

STRENGTHENING CAPACITY FOR EFFECTIVE CETACEAN CONSERVATION

25 YEARS OF ACCOBAMS SUPPORT



Gouvernement Princier
PRINCIPAUTÉ DE MONACO



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FOREWORD

Capacity building is an essential part of the evolution of any organization. By providing the required skills and training, humankind become better positioned to respond to the huge challenge of protecting the marine environment, its richness and biodiversity.

ACCOBAMS plays an important role in protecting cetaceans and their habitats. Capacity-building initiatives have continuously been implemented towards ensuring that countries around the Mediterranean and Black Seas dispose of the required knowledge and the appropriate skills to contribute to the global efforts.

For 25 years now ACCOBAMS has endeavored to provide a knowledge-base to its community. Frequently conducted in collaboration with other regional organizations, such as UNEP/MAP SPA/RAC, these activities have been oriented to increase the ability of experts and organizations in implementing conservation, management and/or monitoring activities. Such initiatives have been developed mindful of the need to constantly adapt to changing contexts and needs, while necessarily keeping up with technological developments.

ACCOBAMS assistance includes a variety of tools like training workshops, technical exchanges, involvement in research projects, all tailored to meet the specific needs. Countless scientists and managers have been supported to participate in relevant international conferences, such as the European Cetacean Society, the International Marine Protected Areas Congress, or the World Marine Mammal Conferences.

Also, all projects supported by ACCOBAMS have to embrace a capacity-building dimension, the impact of which can be outstanding, like the ACCOBAMS Survey Initiative. It notably resulted in the foundation of a powerful task force capable of regularly monitor cetacean populations, in support of the next synoptic basin-wide surveys to be developed in the ACCOBAMS area in the future.

By designing well-tailored capacity-building programmes in an increasingly demanding framework, ACCOBAMS is fully committed to provide a relevant empowerment contribution to the challenge of sustainably manage cetaceans and their habitats in the Mediterranean and Black Sea regions.



Susana Salvador
Executive Secretary

THE AGREEMENT



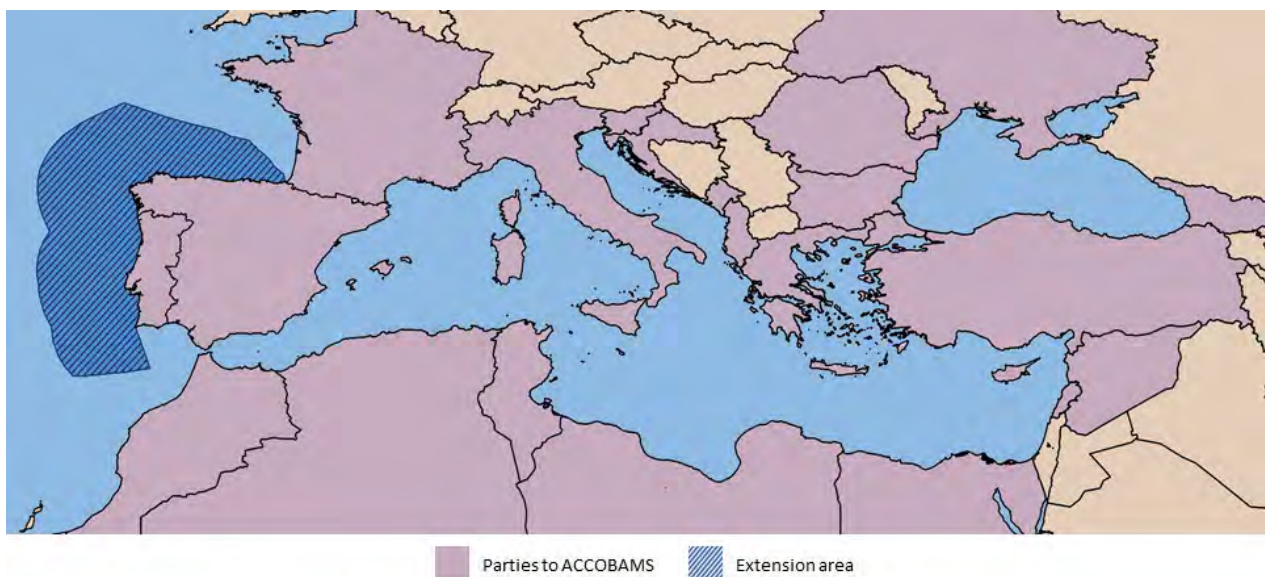
Signed in 1996, the **Agreement on the Conservation of Cetaceans of the Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea and Contiguous Atlantic Area**, commonly referred to as ACCOBAMS, aims at reducing threats to cetaceans notably by improving current knowledge of these animals. This intergovernmental Agreement embodies the drive of riparian Countries to **preserve all species of cetaceans and their habitats** within the Agreement geographical area by the enforcement of more stringent measures than those defined in the texts adopted previously.

One innovative aspect of this Agreement is to include all countries whose maritime activities are likely to jeopardize cetacean conservation. Established under the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (Bonn Convention), ACCOBAMS entered into force in 2001 and counts at present with **24 member countries**.

