>CA2 h - Captivity related issues</b>				
Identify specimens held in captivity in the ACCOBAMS area	Develop draft guidelines for best practices for the management of semi-enclosed facilities for cetacean species in the ACCOBAMS area	-	-	Ongoing initiative – developed in collaboration with the ACCOBAMS Advisory Committee on semi-enclosed facilities
	Develop a draft template for a genetic passport for cetacean species that are			Reports to be presented at SC16

	kept in captivity			
<b>C34a – Area-based measures for cetacean conservation</b>				
Regularly update Cetacean Critical Habitats (CCH) including by identifying priority areas for action to mitigate the known threats (bycatch...) / area-based management measures	Organize a workshop on with stakeholders regarding human activities at sea datasets and their analysis during the ECS	12 000 €	-	<i>ToR will be draft in collaboration with the SC Report to be presented at SC14</i>
	Organize an online meeting with Duke University regarding their ongoing study on mapping of cetaceans taking into account all existing visual and acoustic dataset	3 000 €	-	<i>ToR will be draft in collaboration with the SC Report to be presented at SC14</i>
<b>CA4a – Information / Communication / Awareness about cetaceans</b>				
Maintain regular information/ communication about ongoing activities, cooperation and funding possibilities, cetacean conservation scientists and experts operating in the region and other relevant information; facilitate communication among cetacean conservation actors of the ACCOBAMS area, in particular in Southern Mediterranean countries	Implement the ACCOBAMS communication strategy	30 000€ (LB 54)	-	<i>ACCOBAMS-BU15/2023/Inf07</i>

**ANNEX 4 - OPEN LETTER REGARDING IBERIAN ORCAS AND THEIR INTERACTIONS WITH BOATS****OPEN LETTER regarding Iberian orcas and their interactions with boats**

September 2023

The undersigned are experts in the biology and behaviour of cetaceans, with several specialising in orcas (also known as killer whales).

There has been intense public interest in the interactions between orcas (referred to hereafter as the Iberian orcas) and marine vessels along the coast of the Iberian Peninsula (Spain and Portugal) and in neighbouring waters. We are concerned that factual errors related to these interactions are being repeated in the media, along with a narrative—lacking a basis in science or reality—that the animals are aggressively attacking vessels or seeking revenge against mariners. We believe this narrative inappropriately projects human motivations onto these whales and we are concerned that perpetuating it will lead to punitive responses by mariners or managers. The whales have shown a wide range of behaviours during the interactions, many of them consistent with playful social behaviour.

We therefore seek to clarify the facts on the basis of available scientific evidence. Much of this information comes from a [peer-reviewed article](#) published in *Marine Mammal Science* in 2022 by several signatories to this letter.

The Iberian orcas are categorised on the International Union for Conservation of Nature’s Red List as [Critically Endangered](#). There may be fewer than 40 individuals in this population. They represent a geographically isolated, genetically distinct subpopulation, which feeds primarily on bluefin tuna.

These disruptive interactions with vessels began in earnest in July 2020. To date, at least 11 juveniles and four adult females have been identified as participating in or observing the interactions. There is no evidence of an identifiable ‘leader’ of these interactions. Researchers have given these 15 whales the Latin identifier *Gladis* and an individual name; for example, Gladis Blanca or Gladis Negra (White Gladis and Black Gladis, respectively, in English). Gladis Negra, a juvenile female—and one of the initially reported interacting animals—was observed with a head laceration in spring 2020 and a wound behind the dorsal fin later in 2021. Both injuries were of unknown origin.

The interactions have ranged from no contact with the vessel, through mild or moderate contact with no or minor damage to the vessel, to significant contact with severe damage (preventing navigation). Starting in spring 2021, at least five damaged vessels have sunk. Severe damage has occurred in only 20% of the interactions.

Despite the damage to vessels, we believe characterising the interactions as ‘attacks’ is misleading. While some parts of the vessels infrequently have teeth marks on them, the predominant damage to rudders and keels are due to strikes or rams with the head or body. The whales are not ripping the rudders apart, as they might if this were hunting behaviour. While the behaviour may be frightening (and costly) from a human perspective, from the whales’ perspective, it seems to be somehow gratifying.



Orcas (and other dolphin species) elsewhere have been known to develop [cultural ‘fads’](#) (novel behaviour that briefly persists and expands within a population—an analogy might be fashion trends in people), such as carrying dead fish on their heads. While these vessel interactions may be a similar phenomenon, they are persisting longer than typical fad behaviour, expanding within the population and escalating in impact. Nevertheless, it is possible the behaviour, as previous fads have, will disappear as suddenly as it appeared.

We urge the media and public to avoid projecting narratives onto these animals. In the absence of further evidence, people should not assume they understand the animals’ motivations. The orca is an intelligent, socially complex species, and each population has its own culture—different vocalisations (known as dialects), prey preferences, hunting techniques, even different social structures and migratory behaviours. The Iberian orcas are exhibiting a behaviour never before seen with this consistency among cetaceans—even in the days of industrial whaling from wooden ships and boats, when far larger whales were known to smash or otherwise damage vessels, such incidents were relatively uncommon. Science cannot yet explain why the Iberian orcas are doing this, although we repeat that it is more likely related to play/socialising than aggression. However, it is unfounded and potentially harmful to the animals to claim it is for revenge for past wrongs or to promote some other melodramatic storyline.

