

REPORT OF THE SIXTEENTH MEETING OF THE ACCOBAMS BUREAU

AGENDA ITEM 1 - OPENING OF THE MEETING

1. The Sixteenth Meeting of the ACCOBAMS Bureau was convened online on Tuesday 18th June 2024.
2. The Meeting was presided by the ACCOBAMS Chairperson, Ms. Marie Thérèse Gambin, and attended by three Vice-Chairs, Mr. Milad Fakri, Mrs. Marina Sequeira and Mrs. Yana Velina.
3. The Meeting was also attended by Mr. Simone Panigada, Chair of the Scientific Committee; by 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 14:00, on Tuesday 18th June 2024.
6. She welcomed the participants, the ACCOBAMS Executive Secretary, and the Secretariat's team.

AGENDA ITEM 2 - ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

7. The Chairperson introduced the provisional agenda (ACCOBAMS-BU16/2024/Doc01), alongside the provisional annotated agenda (ACCOBAMS-BU16/2024/Doc02), and the list of documents (ACCOBAMS-BU16/2024/Doc03).
8. The Meeting adopted the agenda and related timetable. The agenda appears as [Annex 2](#) to this report.

AGENDA ITEM 3 - RESULTS FROM THE LTMP CONTACT GROUP MEETINGS ON THE PREPARATORY STAGE TO LAUNCH ASI 2 PROJECT

9. The Executive Secretary informed that the LTMP Contact Group met three times in 2024 in order to provide information from their countries in respect of foreseen contributions (in cash or in kind), which are necessary to have clarity on existing financial means. Such assessment was required by MOP8 as it is indispensable to determine the date of start and ending of the project, as well as for the launching phase of the ASI2 project, as reflected in the corresponding timeline in the Project Proposal dated September 2023. The preparatory stage to launch ASI 2 project was expected to be concluded during the first half of 2024, in order to recruit a scientific team, composed of a scientific coordinator and a project officer, who would be ready to work during the second half of 2024 on the harmonisation of methodology and to launch the project in 2025.

10. She further informed that in face of the insufficient visibility, at this stage, about funding and about when financial means will become available, the discussions of the 3rd LTMP Contact Group Meeting held in the morning of 18th June 2024, to which Bureau Members attended as observers, resulted in the following main conclusions:
- To postpone the starting date of ASI2 to 2026, at this stage, to give time to:
 - pursue the efforts of Countries and the Secretariat in seeking the necessary funding for launching the project;
 - have the necessary funds to recruit the coordination personnel at the Secretariat and the Scientific coordinator, in accordance with point VI of the project (Project Governance): “*full-time Project manager, full-time administrative assistant and the Scientific coordinator*”;
 - use the *momentum* of the political context of the 2025 UNOC to increase visibility of ASI2 project.
 - There is an urgent need to recruit a full-time ASI2 Project manager and a full-time administrative assistant in the Secretariat, as well as the Scientific Coordinator.
 - To consult the Scientific Committee and other relevant experts on the need to adapt the current ASI2 project, including the survey design, bearing in mind new and environmentally-friendly technologies and the need to reduce costs.
11. The Chairperson of the Bureau invited Bureau Members to consider the conclusions of the 3rd LTMP Contact Group Meeting regarding the current situation preventing the launching of the project in 2025, in the Mediterranean, in order to take a decision in accordance with article 1 of the Rules of Procedure of the Bureau.
12. The Bureau started by considering either to keep the ASI2 project as such, until the funding phase would enable further clarity on the project timeline, notably its start and end dates; or to envisage a possible adaptation of its timeline, methodology and geographical coverage.
13. Bureau members reaffirmed the importance of ASI2 project as a basin-wide survey across the ACCOBAMS Area and considered that adjusting its geographical coverage would only be envisaged for areas where the survey could not be conducted due to political context or to the lack of survey permits.
14. The Executive Secretary presented a state of play regarding the current financial allocations as conveyed by the ACCOBAMS countries to the Secretariat (ACCOBAMS-BU16/2024/Inf02), and informed that official letters had been sent to the countries that have previously announced their willingness to contribute either through voluntary contributions or in-kind contributions. In result, there is currently no visibility on funds that are, or will be, allocated to the ASI2 project, which is preventing the launching of the project activities planned for the second half of 2024.
15. She also presented a joint statement received by the Secretariat from Italy and Spain on 17th June 2024. The Bureau invited the Secretariat to circulate it to ACCOBAMS Parties as an annex to this report ([Annex 3](#)).
16. Responding to a query by the Bureau Chairperson about the possibility of combining data from national surveys conducted in 2025 and those conducted in 2026, the Chair of the Scientific Committee stressed that, because of the migratory nature of cetacean species and the changes in the marine environment from one year to the other, it was indispensable to have survey data from the same region / year, in order to avoid biased results.
17. In addition to seeking internal funding from ACCOBAMS countries, it was suggested that external financing should be sought by the Secretariat through EU projects. The Executive Secretary recalled that some of these applications (Horizon, Life) had to be done by EU countries or EU-based organizations. She also recalled the scarce human

