

Agreement on the Conservation of Cetaceans of the Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea and contiguous Atlantic area, concluded under the auspices of the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS)

Accord sur la Conservation des Cétacés de la mer Noire, de la Méditerranée et de la zone Atlantique adjacente, conclu sous l'égide de la Convention sur la Conservation des Espèces Migratrices appartenant à la Faune Sauvage (CMS)

REPORT OF THE NINTH MEETING OF THE PARTIES TO ACCOBAMS

18-21 November 2025
Limassol, Cyprus



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REPORT OF THE NINTH MEETING OF THE PARTIES TO ACCOBAMS

Introduction

1. The Ninth Meeting of the Parties (MOP9) to the Agreement on the Conservation of Cetaceans of the Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea and contiguous Atlantic area (ACCOBAMS) was held in Limassol, Republic of Cyprus, at the Crowne Plaza Limassol hotel, from 18 to 21 November 2025.

Participants

2. The following States Party to the Agreement were represented at the Meeting: Algeria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, France, Georgia, Greece, Italy, Lebanon, Libya, Malta, Monaco, Montenegro, Morocco, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, Ukraine.
3. One non-Party State, the Sultanate of Oman, was represented by an observer.
4. The following inter-governmental organisations were represented as observers: the Secretariats of the Commission on the Protection of the Black Sea Against Pollution Permanent Secretariat (BSC PS), the Mediterranean Science Commission (CIESM), the Pelagos Agreement, the United Nations Environment Programme / Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (UNEP/CMS), the Agreement on the Conservation of Small Cetaceans of the Baltic, North East Atlantic, Irish and North Seas (UNEP/CMS – ASCOBANS), the United Nations Environment Programme / Mediterranean Action Plan – Barcelona Convention Secretariat (UNEP/MAP), the Specially Protected Areas Regional Activity Centre (UNEP/MAP – SPA/RAC), the Mediterranean Cooperation Centre of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN Med).
5. The following ACCOBAMS Partners were also represented as observers: the International Association of Oil and Gas Producers (IOGP), the Marine Mammals Research Association (DMAD), OceanCare, the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF).
6. Other institutions and non-governmental organisations from Cyprus were represented as observers: the Cyprus Institute; the Cyprus Marine and Maritime Institute (CMMI); the Deputy Ministry of Shipping's Directorate of Integrated Marine Ecosystem; the Enalia Physis Environmental Research Centre; the Limassol Municipality; the Ministry of Agriculture, Rural Development and Environment's with the participation of the Directorate-General for the Environment - the Department of Environment, the Department of Fisheries and Marine Research (DFMR), the Department of Veterinary Services, and the Office of the Commissioner for the Environment and Animal Welfare; Terra Cypria – The Cyprus Conservation Foundation; the University of Cyprus's Oceanography Centre; the University of Cyprus's Department of Chemistry.
7. The Secretariat of ACCOBAMS acted as the secretariat for the Meeting.
8. The full list of participants appears as [Annex 1](#) to this report.