The ACCOBAMS Secretariat is hosted by the Principality of Monaco and has relied on its support for over 25 years. The Secretariat coordinates the activities of the Parties to ACCOBAMS and works in collaboration with the different structures of the Agreement (Meeting of the Parties, Bureau, Sub-Regional Coordination Units, Scientific Committee and Partners) as well as with many other stakeholders in the region and beyond.

ACCOBAMS mission strives to promote and facilitate the sustainable management of cetacean populations, the protection of their habitats, and the prevention of human-induced threats. Taking into account the complexity of cetacean conservation, ACCOBAMS also calls for collaboration and partnership with other relevant International Organizations involved in biodiversity conservation, in the fight against pollution, in fisheries and in maritime traffic.

In keeping with a strong policy of building capacities and high standard practices, it enables an active regional cooperation at all levels providing best expertise and propelling the implementation of necessary measures aimed at conserving cetaceans in the Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea and contiguous Atlantic Area.



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THE MEDITERRANEAN SUB REGIONAL COORDINATION UNIT

Since more than two decades, ACCOBAMS Permanent Secretariat and SPA/RAC, [the biodiversity Regional Activity Centre of UNEP/ MAP](#) and the sub-coordination Unit of ACCOBAMS in the Mediterranean, have been working together to achieve and maintain a favorable conservation status for cetaceans in the Mediterranean, based on the decisions of their Parties and in line with the evolving regional context, the new challenges and priorities as identified by the most recent scientific knowledge regarding cetacean conservation.

This collaboration results in various products & tools at national and regional levels, jointly developed through regular exchanges, joint projects and mutual participation in institutional and technical meetings. Main challenges for cetacean conservation in the Mediterranean deal with the improvement of knowledge on the status of cetaceans, the reduction of human pressures on cetaceans, and the enhancement of effective conservation of cetacean critical habitats.

To this end, the two Secretariats have worked closely to strengthen national capacities in monitoring cetacean populations in accordance with IMAP guidelines and protocol of the Barcelona Convention, mitigating the impacts of interactions occurring between cetacean species and fishing activities mainly bycatch and depredation and setting up and reinforcing cetacean national stranding networks. Moreover, SPA/RAC is calling for experiences issued from the ACCOBAMS Survey Initiatives (ASI) and for Sharing its data to support the preparation of the 2023 Quality Status Report (MedQSR) and their dissemination in relevant regional fora.



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THE BLACK SEA SUB REGIONAL COORDINATION UNIT



Since 2002, the Permanent Secretariat of the Black Sea Commission (BSC PS) exercises its role of the Black Sea Sub Regional Coordination Unit for ACCOBAMS in regards to the conservation of the cetaceans of the Black Sea. Overall, BSC PS is sharing the same objective with ACCOBAMS on improving the availability and quality of data on the biological status of the Black Sea and improve the countries' ability to perform marine environmental monitoring, in line with expected MSFD and Black Sea Strategic Action Plan (BS SAP) needs.

Over the years, ACCOBAMS and the Black Sea Commission have collaborated to strengthen the region's capacity for cetacean conservation activities and research. This collaboration has entailed implementing a wide range of capacity-building activities, utilizing several ACCOBAMS instruments, including the Supplementary Fund for Conservation, and partnering on numerous projects. The efforts deployed led to the creation of a remarkable scientific task force in the region, which greatly contributed to the recent success of the ACCOBAMS Survey Initiative in the Black Sea held in summer 2019. The EU-funded CeNoBS project, which supported the Black Sea survey in particular, further strengthened regional ties and the capabilities of national teams. They are now equipped to estimate cetacean populations and distribution, monitor underwater noise, and implement monitoring projects in Black Sea countries to address gaps in the understanding of bycatch pressure on cetaceans.

The results of ACCOBAMS' ongoing capacity-building activities are utilized by the Black Sea Commission and its partners, integrated into all relevant regional strategic documents for the Black Sea, including the Black Sea Integrated Monitoring and Assessment Program (BSIMAP), the Black Sea State of Environment Report (BS SoE), and annual reporting on fisheries indicators. These activities also include the elaboration of cetacean-related indicators and criteria on abundance and distribution, as well as the setting up of thresholds. Additionally, this capacity-building effort contributes to new publications on cetaceans in the Black Sea, joint public awareness campaigns such as ACCOBAMS cetaceans' day and Black Sea Day, and wider participation in joint initiatives and projects with organizations such as GFCM, CBD Convention, other Regional Seas Conventions, UNEP/ MAP Barcelona Convention, as well as relevant UN and EU activities.



Tursiops truncatus ponticus, Black Sea

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Black Sea Bottlenose dolphins
© Shutterstock / N. Volkova



Tursiops truncatus ponticus, Istanbul Strait,
April 2007

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Black Sea Bottlenose dolphins
© TUDAV / A. Dede

THE ACCOBAMS TEACHING MODULE

Populations of the Mediterranean and the Black Sea are generally not informed or misinformed on the presence of cetaceans and research efforts are unevenly distributed across the regions. In order to fill these gaps, the Agreement provides in particular that Parties should implement activities of training and education to develop national expertise on the study and conservation of cetaceans

In line with this objective, ACCOBAMS is engaged with several universities to promote cetology teaching and educate students in cetacean research and conservation. Raising awareness to the future stakeholders and decision-makers about issues linked to the marine environment is the main objective of ACCOBAMS Academic training programme which is organised thanks to the support of the Italian Ministry of Environment and of the Government of the Principality of Monaco.

