PROGRESS REPORT FROM THE TASK MANAGER- INTERACTIONS WITH FISHERIES/AQUACULTURE

Issue: Interactions with fisheries/aquaculture

1. Action requested

The Scientific Committee is invited to:

a. **consider** progress report from the Task Manager- Interactions with fisheries/aquaculture,
b. **provide recommendations** to the Parties on this issue**.**

2. Background

In accordance with the main priorities of the 2023-2025 Working Programme, during the 15th Meeting of the Scientific Committee, members decided to designate the following Task Managers, supported by the respective Vice Task Managers and Support Groups:

CA1a- Cetacean population estimates and distribution

Task Manager: Tilen GENOV

Vice Task Manager: Simone PANIGADA

CA1d – Functional stranding networks and responses to emergency situations

Task Manager: Pavel GOL'DIN

Vice Task Manager: Anastasia KOMNENOU

CA2a – Interactions with fisheries / aquaculture

Task Manager: Dimitar POPOV

Vice Task Manager: Caterina FORTUNA

CA3a – Area-based measures for cetacean conservation

Task Manager: Léa DAVID

Vice Task Manager: Souad LAMOUTI

Each Task Manager will be invited to present a summary of relevant activities.

Progress report from the Task Manager- Interactions with fisheries/aquaculture

Task Manager: Dimitar POPOV
Vice Task Manager: Caterina FORTUNA

Support Group: Marta AZZOLIN, Ibrahem BEN AMER, Rimel BENMESSAOUD, Pauline GAUFFIER, Tilen GENOV, Joan GIMENEZ, Pavel GOL'DIN, Joan GONZALVO, Draško HOLCER, Souad LAMOUTI, Hüseyin OZBILGIN, Ayaka AMAHA ÖZTÜRK, Marian PAIU, Guido PIETROLUONGO, Marina SEQUEIRA, Aviad SCHEININ, Mohamed Naoufal TAMSOURI, Arda M. TONAY

Introduction

The Task Group did not carry out any work of its own (e.g., evaluation of results of relevant ACCOBAMS funded projects and consultancies). Neither the TG or the TMs were officially involved (ex officio) in any of the workshops listed below, with the exception of the ICES WGBYC 2023 and 2024 where the TM was invited to join in its capacity as TM of this TG.

Here below we present a summary of the work carried out by TG members either on a personal professional basis or as ACCOBAMS Secretariat selected consultants.

Mediterranean Sea

1. ACCOBAMS Secretariat is a partner in two FAO projects:

- Monitoring activities and mitigation measures for the reduction of dolphin depredation in small-scale fisheries the Western Ionian Sea (GSA 19). This project is led by Marecamp Association which was involved in the MAVA Depredation project.
- Project for the "reduction and mitigation of the catch of elasmobranchs, sea turtles, and any other vulnerable species (e.g. marine mammals), incidentally captured by trawlers along Turkish coast. This project is led by Çukurova University Underwater Research Centre, which was involved in the Medbycatch project,

The ACCOBAMS Secretariat provides overall coordination, through dedicated Steering Committees, advice, and expertise to support the implementation of the activities of each project. **Joan Gonzalvo** is acting as an advisor to assist the Secretariat in the implementation of these two FAO-funded projects. He will present relevant documents related to these projects, such as progress reports.

2. A collaborative effort is led by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) & GFCM to protect marine ecosystems against unwanted interactions, which pose a threat to the life and survival of some cetacean species during fishing activities in Moroccan waters (GSA 3). FAO, ACCOBAMS & INHR are joining forces in the Alboran Sea to mitigate bycatch rates during trawling (Elasmobranchs) and to reduce dolphin depredation occurrence in purse seine fisheries. **Joan Gimenez and Pauline Gauffier** are acting as experts in this project. **Joan Gonzalvo** will present progress so far on behalf of colleagues from INHR.

3. The National Institute of Marine Sciences and Technologies (INSTM) continued monitoring depredation and testing mitigation measures in Tunisian waters (GSA 12 and 13) that was started through a joint project led by ACCOBAMS and GFCM, with the collaboration of SPA/RAC, the National Institute of Agronomy of Tunisia (INAT) and INSTM aiming to mitigate bottlenose dolphins interaction with fish farm and to reduce depredation occurrence in purse seine fisheries. An attempt to monitor passively acoustic occurrence of dolphins around fish farm and around purse seine was made. The bottlenose dolphins' diet was studied and a paper was submitted. **Rimel Benmessaoud** can provide further details.

4. The project LIFE DELFI: Dolphin Experience Lowering Fishing Interaction - Life18 NAT/IT/000942) (1.1.2020 – 31.12.2024), coordinated by the Institute for Marine Biological Resources and Biotechnology of the National Research Council (IRBIM-CNR, Italy) with the partnership of 4 MPAs, 3 associations and 2 Universities, aims to reduce negative interactions between dolphins and fishing activities in Italian and Croatian waters while limiting the associated economic loss to fishermen. Activities include: the development and adoption of deterrent devices (acoustic and visual) and alternatives gears to limit the interaction; dolphin watching courses as alternative economic sources for fishermen; the establishment of dolphin Rescue Teams to provide first aid and disentanglement to cetaceans; and the adoption of harmonized necropsy protocols and frameworks for the assessment of fishery interaction on cetacean carcasses.