AGENDA ITEM I – WELCOME ADDRESSES

9. Ms. Marie Thérèse Gambin, Chair of the Bureau of ACCOBAMS for the 2023-2025 triennium, opened the Meeting by warmly welcoming participants and expressing her gratitude to the Government of Cyprus for hosting MOP9. She noted the significance of gathering once again in the Mediterranean, whose protection lies at the core of the Agreement. Looking back on the past three years, she acknowledged the numerous challenges affecting the region, its seas, and societies. Despite these difficulties, she highlighted that the ACCOBAMS community has remained united, driven by the conviction that cooperation is essential for safeguarding the shared marine heritage.
10. Ms. Gambin expressed appreciation for the contributions of Ms. Susana Salvador, former Executive Secretary, and congratulated Ms. Maýlis Salivas on assuming the role, praising her longstanding dedication to ACCOBAMS. She also thanked the ACCOBAMS Secretariat, the Scientific Committee and longstanding experts, for their continued support and professionalism throughout the triennium.
11. She encouraged delegates to approach the Meeting with a spirit of collaboration, openness, and optimism, noting that while challenges persist, significant progress has been achieved in strengthening partnerships, advancing knowledge, and reinforcing regional cooperation.
12. Ms. Melanie Virtue addressed the Meeting on behalf of Amy Fraenkel, CMS Executive Secretary. Underlining ACCOBAMS as a flagship CMS Agreement, she commended the strong commitment of its Parties and Secretariat to advancing cetacean conservation through regional cooperation.
13. Ms. Virtue highlighted the longstanding collaboration within the CMS Family—particularly with ASCOBANS and ACCOBAMS—on shared priorities such as underwater noise, bycatch, pollution, and cetacean culture. She noted that the draft resolutions before the Meeting reflect both regional needs and global conservation challenges. Placing the discussions in a broader context, she recalled recent milestones for international ocean governance, including the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, the Nice Ocean Action Plan, and the forthcoming entry into force of the Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ Agreement).
14. Ms. Virtue concluded by emphasising CMS’s commitment to continued cooperation and invited delegates to pursue this dialogue at CMS COP15, to be held in Campo Grande, Brazil, in March 2026.
15. Ms. Maýlis Salivas, Executive Secretary of ACCOBAMS, warmly welcomed delegates and expressed her deep gratitude for the trust placed in her by the Bureau and the Parties, before paying tribute to her predecessor, Ms. Susana Salvador, for her dedication and lasting contribution to the Agreement. She highlighted the significance of meeting in Cyprus, a country emblematic of both cultural crossroads and rich marine biodiversity, at a moment when conservation challenges for cetaceans are growing in complexity. She recalled that the Meeting’s agenda was ambitious, covering the second edition of the ACCOBAMS Survey Initiative (ASI-II), long-term monitoring needs, bycatch, ship strikes, underwater noise, and strengthened cooperation with partner organisations.
16. Ms. Salivas emphasised that ACCOBAMS draws its strength from its community and the dedication of its Parties, institutional bodies and partners. She encouraged delegates to reaffirm ACCOBAMS’ role as a trusted regional

mechanism and knowledge hub, ensuring that decisions continue to be guided by science, cooperation, and long-term sustainability for both the Agreement and the species it serves to protect.

17. Mr. Yiannis Armeftis, Mayor of Limassol, welcomed participants to the city and expressed the honour for Limassol to host an ACCOBAMS MOP. He underlined the city’s deep connection to the sea and its dual role as both part of the challenge and part of the solution in protecting the marine environment. He highlighted the importance of ensuring that economic development, including tourism and the blue economy, is aligned with robust environmental protection. Mr. Armeftis emphasised the close cooperation between the Municipality and the Department of Fisheries and Marine Research in preventing marine pollution, supporting sustainable coastal management, and translating international commitments into concrete local action.
18. He stressed that safeguarding cetaceans and marine biodiversity is not only an environmental obligation but also a foundation for sustainable progress and community well-being. He concluded by thanking ACCOBAMS and its Parties for their trust and expressed his wishes for a successful and productive Meeting.
19. Mr. Savvas Michaelides, speaking on behalf of the Deputy Director-General for the Environment of the Ministry of Agriculture, Rural Development and Environment of Cyprus, welcomed participants to Cyprus for the first ACCOBAMS MOP hosted by the country. He recalled Cyprus’ strong commitment to marine conservation and highlighted both the beauty and vulnerability of the region’s cetaceans, drawing on his own experience from past national surveys and as former Cyprus National Focal Point. He stressed the importance of ACCOBAMS as a platform for scientific cooperation, policy coordination, and regional partnership, and expressed appreciation to the ACCOBAMS Secretariat and the Department of Fisheries and Marine Research for their work in organising the meeting. He wished all participants productive discussions and concluded by presenting a short video illustrating the creative process behind the emblem of the Meeting—inspired by Cyprus’ rich cultural and natural heritage.
20. The full texts of welcome addresses appear in [Annex 2](#) to this report.