A dedicated Cetacean conservation Teaching module was designed so to provide for students enrolled in environmental university courses with a comprehensive understanding of the biology, ecology, and threats faced by cetacean species, as well as the policies and regulations in place to conserve and protect these species in particular in the ACCOBAMS area. The ACCOBAMS Academic training program is delivered through a combination of multidisciplinary Lectures conducted by experienced scientists and conservationists. Since 2012, many ACCOBAMS Experts have provided the teaching module for the conservation of cetaceans in seven ACCOBAMS Parties, both in English & French, equipping therefore more than 300 University students with the necessary knowledge and skills to effectively conserve and manage cetacean populations and their habitats.

MODULE TEACHING OBJECTIVES

To apply the methods and techniques for sampling as well as mapping techniques to evaluate the abundance of the cetacean populations.	Gaining knowledge on the distribution and behaviour of cetaceans present in the Mediterranean Sea.
Gaining knowledge on the threats cetaceans are facing and on the existing conservation measures.	Gaining knowledge on the legal and legislative settings related to the conservation of cetaceans.

Algeria, Oran	Oran University
France, Corte	Pascal Paoli University
Lebanon, Beirut	Saint-Joseph University Saint-Esprit de Kaslik University
Malta, Msida	University of Malta Centre for the Liberal Arts and Sciences
Morocco, El Jadida & Tangier	Chouaïb Doukkali University of El Jadida College of Sciences and Techniques of Tangier
Tunisia, Tunis	El Manar University the "Institut National Agronomique"
Türkiye, Istanbul	University of Istanbul

THE ACCOBAMS CONFERENCES ON CETACEAN CONSERVATION IN SOUTH MEDITERRANEAN COUNTRIES

ACCOBAMS Conferences on Cetacean Conservation in Southern Mediterranean Countries (CSMC) were initiated in 2009 based on the need expressed by the Scientific Community for a framework allowing to assess the knowledge acquired on cetaceans in the South and East of the Mediterranean where information still remained sporadic and scarce. The biennial conferences, originally designed for Southern and Eastern Mediterranean participants, have expanded to include participants from the Black Sea countries and beyond. International organizations, including the CMS, the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean ([GFCM](#)), the International Union for Conservation of Nature ([IUCN](#)), The Mediterranean Protected Areas Network ([MedPAN](#)), the International Fund for Animal Welfare ([IFAW](#)), the BSC, and

the European Commission's Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries (DG MARE), regularly attend the conferences.

The events provide an excellent opportunity for cetacean specialists to exchange experiences, identify potential gaps, exchange scientific information, and promote the implementation of the ACCOBAMS Agreement. The conferences also play a key role in involving the student community and rising awareness of future managers and stakeholders concerning marine issues. Five conferences have been organized to date with the support of the Principality of Monaco and the Regional Activity Centre for Specially Protected Areas (UNEP/MAP-RAC/SPA).

The conferences cover key topics, such as cetacean-human activities interactions,



strandings, population monitoring, species status and distribution, and culminate in conservation recommendations and a training workshop on a chosen topic. [The most recent CSMC](#), held on the 25th anniversary of ACCOBAMS, included a competition to elect the best informative posters presented by doctoral and student participants, with a student award for the best poster. The conferences continue to evolve, providing a valuable platform for advancing cetacean conservation in the Mediterranean and beyond.





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CSMC1

Tabarka, Tunisia, 2009 – organized in collaboration with UNEP/MAP-SPA/RAC

- 46 participants, 8 Mediterranean countries,
- Training Workshop on photo-identification techniques for cetacean studies,

CSMC2

El Jadida, Morocco 2011 – organized in collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture and Maritime Fisheries of Morocco

- > 60 participants, 7 Mediterranean countries
- Training Workshop on cetacean stranding networks and dolphin necropsy

CSMC3

Jounieh, Lebanon 2014 – organized in collaboration with the National Centre for Marine Sciences of CNRS and the IUCN Centre for Mediterranean Cooperation

- > 40 participants, 10 Mediterranean countries,
- Field training on photo-identification techniques for cetaceans

CSMC4

Oran, Algeria 2017 – organised in collaboration with the “Direction Générale de la Pêche et de l’Aquaculture” of the Algerian Ministry of Agriculture, Rural development and Fisheries

- > 40 participants, 8 Mediterranean Countries,
- Training workshop on Marine Mammal Observers (MMO)/ Passive Acoustic Monitoring (PAM) Operators

CSMC5

Lebanon, online, 2021 – organised in collaboration with the National Centre for Marine Sciences of CNRS

- Over 70 participants, 23 countries
- Training Workshop on NETCCOBAMS Platform

ADVANCING POPULATION INSIGHTS WITH PHOTO IDENTIFICATION



The use of photo identification is suitable for addressing a range of conservation related issues, including dolphin interactions with fisheries. Consequently, many additional projects have supported the training and reinforcement of photo identification techniques across the region for the past 15 years. The SCF and recent MAVA funded projects in particular have allowed to conduct several training workshops and on-site training to local and national teams in the Black Sea and in the East and the South of the Mediterranean basin. In total, about a hundred of experts from almost all ACCOBAMS member countries have acquired significant skills in photo identification and many of them are now able to offer training within their own border, creating a ripple effect that extends at the local level. Catalogues of pictures for several species are also emerging from this regional effort, facilitating the sharing of information and monitoring of populations at sub regional levels.

