

2024 REPORT OF THE MSFD-ECAP WORKING GROUP

Issue: MSFD/ECAP Working Group

1. Action requested

The Scientific Committee is invited to:

- a. **consider** the report of the MSFD/ECAP Working Group,
- b. **provide recommendations** to the Parties on this issue.

2. Background

Following the adoption of Resolution 6.12 “Implementation of the EU MSFD and relevant Ecosystem Approach processes” during MOP6, the Terms of References for a MSFD/EcAp Correspondence Working Group on the ACCOBAMS area were proposed to the Scientific Committee during SC11, in 2017, who welcomed them

During the Fifteenth Meeting of the ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee, members highlighted the importance for ACCOBAMS to follow the MSFD and EcAp processes and agreed on the following points:

- The ABIOMMED Working Group becomes the “core” group of the Committee on MSFD and should liaise with WG established under other organisations;
- New co-chairs of the joint MSFD WG were appointed: Giancarlo LAURIANO and José Antonio VASQUEZ.

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Giancarlo Lauriano and José Antonio Vázquez

INTRODUCTION (STATE OF THE ART)

The MSFD/EcAP Correspondence Working Group was proposed during MOP6 to foster transnational initiatives and ensure the coherence of the determination of Good Environmental Status regarding marine mammals.

The Terms of Reference of this WG were established in the SC11 meeting in February 2017 (ACCOBAMS-SC11/2017/Doc25/Annex9). They are as follows:

1. collect information on each national monitoring program regarding marine mammals.
2. Suggest the set of species representative of each species group for the MSFD assessment of Good Ecosystem Status regarding marine mammals as recommended by the European commission (Decision 2010/477/EU).
3. Stimulate collaboration among marine mammal scientists involved in MSFD / EcAP monitoring program for cetaceans to foster transnational initiatives (such as the ACCOBAMS Survey Initiative and the Joint CMS/ACCOBAMS/ASCOBANS Noise Working Group).
4. Collate how criteria elements are nationally assessed for marine mammals (indicators, reference and threshold values) in the context of the MSFD (Decision 2010/477/EU) and EcAP initiative.
5. Ensure the coherence of the determination of Good Ecosystem Status at the relevant scale of assessment for marine mammals (MSFD).
6. Ensure that the conclusions of this working group are brought to the attention of the relevant groups working on the implementation of the MSFD and EcAP.
7. Assist the ACCOBAMS Permanent Secretariat in organizing the workshop mentioned in the Resolution 6.12 “Implementation of the EU MSFD and relevant EcAP”.

The report “Monitoring and Assessment Scales, Assessment Criteria, Thresholds and Baseline Values for the IMAP Common Indicators 3, 4 and 5 related to Marine Mammals” (UNEP/MED WG.500/4) was presented by Caterina Fortuna and Lea David, with the support of the Biodiversity Online Working Group (OWG) on marine mammals, to the Meeting of the Ecosystem Approach Correspondence Group on Monitoring (CORMON) Biodiversity and Fisheries in June 2021.

The report assesses the scale and threshold values for the IMAP Common Indicator **(CI) 3** (Species distributional range), **CI 4** (Population abundance of selected species abundance) and **CI 5** (Population demographic characteristics) for marine mammals, makes a comparison between MSFD criteria and EcAP/IMAP Common Indicators and proposes a list of recommendations on future work to be carried out within the EcAP/IMAP implementation and revision, including a summary of monitoring methods for EcAP/IMAP Common Indicators for cetaceans (Box 1, page 20). In relation to monitoring and assessment methods and scales for cetacean species it is recommended that “Concerning Common Indicator 3 (species distributional range), *a better definition of specific High Priority (HP) and Low Priority (LP) sub-regional units, to be monitored in relation to important habitats for certain species (e.g., fin whales feeding grounds, Ziphius preferred habitats, sperm whales breeding grounds), needs to be refined based on ASI data, latest IUCN species Red List assessments, etc., prior the next assessment (2023).*”