AGENDA ITEM II – ORGANISATIONAL ISSUES

II.1 - Rules of Procedure for the Meeting of the Parties to ACCOBAMS

21. The Chair informed that the Rules of Procedure for the Meeting of the Parties, as adopted by the Fifth Meeting of the Parties in 2013, were applied to this Ninth Meeting.
22. The Rules of Procedure applicable to the Meeting of the Parties are reflected in [Annex 3](#) to this report.

II.2 - Granting the right to vote

23. The Chair recalled that, according to Article 14.2 of the Rules of Procedure for the Meeting of the Parties, “Representatives of Parties which are three or more years behind in paying their subscriptions on the date of the opening session of the Meeting of the Parties shall not be eligible to vote. However, the Meeting of the Parties may allow such Parties to continue to exercise their right to vote if it is satisfied that the delay in payment arises from exceptional circumstances”.

24. A formal letter submitted by Libya to the Secretariat, outlining the exceptional circumstances that led to the delay in payment, was presented to the Meeting. The Meeting subsequently agreed to allow Libya to exercise its right to vote during this Ninth Meeting of the Parties.
25. The Secretariat was requested to revise the corresponding draft Resolution consequently, which was later adopted as Resolution 9.1, "Granting the right to vote" ([Annex 14](#)).

II.3 - Establishment of the Credentials Committee

26. A Credentials Committee was set up in accordance with Article IV of the Rules of Procedure for the Meeting of the Parties.
27. Algeria chaired this Committee composed of representatives from Cyprus, Georgia and Monaco. The Secretariat assisted the Committee in its work.

II.4 - Report by the Credentials Committee

28. As Chairperson of the Credentials Committee, the representative of Algeria reported that the credential letters received from 18 ACCOBAMS Parties (Algeria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, France, Georgia, Greece, Italy, Lebanon, Libya, Malta, Monaco, Montenegro, Morocco, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Spain) had met the criteria of Article IV of the Rules of Procedure for the Meeting of the Parties.

II.5 - Election of the Bureau

a) Election of the MOP 9 Bureau

29. The Chair recalled that pursuant to Article VI of the Agreement and the Rules of Procedure for the Meeting of the Parties to ACCOBAMS, the Meeting shall elect a Bureau for 2026-2028, consisting of a Chairperson and four Vice-Chairpersons of the Meeting of the Parties.
30. The Executive Secretary informed the Meeting that, during the pre-Meeting consultations, the following Parties agreed to be proposed as candidates for the 2026-2028 Bureau of ACCOBAMS: Cyprus, Bulgaria, France, Italy, Morocco.
31. The Chair invited the participants to decide on the composition of the Bureau. The Meeting elected the following members of the Bureau:
 - Chairperson: Mr. Lavrentios Vasiliades (Cyprus)
 - Vice-Chairperson: Ms. Yana Velina (Bulgaria)
 - Vice-Chairperson: Ms. Nora Susbielle (France)
 - Vice-Chairperson: Ms. Cristina Farchi (Italy), acting also as Rapporteur
 - Vice-Chairperson: Mr. Mohamed Yassine El Aroussi (Morocco).
32. The Executive Secretary reminded the Meeting that all members and alternate members of the Bureau shall exercise their functions in their personal capacity and shall not represent any single ACCOBAMS Party.
33. Mr. Lavrentios Vassiliades, elected Chair of the Bureau, thanked the Meeting for the confidence and congratulated the outgoing Chairperson and Vice-Chairpersons of the 2023-2025 Bureau for their excellent work. He also expressed his appreciation to the Ministry of Agriculture, Rural Development and Environment of

Cyprus, as well as to the Department of Fisheries and Marine Research, for the successful organisation of the Meeting.

b) New composition of the Bureau (proposal by Italy)