When we are at sea, we are in the realm of marine life. We should not punish wildlife for being wild. We need to keep cool heads when wild animals exhibit novel behaviour and we must put greater effort into adapting our own actions and behaviour to the presence of wildlife. The survival of the species with which we share this planet depends on it.

Signed:

Naomi A. Rose, PhD  
Senior Scientist, Marine Mammal Biology Animal  
Welfare Institute  
USA

Artur Andriolo, PhD  
Profesor Titular, Universidade Federal Juiz de Fora  
Presidente, la Sociedad Latinoamericana de Especialistas en Mamíferos Acuáticos Brazil

Lucy Babey  
Director of Programmes ORCA  
United Kingdom

Robin W. Baird, PhD Hawai'i  
Program Director  
Cascadia Research Collective USA

Lance Barrett-Lennard, PhD  
Senior Research Scientist and Co-Director Raincoast  
Conservation Foundation Canada

Giovanni Bearzi, PhD President  
Dolphin Biology and Conservation Italy

Maddalena Bearzi, PhD President  
Ocean Conservation Society USA

Alessandro Bocconcelli, MSc  
Emeritus Research Scholar  
Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution USA

Jaime Bolaños, PhD  
Caribbean-Wide Orca Project (CWOP), Coordinator Sea Vida  
(Venezuela), Executive Director Venezuela

Silvia Bonizzoni, MSc Executive  
Director  
Dolphin Biology and Conservation Italy

Philippa Brakes, PhD  
Honorary Lecturer, University of Exeter  
Research Fellow, Whale and Dolphin Conservation New  
Zealand

Inês Carvalho, PhD

Population and Conservation Genetics Group Instituto  
Gulbenkian Ciência

Portugal

César Castro-Azofeifa

Investigador sobre mamíferos marinos Escuela de  
Biología, Universidad de Costa Rica

Centro Nacional de Alta Tecnología de Costa Rica Costa Rica

Phillip J. Clapham, PhD

Senior Scientist Seastar  
Scientific Inc. USA

Mel Cosentino, PhD

Marine mammal researcher Aarhus  
University

Denmark

Darren P. Croft, PhD

Professor of Animal Behaviour  
University of Exeter

United Kingdom

Volker Deecke, PhD

Professor of Wildlife Conservation University of  
Cumbria

United Kingdom

Judith Denkinger, PhD Professor

Universidad San Francisco de Quito, Galapagos Science Center Ecuador

Raúl E. Díaz Gamboa, PhD

Vicepresidente

Sociedad Mexicana de Mastozoología Marina Universidad  
Autónoma de Yucatán

Mexico

Manuel E. dos Santos, PhD

Professor

MARE-Ispa Portugal

Cindy Elliser, PhD

Research Director

Pacific Mammal Research USA

Rocío Espada-Ruiz

University of Sevilla, Ecolocaliza

GTOA (Grupo de Trabajo Orca Atlántica/Atlantic Orca Working Group) Spain

Ruth Esteban, PhD Madeira

Whale Museum GTOA

Portugal

Lilián Flórez-González, MSc

Founder, President Fundación

Yubarta Colombia

Andrew Foote, PhD Researcher

Centre for Ecological and Evolutionary Synthesis, University of Oslo Norway

John K. B. Ford, PhD

Research scientist (emeritus), Pacific Biological Station, Fisheries and Oceans Co-chair,

COSEWIC Marine Mammals Species Specialist Subcommittee Canada

Pedro F. Fruet, PhD

Eliézer de C. Rios Professor, Museu Oceanográfico

Universidade Federal do Rio Grande

Brazil

Claire Garrigue, PhD Scientist

French National Research Institute for Sustainable Development, UMR ENTROPIE New Caledonia  
(France)

Tilen Genov, PhD

Morigenos – Slovenian Marine Mammal Society IUCN  
Cetacean Specialist Group

Slovenia

Deborah Giles, PhD

Science and Research Director Wild

Orca

USA

Christophe Guinet, PhD Senior

Scientist, CNRS

Centre d'Etudes Biologiques de Chizé France

Patricia Holm, PhD

Professor Universität

Basel Switzerland

Erich Hoyt

Research Fellow, Whale and Dolphin Conservation

Co-chair, IUCN SSC-WCPA Marine Mammal Protected Areas Task Force United Kingdom

Rodrigo Hucke-Gaete, PhD

Director, Marine Mammal Laboratory, Universidad Austral de Chile Centro

Ballena Azul

Chile

Miguel Iñíguez Bessega, MSc

President

Fundación Cethus

Argentina

Dan Jarvis

Director of Welfare and Conservation British  
Divers Marine Life Rescue United Kingdom

Maria Clara Jimenez A. Alianzas para  
la Conservación Fundación  
Conservaré Colombia