WORKSHOP ON CETACEAN ABUNDANCE ESTIMATION THROUGH DISTANCE SAMPLING METHODS (WKCETAB)

On 20 September 2023, the Spanish Ministry for the Ecological Transition and the Demographic Challenge organized a western Mediterranean sub-regional online meeting in the context of the current MSFD reporting cycle. The meeting was attended by representatives and experts of Spain, France, and Italy with the aim to boost sub-regional cooperation within the MSFD Mediterranean subregion for a more coordinated implementation of the MSFD. It was agreed to explore the possibility to organize a workshop under ICES auspices as a first step for the creation of an expert group or recurring workshops, extending the participation to other Mediterranean MS and all other relevant parties (e.g. experts of relevant RSCs and Multilateral Agreement and other Conventions, such as OSPAR, HELCOM, Barcelona Convention/UNEP MAP, Bucharest Convention/Black Sea Commission, ASCOBANS, ACCOBAMS, NAMMCO, IWC, Pelagos Agreement). The Workshop on Cetacean Abundance Estimation Through Distance Sampling Methods (WKCETAB) took place in April 2024 at the ISPRA headquarters (Rome). During the first part of the meeting different analysis obtained from several sources of data collected at national and international level (SCANS, ASI, CETAMBICION, ABIOMED, ICCAT) were presented by experts of different countries. In the second part, experts discussed different important aspects that need to be taken into consideration about the two main different methods available to analyse distance sampling data; design-based and model-based approach. The experts conclude that all the different options described in this first meeting needs to be discussed in the next meeting in order to map a decision-tree to help selecting the most appropriate approaches on a case-by-case basis, thereby ensuring coherent assessment (with respect to methodology and data) between countries/MS for reporting purposes.

A new meeting is planned to be in June 2025 and will focus on the following points:

1. achieve ecological and administrative coherence on Assessment Units (AU) based on the best available scientific evidence (2025).
2. long-term monitoring (temporal and spatial scales; approaches meeting requirements of MSFD and similar frameworks) (2025).
3. guidance on the most appropriate (robust, precise and unbiased) approach on reporting abundance in the context of MSFD and similar frameworks (2025).
4. set up a system to ensure data flow and data handling (including use of tools to organize data) and data call specifications/restrictions in coordination with WGJCDP, and other relevant groups/fora.
5. provide regionally agreed tools/products (e.g. shape files and abundances of survey strata, Assessment Units, shiny applications, etc.) for coherent reporting at ecological relevant scales in the context of MSFD and similar frameworks.
6. Facilitate the coordination among MS/countries, at sub-regional level, on synchronization of large-scale surveys (ecologically meaningful surveys).

The chair of the ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee attended to the WKCETAB. The MSFD/EcAP WG co-chairs think that the issues discussed in the WKCETAB are relevant and of great value for facing the implementation of the common indicator 4 "Population abundance of selected species abundance. It is recommended that the Chair of the ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee attend the next WKCETAB meeting.

SPATIAL ANALYSES TO ASSESS CETACEAN DISTRIBUTION AND ABUNDANCE IN THE PELAGOS SANCTUARY AND SURROUNDING AREAS

Within the framework of the Pelagos Action Plan for the 2022-2027 period, a call was issued to assess the abundance, distribution, and habitat preferences of cetaceans in the Pelagos Sanctuary and surrounding areas. Priority was given to species most sensitive to human activities, namely fin whales, sperm whales, Cuvier's beaked whales, and common bottlenose dolphins.


Recognizing the significant efforts made by the three countries in the past decade in both the Pelagos area and the contiguous western Mediterranean Sea, and with formal approval from the relevant competent authorities, representative data sets from aerial and naval surveys were provided. These data extend the study area to the western Mediterranean Sea and cover a period from 2009 to 2023.