34. During MOP8, Italy proposed an amendment to the Rules of Procedure for the Meeting of the Parties, seeking to increase the number of Vice-Chairpersons from four to a maximum of six in order to improve representativity in the Bureau. MOP8 mandated the Bureau to consider this proposal during the intersessional period and to submit recommendations to MOP9.
35. Ms. Marie Thérèse Gambin, Chair of the outgoing Bureau, presented the Bureau's conclusions on this matter as discussed in its 15th Meeting (Monaco, 22-23 November 2023), 17th Meeting (Monaco, Hybrid, 13-14 February 2025), and the 6th Extended Bureau Meeting (Nice, 23-24 April 2025). The Bureau concluded that:
- The Italian proposal requires amendments to the Rules of Procedure for both the Meetings of the Parties and the Bureau.
 - Implementing the proposed amendments would be complex, posing significant procedural and administrative challenges, including the need for an annex specifying geographical regions and Parties.
36. The Meeting was invited to consider Italy's proposal at MOP8 in light of the Bureau's conclusions.
37. The representative of Monaco, supported by the representatives of Bulgaria, France and Portugal, stated that they had carefully reviewed the Bureau's conclusions. They questioned the actual benefits of the proposal, citing budgetary implications and noting that the current number of Chairpersons allows for fair representation of all member Parties. The representative of Bulgaria emphasised that Extended Bureau meetings are open to all National Focal Points and conducted in a hybrid format, to facilitate participation from all interested Parties.
38. The representative of Italy acknowledged the documents presented by the Secretariat on this matter, stating that Italy agrees to keep the Bureau's composition as it is.

II.6 - Admission of observers

39. In accordance with Article III, paragraph 4 of the Agreement, the Secretariat presented to the Parties the list of organisations that requested to take part in the Ninth Meeting as observers (ACCOBAMS-MOP9/2025/Doc06).
40. The Meeting allowed the participation of all observers who had requested attendance.

II.7 - Adoption of the Agenda

41. The Executive Secretary presented the Provisional Agenda (ACCOBAMS-MOP9/2025/Doc01Rev1), the Supplementary Provisional Agenda (ACCOBAMS-MOP9/2025/Doc01_suppl), the Provisional Annotated Agenda (ACCOBAMS-MOP9/2025/Doc02Rev2), and the Provisional Timetable (ACCOBAMS-MOP9/2025/Doc03).
42. She explained that the ACCOBAMS Secretariat had received written comments on the draft Resolutions of MOP9 from Türkiye on 14 November 2025 and from the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean and the Black Sea (GFCM) on 5 November 2025. Neither Türkiye nor GFCM were represented at MOP9. She informed that taking into account Article 6, paragraph 3, and Article 7 of the Rules of Procedure for the Meeting of the

Parties, the Secretariat, in consultation with the Bureau, proposed a Supplementary Provisional Agenda relating to Item II.7 of the provisional agenda.

43. The Meeting adopted the proposed agenda and timetable. The Meeting also adopted the supplementary agenda under agenda item II.7.b and invited the Secretariat to disseminate the written comments from Türkiye and GFCM as additional MOP9 working documents, specifically ACCOBAMS-MOP9/2025/Doc32 and ACCOBAMS-MOP9/2025/Doc33, respectively.
44. The agenda as adopted by the Meeting is shown in [Annex 4](#) to this report.

