

## REPORT OF THE JOINT ACCOBAMS/ASCOBANS BY-CATCH WORKING GROUP

### Issue: by-catch

#### 1. Action requested

The Scientific Committee is invited to:

- a. consider the document reflecting the activities carried out by the ACCOBAMS-ASCOBANS bycatch Working Group,
- b. provide recommendations to the Parties on this issue.

#### 2. Background

Incidental entanglement in fishing gear is the leading known cause of mortality for several cetacean species, including harbour porpoises, bottlenose dolphins, common dolphins, and striped dolphins, resulting in thousands of deaths across the ACCOBAMS area. This issue also affects other non-target species, such as seabirds, seals, sharks, and turtles.

The Joint Bycatch Working Group (JBWG) was established in 2019, including members and observers of the scientific and advisory bodies of ACCOBAMS and ASCOBANS, and external experts. This WG addresses the mandates of relevant Resolutions of the two organizations, such as ACCOBAMS Res 2.12, ACCOBAMS Res 2.13, ACCOBAMS Res 2.21, ACCOBAMS Res A/3.1, ACCOBAMS Res 3.8, ACCOBAMS Res 4.9, ACCOBAMS Res 6.16, ASCOBANS Res.8.5, ASCOBANS Res.5.5 and ASCOBANS Res.3.3.

## REPORT OF THE JOINT ACCOBAMS/ASCOBANS BY-CATCH WORKING GROUP (Apr 2023 - Nov 2024)

The Joint Bycatch Working Group (JBWG) was established in January 2019. Dr. Ayaka Amaha Oztürk (Turkish Marine Research Foundation/Faculty of Aquatic Sciences, Istanbul University, Türkiye), representing ACCOBAMS, and Dr. Peter Evans (Sea Watch Foundation/School of Ocean Sciences, Bangor University, UK) representing ASCOBANS, agreed to act as Co-Chairs, and have maintained regular contact with one another and their respective Secretariats ever since.

The meetings organized as JBWG activities were:

- The first formal meeting (JBWG1), online, 10 - 12 February 2021, attended by >150 persons from 31 countries. A Programme of Work (PoW) for the period 2021-2023 (attached below) and a total of [24 Recommendations](#) were elaborated.
- A smaller catch-up meeting, online, 18 August 2022, reviewing progress on the PoW.
- A workshop “Current bycatch issues in European waters”, face-to-face, prior to the Annual Conference of European Cetacean Society, 17 April 2023, O Grove, Spain. It was attended by 43 people, including some from fishing communities.

The second formal meeting (JBWG2), online, was originally planned for October 2024. However, it was decided to reschedule it, mainly because of the low number of registrations received by September 2024. The new date is planned for February 2025 and will be announced shortly.

The main aims of this meeting are:

- To revise PoW, clearly indicating priorities,
- To secure task leads,
- To consider updating the ToR, and
- To elect co-chairs.

Two workshops to review ASCOBANS Conservation Objectives were organized in April and May 2023. The general aim is to minimize (i.e. ultimately to reduce to zero) anthropogenic removals (i.e. mortality), and in the short term, to restore and/or maintain biological or management units to/at 80% or more of the carrying capacity. Another aim of the workshops was to evaluate the ASCOBANS Intermediate precautionary aim to reduce bycatch to less than 1% of the best available population estimate, and that a total anthropogenic removal above 1.7% of the best available estimate of abundance should be considered unacceptable in the case of the harbour porpoise. If available evidence suggests that a population is severely reduced, or in the case of species other than the harbour porpoise, or where there is significant uncertainty in parameters such as population size or bycatch levels, then “unacceptable interaction” may involve an anthropogenic removal of much less than 1.7%. See conclusions in [ASCOBANS/AC28/Doc.8.2](#); Draft Technical Guidance Document [here](#).

Other activities related to bycatch issues in either or both agreement areas include, but are not limited to, the following:

- At FAO-GFCM conference, Fish Forum 2024, Antalya, Türkiye, a workshop titled “Mitigating multitaxa fisheries interactions in the Mediterranean: a collaborative approach to monitor and reduce vulnerable species bycatch and dolphin depredation” was organized as a joint effort of ACCOBAMS, GFCM, UNEP-MAP-SPA/RAC, IUCN-Med, MEDASSET, BirdLife ECA, WWF and Turkish Marine Research Foundation.
- A workshop titled “The Future of Marine Biodiversity Monitoring in Europe” was organized by JRC and CINE, 5-7 November 2024, Sitges, Spain. ACCOBAMS co-chair (AAO) participated in the meeting. Challenges and possible solutions for monitoring, including those on fishing activities, were discussed.

- Bycatch related projects across both Agreement Areas (e.g. OBSCAME, CetAMBicion, CIBBRiNA, Marine Beacon, MedBycatch, Bycatch4Fish) have been carried out in recent years and the results have been and will be shared among the JBWG members at various meetings.
- Besides national initiatives as well as the above activities, several international bodies (e.g. ICES WGBYC, FAO, GFCM, IWC, OSPAR, HELCOM) are involved in actions relating to bycatch, and rather than duplicate those efforts (many of which already involve JBWG members), the WG aims to integrate those with initiatives that will fill gaps. To ensure regular liaison between JBWG and those bodies, representatives of the latter have participated in one or both of the JBWG meetings. In this context, ASCOBANS co-chair (PE) has been in contact with NE Atlantic Fisheries Commission, NAMMCO, OSPAR, HELCOM, Marine Stewardship Council, participating in the meetings of ICES WGBYC (Working Group on Bycatch of Protected Species), as well as ICES WGMME (Working Group on Marine Mammal Ecology), where he led a Term of Reference on bycatch risk estimation as well as EC JRC.