Photo identification is a highly valuable method for researchers studying the demographics and distribution of cetaceans. This approach involves capturing images of individual animals and using unique markings, such as scars or dorsal fins, to identify them. The information gathered can then be used to track the movements, behaviors, and population dynamics of different cetacean species. In the ACCOBAMS Area, photo identification has proven particularly useful for monitoring bottlenose, common dolphins or fin whales for example.

To ensure that photo ID techniques are consistently and effectively utilized throughout the ACCOBAMS region, the Secretariat of the Agreement organizes regular training courses since 2003. These courses cover a range of topics, including cetacean biology, the principles of photo identification, and the use of software for analyzing and storing photo identification data. Participants in the training program benefit from hands-on learning experiences, including training at sea to refine their shooting techniques and analyzing photo catalogues of cetaceans from the ACCOBAMS region to improve their analysis skills.



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MONITORING POPULATIONS: BENEFITS FROM THE ACCOBAMS SURVEY INITIATIVE



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Assessing the abundance and distribution of cetacean populations is a prerequisite to understand their conservation status so to set up and adjust any conservation measures. Monitoring highly mobile species such as cetaceans requires a regional harmonization of methodology and synchronization of monitoring efforts. Since 2016, the ACCOBAMS Survey Initiative (ASI) has successfully engaged all ACCOBAMS Area countries and more than 40 national and international organizations to improve cetacean monitoring across the entire ACCOBAMS area. In 2018 and 2019 the ASI led to the largest cetacean surveys ever conducted in the Mediterranean and Black Sea through the CeNoBS project, collecting unprecedented amounts of data on cetaceans, megafauna and human impacts. These results helped establishing a baseline of abundance and distribution and creating the

ACCOBAMS Long Term Monitoring Programme.

The ASI has been a tremendous asset in enhancing the monitoring capabilities of ACCOBAMS countries by providing customized workshops and training sessions on monitoring techniques and tools. The ASI capacity building programme was set up in collaboration with UNEP/MAP/SPA-RAC and led to hold 11 workshops and trainings between 2018 and 2021, training over 120 scientists and conservationists in abundance and distribution monitoring methods, including aerial and boat data collection protocols, safety certifications, software use, data analysis, modeling and results

interpretation.

The ASI vessel monitoring campaign also provided real-life training opportunities for some 30 national scientists and students aboard the Song of the Whale in the Mediterranean during the summer of 2018. The training covered visual and acoustic monitoring and organization of life on board a scientific vessel. Overall, the ASI has brought significant value in improving cetacean monitoring in the ACCOBAMS area, facilitating collaboration among countries and organizations, and providing necessary training for scientists and conservationists to continue monitoring over the long term.



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THE ASI TASK FORCE

Scientific observers from all countries of the ACCOBAMS Area were intensively trained on cetacean monitoring techniques, analyses and instruments. The ASI task force represents a contingent of more than 100 competent scientists that can be mobilized throughout the region to carry out future monitoring aerial and boat-based surveys. The ASI task force also includes experts, government representatives and contact persons in the administrations of all countries of the ACCOBAMS area who provided fundamental support in the implementation of such complex and large-scale operations.



© ACCOBAMS / Mathieu Cellard

INCREASING NATIONAL ABILITIES TO MONITOR CETACEAN STRANDING EVENTS

Cetacean stranding events provide valuable opportunities to gather information about these creatures and their habitats. By monitoring strandings, researchers can learn more about the health status and distribution of cetacean populations, identify potential threats to their survival, and reveal unusual mass mortality episodes. National networks of cetacean stranding monitoring play an essential role in this effort by bringing together different organizations and individuals to collect data and share information. Stranding networks exist in the Agreement area, each of them having various degrees of the extent of their spatial and temporal coverage, efficiency, and institutional involvement. ACCOBAMS seeks to improve the networks efficiency including by helping extending the appropriate

know-how to countries where strandings are currently not monitored, and creating the basis for the establishment of a wider network at the regional level. When needed, ACCOBAMS supports the development and reinforcement of national stranding networks by providing technical assistance and training for local responders as well as sharing of best practices for stranding response. Standard operating procedures have been developed to provide guidelines for handling live animals, disposing of dead animals, and collecting and preserving data. Data collected by these networks is shared through the Mediterranean Database of Cetacean Strandings.

In addition, ACCOBAMS is working transversally to assess the legal and institutional status of existing national stranding networks so

to help experts in other countries establish new official national stranding networks, ensuring that effective stranding response and comprehensive and effective monitoring are in place throughout the ACCOBAMS area.