AGENDA ITEM III – OPENING STATEMENTS

45. The Chair invited Parties and observers that wished to make a brief oral statement to do so and encouraged those that wanted their opening statement to be included in the report to provide them in writing to the Secretariat electronically, in English or in French ([Annex 5](#)).
46. The representative of Georgia emphasised that his country remains strongly committed to the objectives of ACCOBAMS and recognises the importance of regional cooperation for the effective protection of marine biodiversity in the Black Sea and the wider ACCOBAMS region. As a Black Sea coastal country, Georgia understands its role in safeguarding cetacean populations and ensuring the health of the shared marine environment through collective commitment to ensure the long-term survival of cetaceans across the ACCOBAMS area. In recent years, Georgia has continued to strengthen its marine conservation efforts. This included improving cetacean monitoring, enhancing data collection, collaborating with scientific institutions, and expanding cooperation with regional partners, as well as raising awareness among local communities and stakeholders about the importance of reducing threats such as pollution, bycatch, habitat degradation, and underwater noise.
47. The representative of Greece expressed pride in participating in the ACCOBAMS MOP9, reaffirming Greece's strong commitment to cetacean protection and the preservation of fragile marine ecosystems in the Mediterranean. Emphasising the importance of collective action, Greece aims to advance science-based policies and enhance regional cooperation in the face of increasing pressures on marine life. The representative highlighted the successes of ACCOBAMS in fostering collaboration and underscored Greece's dedication to supporting initiatives that strengthen monitoring, research, and community engagement for conservation efforts.
48. The representative of Italy stressed the importance of the second edition of the ACCOBAMS Survey Initiative (ASI-II) whose implementation constitutes one of the priorities during the challenging triennium 2026-2028. She added that ASI-II is an ambitious monitoring project providing at the same time a great opportunity, not only to enhance scientific knowledge of cetaceans in the ACCOBAMS area, but also to strengthen regional cooperation leading to greater knowledge sharing, capacity building and to the pooling of experience and know-how. Coordination and cooperation among countries as well as synergy and coordination with other regional Conventions and Agreements of the ACCOBAMS area will be essential to ensure the success of ASI-II and to assess the conservation status of the relevant species.
49. She informed the Meeting that, in line with its long-lasting commitment to cetacean conservation and to the work of the ACCOBAMS Agreement, including the first edition of ASI in 2018, Italy hereby confirms its support

to ASI-II by providing an important in-kind contribution, which includes aerial surveys and the experience of relevant personnel.

50. The representative of Libya confirmed the commitment of his country to the conservation of cetaceans and the objectives of ACCOBAMS. He informed the Meeting about a series of relevant activities undertaken by Libya in collaboration with international organisations, including the convening of workshops, field surveys for monitoring and the organisation of a conference in Tripoli to share the results of the monitoring, including those relating to cetaceans.
51. The representative of Slovenia expressed gratitude to the Republic of Cyprus for hosting the Meeting and praised the hospitality extended by its government and people. Slovenia congratulated the Chair and thanked the Secretariat for their dedicated efforts in cetacean conservation over the past triennium. The representative also acknowledged Malta's leadership during the previous period and thanked the Scientific Committee and Bureau for their preparations. Slovenia looked forward to a successful meeting, emphasising the importance of constructive discussions on critical issues such as environmental pressures, long-term monitoring, the work plan, and budget.
52. The representative of the UNEP/MAP – Barcelona Convention Secretariat expressed gratitude to ACCOBAMS and Cyprus for hosting the MOP9 in Limassol, underscoring the strength of their longstanding collaboration. This partnership, formalised through a new Memorandum of Understanding signed at COP23 of the Barcelona Convention in Portorož, Slovenia, in December 2023, is vital for advancing the implementation of the Ecosystem Approach in the Mediterranean, particularly in relation to biodiversity, marine litter, and underwater noise. Enhanced synergies with the UNEP/MAP EU-funded SEMPA Project “Bolstering Mediterranean biodiversity and Marine and Coastal Protected Areas for nature” (2023-2027) are supporting monitoring and assessment efforts for cetaceans across several southern and eastern Mediterranean countries, ensuring that the data collected benefits both ACCOBAMS and the UNEP/MAP system.
53. The representative further noted that during COP24, scheduled for 2-5 December 2025 in Cairo, Egypt, critical decisions will be made regarding sustainable development, the Ecosystem Approach Policy, climate change, and marine pollution. The representative highlighted the collaborative achievements between UNEP/MAP and ACCOBAMS, proposing the upgrade of the two Integrated Monitoring and Assessment Programme (IMAP) Indicators on impulsive and continuous underwater noise from candidate to full common indicators. Looking ahead, there is optimism for strengthened collaboration between UNEP/MAP and ACCOBAMS in the upcoming 2026-2027 biennium.
54. The representative of the Black Sea Commission congratulated the Chair on his election and wished him success in his upcoming chairmanship. She thanked the Government of Cyprus and the ACCOBAMS Secretariat for hosting the meeting in Limassol. She highlighted the role of the Black Sea Commission as the executive body for the Bucharest Convention, responsible for promoting the implementation of its protocols. This includes monitoring pollution, conserving biodiversity, managing marine resources, and addressing integrated coastal zone management and maritime policy. Since 2002, the Commission has served as the Black Sea Sub-Regional Coordination Unit for ACCOBAMS, emphasising the strong cooperation between the two organisations and their commitment to cetacean conservation in the Black Sea. In closing, the representative acknowledged the excellent leadership of Malta and Ms. Marie Thérèse Gambin, congratulated Ms. Maÿlis Salivas on her new role, and expressed optimism for future efforts to conserve cetaceans in both the Mediterranean and Black Sea regions.