resources of the Secretariat who nevertheless were extensively mobilised in reaching out potential stakeholders and donors.

18. In result of the constructive discussions, the Bureau agreed on the following conclusions:

Conclusion 1:

Noting the current circumstances, the initial timeline of the project needs to be updated, notably for the ASI2 fieldwork.

Conclusion 2:

To start the project as soon as possible in order to plan ASI2 first fieldwork in 2026, and meanwhile allow time to:

- pursue the efforts of Countries and the Secretariat in seeking the necessary funding for launching the project;
- have the necessary funds to recruit the coordination personnel at the Secretariat and the Scientific coordinator, in accordance with point VI of the project (Project Governance): *“full-time Project manager, full-time administrative assistant and the Scientific coordinator”*;
- use the *momentum* of the political context of the 2025 UNOC to increase visibility of ASI2 project.

Conclusion 3:

Subject to bilateral agreements with donor countries, seek the possibility to use funds from any contributions received in 2024 for engaging a scientific team to adapt the project methodologies, considering appropriate environmentally-friendly technologies, and survey design in consultation with the Scientific Committee

AGENDA ITEM 4 - CLOSURE OF THE MEETING

19. The Bureau Chairperson thanked all the participants and closed the 16th Meeting of the ACCOBAMS Bureau at 16.00 on Tuesday 18th June 2024.

ANNEX 1 - LIST OF PARTICIPANTS**MEMBERS OF THE BUREAU****FAKRI Milad**

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ANNEX 2 - AGENDA

1. Opening of the Meeting
2. Adoption of the Agenda
3. Results from the LTMP Contact Group meetings on the preparatory stage to launch ASI 2 Project
4. Closure of the Meeting

ANNEX 3 - STATEMENT BY ITALY AND SPAIN (17 June 2024)

Italy and Spain fully acknowledge the importance of carrying out a synoptic basin wide survey to support the establishment of a Long-Term Monitoring Programme (LTMP) across the ACCOBAMS area. Being aware that periodic surveys are needed to assess trends in cetacean abundance and distribution and to evaluate their conservation status, we are willing to provide a significant in-kind support to the next ASI through the surveys carried out at the national level in the framework of the MSFD and the HD. Nevertheless, in order to: i) gain a clear picture of the effort required for such survey, ii) better define the overall budget needed and iii) facilitate the planning of our in kind-contribution, we deem necessary to include in the ASI project proposal a detailed **survey design**, to be prior submitted to ACCOBAMS SC for evaluation and approval.

Further to the proposal of the Secretariat to postpone the next ASI to 2026, Italy is available to explore this possibility, despite the consequent significant and time-consuming administrative issues involved, with a view to carry out coordinated monitoring activities at the Mediterranean level, avoiding duplication of efforts.

In the case of Spain, the possibilities of postponing the campaigns to 2026 are very short-lived, as they are already scheduled to be carried out throughout 2025.

However, prior to proceeding with any internal consultations at the Ministerial level, a formal commitment from the Secretariat on the fact that the Mediterranean component of ASI 2 will certainly be implemented in 2026 is essential.