In collaboration with : department of Comparative Biomedicine and Food Science, (University of Padova, Italy) and the Department of Veterinary Pathology (University of Liege, Belgium), in collaboration with the Laboratory of Applied Bioacoustics LAB (Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya, Spain), the UMS Pelagis, Centre de Recherche sur les Mammifères Marins (University of La Rochelle, France) and the Cre.Di.Ma – Centro di Referenza per la Diagnostica sui Mammiferi Marini (Istituto Zooprofilattico Sperimentale Piemonte, Liguria e Val d'Aosta, Torino, Italy).

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BUILDING EXPERT CAPACITY FOR EFFECTIVE NECROPSIES



© ACCOBAMS / CERT, Padova

procedures, data collection and tissues sampling.

By developing and applying the concept of tele-necropsy and online consultancy with marine mammal health specialists, these capacity-building actions can also promote harmonization for regional analysis and interpretation while leveraging the benefits of new technologies.

Recently, ACCOBAMS has focused on creating a task force to provide assistance to local and national team in addressing emergency situations and unexpected mortality events in the Agreement Area. Thanks to new tools, this group will be able to provide immediate assistance during unusual stranding events.

Each stranded animal is a remarkable source of information. Subsequent necropsies provide an invaluable opportunity for researchers to investigate mortality causes and the impact of human interactions, to assess the importance of potential threats (by analysis of accumulated pollutants and toxins), and to gain insights on aspects of their population biology: reproduction, development, feeding habits, etc. In the last years, thanks to the development of molecular techniques, cetacean strandings represent also a chance for collecting small tissue samples for population genetic studies.

To support the development of necropsies in the region, ACCOBAMS and ASCOBANS have partnered in 2020 to harmonize and develop Best practices

for cetacean postmortem investigation and tissue sampling and for the development of diagnostic frameworks for specific threat to be investigated during cetaceans' strandings, namely bycatch, marine debris effects, sound related mortalities, pollution, infectious diseases and others.

To ensure that those practices are applied in the Agreement area, ACCOBAMS has settled a marine mammal necropsy training programme dedicated to expert biologists and veterinarians from the different ACCOBAMS countries. This training complete courses is conducted in partnership with several renown European Universities Veterinarian and biology Departments and has allowed to train so far about 50 experts on cetacean's necropsy



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IMPROVING ANTHROPOGENIC NOISE MONITORING



The impact of anthropogenic noise generated by human activities, such as shipping, construction, and oil and gas exploration, poses a major threat to marine wildlife and cetaceans in particular. It has become a priority for ACCOBAMS which has been working with governments, researchers, and industries to develop guidelines and measures to reduce the impact of noise on marine mammals, such as requiring the use of passive acoustic monitoring during seismic surveys.

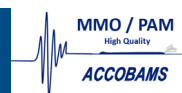
To further support these efforts, ACCOBAMS and its partners have been working thanks to several EU-funded regional projects to assist countries to meet the expectations of the EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive and of the Integrated Monitoring and Assessment Programme of the Barcelona Convention regarding noise issues. Over the past six years, they have conducted six workshops to train more than 40 national representatives and experts in effective regional noise monitoring.

These initiatives have also led to the creation of the first [Impulsive Noise Register in the Mediterranean region \(INR-MED\)](#) in 2018. Since then, additional workshops and training sessions have been organized to raise awareness of this tool among competent authorities and propose methodologies for defining threshold values. The INR-MED serves as a database to collect, process, and share data on impulsive noise events in the Mediterranean region, which is critical to inform decision-making processes for noise management and mitigation.



HIGH QUALITY MMO/PAM OPERATORS

To address the increase in seismic operations in the ACCOBAMS Area, an ACCOBAMS Certification for Highly Qualified Marine Mammals Observers (MMO) and Passive Acoustic Monitoring (PAM) Operators was adopted in 2016. This provides recognized and standardized training for the entire region. In 2018 and 2019, five ACCOBAMS partners were accredited as training organizations and have conducted 6 trainings so far, resulting in around 70 MMO/PAM Operators being certified. Ongoing discussions with the MMO/PAM WG and industry aim to enhance current training and develop online options to overcome challenges such as the ones brought by the Covid19.



CAPACITY BUILDING IN RELATION TO INTERACTIONS WITH FISHERIES

© Tunisian Dolphin Project



demonstrations and short training on sites have been provided. In recent years, ACCOBAMS has also included the collection of bycatch evidence in its necropsy training. All this material and experience is now shared during training activities organized by ACCOBAMS and other MedBycatch partners.

In coastal waters around the world, fisheries report a growing number of cases where dolphins are preying on catch and breaking fishing gear, a phenomenon known as depredation. This represents a growing concern in the ACCOBAMS area, as it can affect the survival of wild dolphin populations and the livelihood of fishers. Since 2008, ACCOBAMS has provided extensive technical support and training to local teams in fishing gear technologies, acoustics, and cetacean population monitoring to assess and mitigate bottlenose dolphins in purse seine and small-scale fisheries in Morocco and Tunisia. National teams have been equipped to continue monitoring this complex issue, and the tools developed are applicable to the entire Mediterranean and Black Sea area.