55. The representative of ASCOBANS, congratulated Ms. Maýlis Salivas on her new role as Executive Secretary and expressed support for her leadership in guiding ACCOBAMS. ASCOBANS, which covers the Baltic, North East Atlantic, Irish, and North Seas, emphasised the strong opportunities for cooperation with ACCOBAMS in cetacean conservation. She highlighted ongoing collaborative efforts, including the Joint Noise and Bycatch Working Groups. A notable event was the Joint ACCOBAMS-ASCOBANS Workshop held in Toulon, France, in November 2024, which focused on underwater noise mitigation strategies in collaboration with national navies and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). The representative also referenced the 10th Meeting of the Parties to ASCOBANS in September 2024, which adopted resolutions on subjects relevant to ACCOBAMS. The recent ASCOBANS Advisory Committee meeting discussed priority actions and established new working groups to address issues like mass strandings and cetacean culture. She expressed enthusiasm for the continued close cooperation between ASCOBANS and ACCOBAMS in the future.
56. The representative of CIESM opened her statement by emphasising the importance of scientific impartiality and independence for credible advice. Highlighting the integrity of their contributions to the ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee, the representative noted that electing scientists by scientists is a model of scientific excellence. This commitment to rigour is essential for maintaining the trust of State Parties and the public. The representative emphasised that robust and objective recommendations strengthen the legitimacy of decisions made and support effective regional cooperation. A pledge was made to uphold these principles throughout future collaborations.
57. The representative of IUCN Med expressed gratitude for the opportunity to address the ACCOBAMS MOP9, emphasising the significance of collective efforts in conserving cetaceans and marine ecosystems in the region. She highlighted the long-standing collaboration between IUCN Med and ACCOBAMS, rooted in science and shared conservation goals. The representative reaffirmed IUCN Med's commitment to supporting ACCOBAMS through its expertise, particularly in enhancing implementation and coordination, while thanking the Secretariat, the host country, and participants for their dedication to this mission.
58. The representative of the Pelagos Agreement expressed gratitude to the Cypriot authorities for hosting the meeting and congratulated Ms. Maýlis Salivas on her new role as Executive Secretary, along with the incoming Chairperson and the new Bureau. She emphasised the importance of collaboration with ACCOBAMS for the protection of marine mammal habitats. She highlighted the successful implementation of high-quality whale watching initiatives developed jointly under the Memorandum of Understanding between the two agreements, particularly within the Pelagos Sanctuary. She further affirmed confidence in the continued efficiency of this collaboration, as reaffirmed during the recent 10th Meeting of Parties to the Pelagos Agreement held in Monaco.
59. The representative of WWF expressed appreciation for attending the ACCOBAMS MOP9 and thanked Cyprus for generously hosting this significant event. WWF commended ACCOBAMS for establishing crucial objectives and targets essential for enhancing the conservation status of cetaceans in the Mediterranean and Black Sea regions.
60. While acknowledging recent successes in cetacean conservation, the representative raised concerns about ongoing threats facing these species, particularly related to bycatch, marine traffic, and hydrocarbon exploration. She emphasised the urgent need to bolster conservation efforts amid the challenges of blue growth. WWF is eager to contribute to ACCOBAMS' strategy through various initiatives and support ASI-II, which plays a vital role in collecting data on cetacean diversity and distribution, as well as other threatened species. The representative expressed hope for continued engagement with the ACCOBAMS Secretariat and member

Parties, looking forward to a productive meeting focused on advancing cetacean conservation efforts in the region and beyond.