Data collected are from the SAMM, MOOSE and Pelmed ship surveys made by France (2011-2021), aerial survey from Italy (2009 – 2023) and both ship (MEDIAS) and plane (ICCAT, DMESAL, DMLEBA) from Spain (2015-2023). Densities of cetaceans will be inferred by spatial density models and statics and dynamic marine environmental variables. Work from the consultant is in progress and will end with cetaceans' abundance estimates and map of densities for both the Pelagos area and the entire western mediterranean sub region (*sensu* Marine Strategy Framework Directive).

ABIOMMED

In the framework of the project "Support Mediterranean Member States towards implementation of the MSFD new GES Decision and programs of measures and contribute to regional/subregional cooperation" (11.0661/2020/839620/SUB/ENV.C2), a questionnaire was circulated to collect information on monitoring activities carried out by Mediterranean countries in relation to the MSFD. The output is indicating a general agreement on monitoring methods, but no consensus has been reached on assessment methodologies.

As an output on the results general recommendations have been issued in the ABIOMMED Synergy workshop about the D1C2, D1C4 and D1C5 criteria.

ABIOMMED			
			
<h2>Recommendations</h2>			
Criteria	MSFD definition	Recommendation on methodological approaches	Urgent steps to take
D1C2 Population size <i>Primary (all species)</i>	The population abundance of the species is not adversely affected by anthropogenic pressures, such that its long-term viability is ensured.	Absolute abundance. <u>Scale of assessment:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Region for deep-diving odontocetes, baleen whales Sub-region for small odontocetes MSs MUST work together NOW No decline compared to the earliest available abundance estimate, in line with the HD FRP value .	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Agree on a list of species for the Mediterranean, if necessary per subregion. Agree on "units-to-serve" (taking into account the scaling up to region/subregion).
D1C4 Distributional range <i>Primary (all species)</i>	The species distributional range and, where relevant, pattern is in line with prevailing physiographic, geographic and climatic conditions.	Presence only (<i>presence in 10x10km cells grid</i>) and estimate with the HD Eionet Central Data Repository Range tool. <u>Scale of assessment:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> As above MSs MUST work together NOW No decline compared to the previous FRR .	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work on Ecological Potential Range based on the most robust data collection design. Discussion on the meaning of "changes": what is "good", what is "bad" and what is "natural fluctuation" (which is possibly a good ecological strategy).
D1C5 Habitat for the species <i>Primary (all species)</i>	The habitat for the species has the necessary extent and condition to support the different stages in the life history of the species.	Some basic model (possibly starting from static variables), which can provide comparable maps/results to identify variations/trends. <u>Scale of assessment:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> As above MSs MUST work together NOW 	
D1C1 Bycatch mortality <i>Primary (all species)</i>	The mortality from incidental by-catch is below levels which threaten the species long-term viability.	To set a threshold value that shall not be exceeded use PBR now and RLA when more info from D1C3 becomes available. If bycatch rates are not available: apply BRA <u>Scale of assessment:</u> bycatch rates per species per fishing métier per GFCM GSA.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implement/populate all aspects of D1C3 feeding into the PBR to move from taxa/species default values to population-based values.

Synergy workshop about D1C2, D1C4 and D1C5

03rd of April 2023

GENERAL CONSIDERATION

The data for the second cycle of the Marine Strategy 2018-2024 was uploaded to Reportnet 3.0 on October 15th. Despite the need for a collaboration among Countries, as indicated in the New Decision and supported by ecological cetacean considerations, significant and official collaboration is still lacking. Involvement remains limited to those directly engaged in data collection and analysis.

REFERENCES

ICES. 2024. Workshop on Cetacean Abundance Estimation Through Distance Sampling Methods (WKCE-TAB). ICES Scientific Reports. 6:73. 25 pp. <https://doi.org/10.17895/ices.pub.27043966>

UNEP/MAP 2021. Monitoring and Assessment Scales, Assessment Criteria, Thresholds and Baseline Values for the IMAP Common Indicators 3, 4 and 5 related to Marine Mammals, Tunis June 2021. 123 pages. UNEP/MED WG.500/4.