Negative interactions between fishing activities and cetaceans are complex and long-standing issues in the ACCOBAMS Area. Despite their importance, monitoring efforts have been sporadic, resulting in a lack of reliable data to inform conservation strategies. Fishing activities can directly impact cetaceans by injuring or killing them when they are occasionally trapped in fishing gears, a phenomenon known as bycatch.

To address this issue, ACCOBAMS has collaborated with relevant regional organizations, including

GFCM and UNEP/MAP/SPA-RAC since 2008.

ACCOBAMS took part in the MedBycatch project that provided five-day training sessions to dozens of observers, who collect bycatch data across more than 40 ports in Morocco, Tunisia, and Türkiye following an harmonized monitoring methodology that includes on-board observations, questionnaires, and self-reporting. To help fishers facing incidental catch events, identification guides and good practices to handle vulnerable marine species incidentally caught, along with

PESCATOURISM BOX

Pressure on fish stocks has drastically increased in the Mediterranean and alternative income-generating activities, such as pescatourism, aim to reduce the fishing effort on stocks and create new income opportunity for small scale fisheries. Combined with marine wildlife viewing activities, ACCOBAMS has supported the development of these ecotourism activities in Morocco and Tunisia, showcasing traditional fishing activities and promoting the observation of marine wildlife following the HQWW Certificate. Capacity-building activities have taken place in the form of training workshops organized in both countries, complemented by five-days study visits in France and Italy to meet with fishers engaged in pescatourism activities and HQWW-certified whale watching operators, enabling the Tunisian and Moroccan teams to be equipped to develop adequate policy framework and regulations in their country.

TOWARDS RESPONSIBLE WHALE WATCHING ACTIVITIES



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Whale-watching has become a growing trend in the north-western Mediterranean region, providing an opportunity for environmental education, contributing to the local economy, and supporting research on cetaceans and their conservation. However, proper management is crucial to ensure the activity remains sustainable and does not disturb cetaceans or the environment.

To address these challenges, the **"High Quality Whale-Watching®" Certificate**, an ACCOBAMS registered trademark, was created in 2014 to encourage the implementation of **good practices and responsible know-how by whale watching operators**. Already implemented in France and Monaco the certification is also promoted in Italy since March 2019.

The certification brings added value to whale-watching operators and helps ensure a sustainable future for commercial whale-watching.

ACCOBAMS has been supporting the national entities in charge of providing the training program leading to the certification. The three-day training course equips candidate operators with knowledge and tools aimed at minimizing the impact of their activity on cetaceans, promoting quality service, and adopting an ecologically sensible approach with the public. Souffleurs d'Ecume, MIRACETTI, and CIMA Foundation are in charge of the HQWW certification in France and Italy and have organized 9 training programs since 2015. To date 17 operators are HQWW labeled in France and Monaco and 22 in Italy.

The HQWW distinction has significant potential for application, as all ACCOBAMS member countries are likely to implement the scheme on their territory eventually. The HQWW framework is an important asset for capacity-building efforts to develop sustainable activities in the Agreement area.



ASSISTANCE FOR THE ELABORATION OF NATIONAL ACTION PLANS FOR THE CONSERVATION OF CETACEANS

ACCOBAMS calls on its Parties to implement a comprehensive Conservation Plan so to achieve and maintain a favorable conservation status for cetacean species in the waters under their national jurisdiction. Such National Actions Plans help facilitating the national implementation of decisions adopted within the framework of ACCOBAMS, raising awareness among all stakeholders, and identifying and mitigating threats to cetaceans.