**Annex 1**  
**Programme of Work 2021-2023 for the Joint Bycatch Working Group of ACCOBAMS and ASCOBANS**  
*(Version: 20 September 2022)*

TOR	Task description	Lead	Priority	Timeframe	Report to
1.	Collate and prepare an overview of scientific information <sup>1</sup> relevant to bycatch of affected cetacean species.				
	1.1. ACCOBAMS Area: 1) Mediterranean, 2) Black Sea (e.g. ASI report, strandings network data, CeNoBS and Anemone reports). Engage Parties.	Ayaka Amaha Ozturk	High	Nov 2021, May 2023	SC14, SC15
	1.2. ASCOBANS Area. Engage Parties.	Peter Evans	High	Sep 2022	AC27
2.	Review available information on IUU (Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated) fishing, recreational fishing, identification of bycatch risk areas, fishing techniques and gears applied in both agreement areas related to bycatch				
	2.1. IUU: ACCOBAMS Secretariat to contact Parties regarding illegal driftnets > report to Bureau	ACCOBAMS Secretariat	High (ACC) Medium (ASC)	Nov 2022 Sep 2022	MOP8 / SC15 AC27
	2.2. Recreational fishing		Medium	May 2023 Sep 2022	SC15 AC27
	2.3. Identification of bycatch risk areas	Peter Evans (ASCOBANS)	High	EC contract to PE (ASC) completed Jun 2021	

<sup>1</sup> Related to abundance and management units, including population dynamics.

TOR	Task description	Lead	Priority	Timeframe	Report to
	2.4. Fishing techniques and gears <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- ICES collecting this information in the ASCOBANS Area; also discussed in ASCOBANS North Sea and Jastarnia Groups.</li> </ul>	Leave to ICES WGBYC / CIBBRINA?  GFCM	High (ACC)  Medium (ASC)	Ongoing	
<b>3.</b>	Contribute to the assessment process of the EU-MSFD criteria and/or UNEP-MAP EcAp, and associated targets				
	3.1. EU MSFD: Comparison between the Agreement areas.  Intermediate report.	Sinead Murphy	High	by end of 2022?	JBWG2
	3.2. EU MSFD: ABIOMMED project in the ACCOBAMS Area. OSPAR and HELCOM leading in the ASCOBANS Area (underway).	ABIOMMED Partners		Ongoing	JBWG2
	3.3. UNEP-MAP EcAp: Report on SPA-RAC in ACCOBAMS Area.	SPA/RAC		End of 2023	JBWG2
<b>4.</b>	Review and provide updates on bycatch mitigation reduction measures currently available or under development and their effectiveness, using existing sources <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Reviews done recently in both Agreement Areas</li> </ul>	Co-chairs & Secretariats	Medium	Ongoing	JBWG2
	4.1. Collating experiences from case studies in the two Agreement Areas that describe which measures have or have not worked.	Co-chairs	High	Ongoing	JBWG2
<b>5.</b>	Prepare an overview of national and international legislation and other measures relevant to the monitoring and management of cetacean bycatch, and include an overview of actions taken to deliver on ACCOBAMS and ASCOBANS obligations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Overview presented e.g. at JBWG1</li> </ul>	Secretariats	Low	2023	JBWG2

TOR	Task description	Lead	Priority	Timeframe	Report to
6.	Prepare, as appropriate, and in coordination with ICES WGBYC, advice on: a. target setting including potential conservation and user objectives, in accordance with the policies of the two Agreements; b. monitoring cetacean bycatch and fishing operations				
6.1.	Advice on target setting (bycatch limits)  - OSPAR, HELCOM, ICES WGs working on this in the ASCOBANS Area but plan is to have two workshops to reach conclusions		High (ACC) Medium (ASC)	Oct 2021 Apr 2023	SC14 AC28
6.2.	Advice on monitoring cetacean bycatch and fishing operations  - ICES WGBYC working on this, with reference to the two Agreement Areas	-	Medium		
7.	Provide technical support as required to facilitate dialogue with relevant bodies that have certification schemes, such as the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC), including by actively contributing to the assessment of relevant fisheries with respect to cetacean bycatch	-	High	Ongoing	As requested
8.	Comment on requests for information or advice received through the Secretariats	Secretariats	High	Ongoing	As requested
9.	Report back to ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee and ASCOBANS Advisory Committee meetings, and where appropriate provide input intersessionally to other relevant meetings or working groups under the two agreements		High	Ongoing	As requested
10.	Engagement with fishers				
10.1.	Develop guidelines on how to best incentivise and engage fishers in mitigation and monitoring programmes.  - Potentially covered in the International Bycatch Project.	Anne-Marie Svoboda	High	?	?
10.2.	Develop an outreach strategy (include sociologists)	?	High	?	?