Black Sea

5. Collaboration with GFCM within the framework of CetaByM project in the Black Sea: testing of mitigation measures for reducing bycatch of cetaceans - PAL pinger trials, fishing gear modifications (mono- and multifilament, net height) and temporal closures. Results in Bulgaria in 2024 showed a smaller reduction of bycatch (78%) compared to 2023 when 89% was observed. That was largely due to higher bycatch levels observed in summer. The final report is pending but provisional results have been very promising and suggest effective mitigation of porpoise bycatch by use of PAL pingers. It is of great importance for these results to be communicated to relevant stakeholders and decision-makers.

6. Collaboration with the Black Sea Commission during the joint ACCOBAMS/Black Sea Commission meeting in March 2024: a proposed network for harbour porpoise bycatch between EC/DG Mare, GFCM, ACCOBAMS, and BSC; regarding the monitoring and mitigation project of harbour porpoise bycatch by GFCM, participants agreed that the results of the GFCM project were impressive and promising for the use of PALs as mitigation measures against the bycatch of harbour porpoises, which is still the most serious threat for this subspecies. Participants recommended stressing this point at the next SC and following MOP to elaborate some practical recommendations (ex. use of PAL-pingers as a proven mitigation measure; bycatch estimates and threshold values based on CeNoBS project results, etc.).

7. Collaboration with ICES - risk assessment of Black Sea harbour porpoise within ICES WGMME; presenting results of testing different pingers for mitigation of cetacean bycatch to ICES WGBYC (2023, 2024).

8. Participation in ASCOBANS “Workshop to recommend small cetacean conservation objectives in relation to anthropogenic removals - Part 2”. The workshop discussed different approaches on specifying acceptable bycatch limits or thresholds. A conservation objective document was drafted. It is highly recommended similar approach to be undertaken for ACCOBAMS as we are aiming to reach a unified approach for bycatch threshold assessment together with ASCOBANS, to be introduced to the EC and ICES.

9. The ongoing collaboration with the European Commission as a part of the MSFD D1C1 updating: Members of SC contributed to the work on the setting of threshold values for MSFD D1C1 on incidental bycatch for the European Commission, Directorate D – Sustainable Resources.

10. Projects (Net Free Black Sea and Black NETs) on detection and removal of ghost nets in the Black Sea contributing to lowering bycatch in such gear.

11. Between 15 February and 15 March 2024, about 30 common dolphins were stranded, especially on the western Black Sea coast of Türkiye and in the İstanbul Strait. (In the same period in 2022, at the beginning of the Ukraine-Russia war, it was roughly twice more than this). Four of them underwent necropsy and they were bycatch cases. The main suspects for these abnormal stranding cases are purse seine and mid-water trawls, because 1) they had net marks on the rostrum and mandibles, 2) their stomachs were full of undigested horse

mackerel, the target fish species of the most intensive pelagic fisheries in the region at that time. An onboard observer was not available, thus there was no report of bycatch.

12. The collected data from bycatch monitoring in Bulgaria in 2023-24 included 81 hauls (292.21 km nets) by 7 vessels using bottom set gillnets targeting turbot. Number of bycaught cetaceans was 112 porpoises and 9 bottlenose dolphins.

13. See also the report of ACCOBAMS/ASCOBANS Joint Bycatch Working Group (JBWG) - ACCOBAMS-SC16/2024/Doc15- for their activities regarding bycatch, not included here.

Adjacent Atlantic area
(Portugal)

14. Under Order nr. 12140/2023 from the 29th of November a working group was established to identify and propose the adoption of specific measures to minimise interactions between marine mammals, birds, and reptiles with fisheries and to minimise incidental catches of these species as a result of such interactions, in the maritime areas under national sovereignty or jurisdiction included in the continental subdivision of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive.

    The objective of the working group is to develop an Action Plan to minimise the incidental capture of marine mammals, birds and reptiles in fisheries, which shall include the following specific objectives:

    a. identify species whose good population status is at risk in the long term, taking into account current knowledge of their abundance and levels of incidental catches;
    b. identify, on the basis of current knowledge, the fishing gears and areas with the most significant interactions and incidental catches of the species identified in point (a);
    c. propose management measures taking into account the information identified in (a) and (b);
    d. propose programmes to monitor incidental catches by fishery, abundance, and distribution of marine mammals, birds, and reptiles;
    e. propose strategies for the dissemination of best practices contributing to the implementation of the Action Plan.

    It is expected that a preliminary version of the Actin Plan could be ready by the end of 2024 to be submitted to the relevant ministries and that a set of public sessions could be scheduled with the relevant stakeholders at the beginning of 2025.