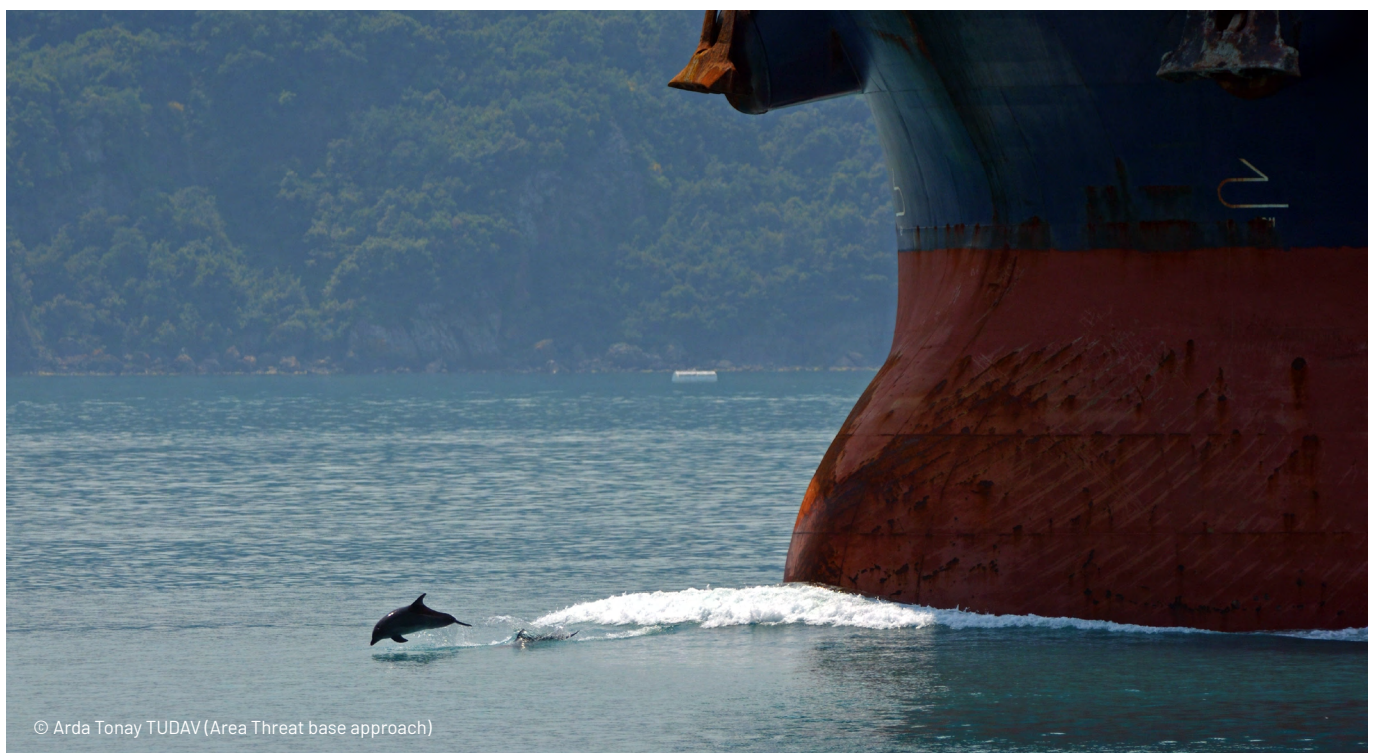
ACCOBAMS recognizes that some of its Member States may require

support in developing their NAPs, and thus, is providing assistance to those where NAPs are not yet existing or consolidated. Experts from diverse backgrounds are mobilized to assist countries in their strategic thinking and the development of their NAPs, covering legal, scientific, technical, capacity building, and communication perspectives.

ACCOBAMS has supported the development of NAPs in Ten countries in the South, East Mediterranean, and Black Sea regions. By providing this

assistance, ACCOBAMS hopes to ensure that all Member States have effective and comprehensive NAPs in place to protect and conserve cetaceans in their waters.

Although the implementation of the National Action Plans (NAPs) remains the sole responsibility of each country, ACCOBAMS remains at their side to support them by mobilizing its range of capacity building tools and initiatives as needed.



© Arda Tonay TUDAV (Area Threat base approach)

THE ACCOBAMS SUPPLEMENTARY CONSERVATION FUND

Established as one of ACCOBAMS initial Resolution, the Supplementary Conservation Fund (SCF) became operational in 2004 to support conservation projects that align with ACCOBAMS' objectives. The SCF is a financial mechanism that provides funding for the conservation of cetaceans and their habitats, as well as for capacity-building and technical assistance in the ACCOBAMS area.

The SCF operates on a project basis and provides grants to support initiatives that align with the priorities of the ACCOBAMS Work Programme. Priority areas include reducing the impact of human activities on cetaceans, developing conservation measures for endangered and threatened cetacean species, promoting regional cooperation and awareness, and improving the scientific knowledge of cetaceans and their habitats in the ACCOBAMS area.

Since 2011, projects to be funded under the SCF are selected through calls for proposals launched by the Secretariat, in consultation with the Bureau of the Parties, and following the scientific evaluation made by the Scientific Committee of ACCOBAMS. The SCF has led so far to the implementation of 23 projects. Many of these projects have incorporated strong capacity-building actions and other empowerment activities to ensure long-term, sustainable impact.

LIST OF SCF PROJECTS TO BE MAPPED

2005 - 2007

Assessment of the extent of current cetacean by-catch and stranding in the Romanian Black Sea area - National Institute for Marine Research and Development "Grigore Antipa" (NIMRD)

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2008 - 2010

Pilot project for use of acoustic devices in Morocco - Institut National de Recherche Halieutique (INRH)

Study of dolphin/fishing net interactions at the level of traditional fisheries in Kerkennah and Kelibia (Tunisia): assessment of damage and economic loss - Institut National des Sciences et Techniques de la Mer (INSTM)

Development of cetacean stranding and bycatch network in Georgia, elaboration of measures for mitigation of adverse impact of fisheries on Black Sea cetaceans - Association "Flora & Fauna"

Study of the presence of cetaceans in Lebanon, identification, abundance and distribution areas - CNRS-Lebanon

Development of national network for monitoring the Black Sea cetaceans (stranded and by-caught) in Bulgaria and identifying relevant measures for mitigation the adverse impact of fisheries - Institute of Fish Resources (IFR)

Development of national network for monitoring the Black Sea cetaceans (stranded and bycaught) in Romania and identifying relevant measures for the mitigation of the fisheries adverse impacts - National Institute for Marine Research and Development "Grigore Antipa" (NIMRD)