Eve Jourdain, PhD Director and  
Researcher Norwegian Orca  
Survey Norway

Ulrich Karlowski, Biologist (Univ.) Board of  
Directors  
Deutsche Stiftung Meeresschutz Germany

Sven Koschinski, MSc  
Consultant, Marine Nature Conservation  
Meereszoologie  
Germany

Giancarlo Lauriano, PhD Senior  
researcher  
ISPRA - Institute for Environmental Protection and Research (ISPRA) Italy

Alfredo López Fernández, PhD  
University of Aveiro, CESAM  
CEMMA, GTOA  
Portugal

Ibiza Martínez Serrano, PhD  
Presidenta  
Sociedad Mexicana de Mastozoología Marina Universidad  
Veracruzana  
Mexico

Paula Méndez Fernandez, PhD Marine  
Mammal Researcher  
Pelagis Observatory, La Rochelle University GTOA  
France

Olaf Meynecke, PhD  
CEO, Humpbacks & High-rises Inc  
Marine Scientist, Whales and Climate Program Australia

Eduardo Morteo Ortiz, PhD Director  
Laboratorio de Mamíferos Marinos de la Universidad Veracruzana (LabMMar-IIB-ICIMAP-UV) Mexico

Alexandra Morton  
Researcher  
Raincoast Research Society Canada

Giuseppe Notarbartolo di Sciara, PhD Honorary  
President  
Tethys Research Institute Italy

Laetitia Nunny, MSc  
Science Officer OceanCare  
Spain

Liliana Olaya-Ponzone  
University of Sevilla  
GTOA  
Spain

Christian D. Ortega Ortiz, PhD  
Professor  
Universidad de Colima Mexico

Daniel M. Palacios, PhD

Endowed Associate Professor in Whale Habitats Marine  
Mammal Institute, Oregon State University USA

Mario A. Pardo, PhD Research

Associate CONAHCYT –  
CICESE

Mexico

E. C. M. Parsons, PhD Associate

Professor

Centre for Conservation and Ecology, University of Exeter United  
Kingdom

Héctor Pérez Puig, MSc

Coordinador Programa de Mamíferos Marinos

Centro de Estudios Culturales y Ecológicos Prescott, A.C. Mexico

M. Rafael Ramírez-León, PhD

Postdoctoral researcher

Departamento de Oceanografía Biológica, CICESE Mexico

Marianne H. Rasmussen, PhD

Research Professor University of  
Iceland

Iceland

Randall Reeves, PhD Chair

IUCN SSC Cetacean Specialist Group Canada

Ryan Reisinger, PhD Lecturer in

Marine Ecology University of  
Southampton United Kingdom



Fabian Ritter, Dipl-Biol President,  
Director of Research

M.E.E.R. e.V.  
Germany

Lorenzo Rojas-Bracho, PhD Senior  
Expert, Whales Ocean Wise

Canada

Hiram Rosales Nanduca, PhD

Professor, Universidad Autónoma de Baja California Sur Coordinator, Marine  
Megafauna and Fisheries Research Group Mexico

Filipa Samarra, PhD Research  
specialist University of Iceland  
Iceland

Eduardo R. Secchi, PhD Professor

Marine Megafauna Ecology and Conservation Laboratory, Federal University of Rio Grande- FURG  
Brazil

Jörn Selling  
Biologist  
firmm Spain

Maritza Sepúlveda, PhD  
Profesora

Laboratorio de Ecología de Mamíferos Marinos (LECMMAR), Universidad de Valparaíso Chile

Marina Sequeira

Institute for Nature Conservation and Forests GTOA

Portugal

Salvatore Siciliano, PhD  
Pesquisador Titular

Grupo de Estudos de Mamíferos Marinhos da Região dos Lagos Brazil

Tiu Similä, PhD Head  
of Science Whale2Sea  
Norway

Mark Peter Simmonds, OBE  
Director of Science OceanCare

United Kingdom

Courtney E. Smith, PhD Affiliate  
Faculty

Department of Environmental Science and Policy, George Mason University USA

Jennifer B. Tennesen, PhD Senior  
Research Scientist

Center for Ecosystem Sentinels, University of Washington USA

Paul Tixier, PhD

Researcher, marine mammal ecology and their interactions with human activities French National  
Research Institute for Sustainable Development, IRD MARBEC France

Jared Towers  
Executive Director Bay  
Cetology Canada

Fernando Trujillo, PhD Founder,  
Scientific Director Fundación  
Omacha Colombia

Jorge Urbán R., PhD Professor  
Universidad Autónoma de Baja California Sur Mexico

Ingrid N. Visser, PhD Founder  
Orca Research Trust New Zealand

Lindy Weilgart, PhD  
Senior Ocean Noise Expert and Policy Consultant, OceanCare Adjunct, Department  
of Biology, Dalhousie University Canada

Hal Whitehead, PhD Professor  
Dalhousie University Canada

Alex Zerbini, PhD Senior Scientist  
Cooperative Institute for Climate, Ocean and Ecosystem Studies, University of Washington USA