2011-2013

Conducting in depth studies to identify communities of bottlenose dolphins in Algeria - Laboratory « Réseau de Surveillance Environnementale » of the University of Oran

Sampling of cetaceans in the Siculo- Tunisian strait using ferries as a platform of observation - ATUTAX NGO

Pilot cetaceans Photo ID activities along southern Bulgarian coast - Green Balkans NGO

Photo identification of dolphins from the Romanian Black Sea coastal waters - Mare Nostrum NGO

Building capacities of Bulgarian Black Sea municipalities on Cetacean strandings in Bulgaria - Green Balkans NGO

Strengthening the networks of cetacean strandings monitoring in Morocco - Institut National de Recherche Halieutique (INRH)

Strengthening the networks of cetacean strandings monitoring in Tunisia - Institut National des Sciences et Techniques de la Mer (INSTM)

2014-2016

Increase the regional capacity for developing cetacean distribution and abundance studies - NGO Mare Nostrum

Tunisian Dolphin Project : population size and habitat use for bottlenose and common dolphins” - Association Nationale du Développement Durable et de la Conservation de la Vie Sauvage (ANDDCVS)

Identification and initial assessment of cetacean groupings in coastal waters of the north-western Black Sea, Ukrainian sector - Ukrainian Scientific Center of Ecology of the Sea (UkrSCES)

2016-2019

Monitoring and mitigation of cetacean bycatch in Bulgarian waters - Green Balkans NGO

Establishment of a new operational network for monitoring cetacean strandings on the Algerian coastline - Centre National de Recherche et de Développement de la Pêche et l'Aquaculture (CNRDPA)

Establishing the national tissue bank of cetacean samples, the first Ukrainian facility of this type for wild animals and; starting collection and archiving of cetacean tissue samples obtained from strandings, bycatch, biopsy, environment sampling and captivity - I.I. Schmalhausen Institute of Zoology, National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine (IZAN)

2020 - 2022

Implementing ACCOBAMS best practices in post-mortem investigations on stranded and by-caught cetaceans from Romanian shore and ingested marine litter monitoring (PONTICCET) - National Institute for Marine Research and Development (NIMRD)

The Tunisian Dolphin Project, expanding the monitoring programme to the Gulf of Gabes - Association Tunisienne de la Vie Sauvage (ATVS)

Research and Conservation of the Sperm Whale (Physeter macrocephalus) in the Eastern Mediterranean Sea of Türkiye - NGO Deniz Memelileri Araştırma Derneği (DMAD).

Establishing a cetacean tissue bank in Türkiye - Istanbul University, Faculty of Aquatic Sciences (IUFAS)

NETCCOBAMS: A COLLABORATIVE MANAGEMENT TOOL

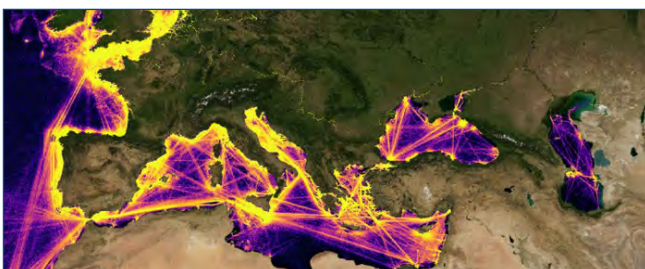
NETCCOBAMS platform is an online knowledge hub developed specifically in support of cetacean conservation in the Mediterranean and Black Seas. NETCCOBAMS gathers all data available about marine mammals, oceanography, and human activities. Thanks to powerful High-Performance Processing it can deliver large scale information about underwater noise impact on cetaceans or other threats such as ship strike. Such information aims to be used to make data-driven decisions for cetacean conservation.

For instance, it has recently greatly served the ongoing Particularly Sensitive Sea Area (PSSA) proposal in the North-Western Mediterranean Sea in the framework of the International Maritime Organisation.

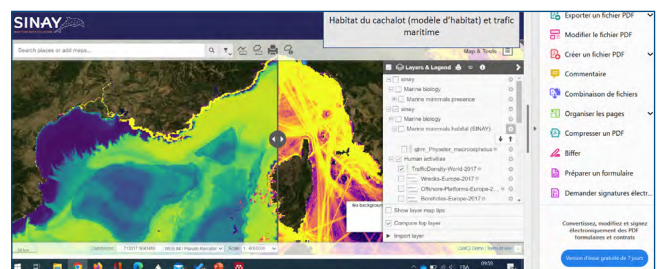


NETCCOBAMS is also designed to work in direct support of ACCOBAMS Parties and Partner's, providing them with an exchange platform to share information and institutional relevant documents.

ACCOBAMS is a cutting-edge tool that is constantly evolving and dedicated to serving the ACCOBAMS community and conservation stakeholders. With a focus on knowledge-building, this innovative tool is accompanied by training resources to help users optimize its functionality and make the most of its features.



Example of maritime traffic map as it appears in NETCCOBAMS



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ACCOBAMS Parties

IUCN-Med

European Commission

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