61. The Executive Secretary of ACCOBAMS informed the Meeting that an additional written statement had been received from the GFCM, which would be annexed to the report.
62. During their interventions, delegations thanked the Government of Cyprus for hosting the MOP in such a beautiful island of the Mediterranean Sea and congratulated the Secretariat for the excellent work carried out for the organisation of the Meeting.
63. The full statements appear in [Annex 5](#) to this report.

AGENDA ITEM IV – PROGRESS REPORTS OF THE AGREEMENT

IV.1 - National Reports

a) Synthesis of the National Reports of the Parties

64. The Executive Secretary thanked the Parties that provided their national reports via the Network on the Conservation of Cetaceans of the Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea and contiguous Atlantic area (NETCCOBAMS) platform and reminded that the Secretariat had prepared pre-filled reports to facilitate reporting by the focal points.
65. She presented the synthesis of the national reports contained in document ACCOBAMS-MOP9/2025/Doc07. This document compiles and analyses the national reports submitted by the 24 ACCOBAMS Parties for the 2023-2025 triennium, in line with Article VIII of the Agreement. The reports were updated via the NETCCOBAMS platform, with support from the Secretariat.
66. Following the presentation of the synthesis of the national reports by the Secretariat, the Chair invited delegates wishing to share information on the activities undertaken by their countries within the framework of the implementation of ACCOBAMS to take the floor.
67. The representative of Ukraine informed the Meeting that military activities conducted by the Russian Federation in the Black Sea continue to cause severe and wide-ranging impacts on the marine environment, including pollution, eutrophication, increased risks of infections and bioinvasions, and the consequences of dam destruction. Additional pressures such as construction works, altered shipping routes, oil spills, and underwater noise are also affecting marine ecosystems across all Black Sea countries.
68. He stressed the urgent need for comprehensive monitoring of underwater noise, pollution, biological stress indicators, and improved response to stranding events, noting that a coordinated regional effort is essential to understand mortality causes and broader impacts.
69. He further highlighted the importance of both short- and long-term demining activities, using best available techniques to safely remove historical and recent underwater explosives, building on existing initiatives in other regions.

70. Finally, he emphasised the need to establish new marine protected areas, including transboundary sites based on identified Important Marine Mammal Areas (IMMAs), and encouraged the use of innovative research tools such as unmanned aerial and underwater vehicles for cetacean studies.
71. The representative of OceanCare expressed gratitude to the host government of Cyprus for their warm hospitality. He welcomed the Synthesis Report along with the National Reports addressing threats to cetaceans but raised some concern regarding potential misinterpretation in this report. OceanCare emphasised the importance of Parties contributing data to the ACCOBAMS regional noise registry, as limited data hampers assessments of underwater noise impacts and congratulated those Parties actively utilising the noise registry.

b) Non-Parties activities

72. Expressing her honour to attend the Meeting carrying the voice of her country, the representative of the Sultanate of Oman informed the participants that the valuable efforts undertaken by the ACCOBAMS to protect cetaceans and conserve their habitats are followed with great admiration and appreciation in Oman. The work under ACCOBAMS through scientific surveys, knowledge exchange, and capacity building has created a regional cooperation network that stands as a model to be emulated.
73. The Sultanate of Oman's commitment to the protection of marine mammals is deep and firmly rooted in its environmental vision. From this commitment, many initiatives have emerged, including:
- The establishment of marine protected areas,
 - Humpback whale conservation,
 - Monitoring of stranding.
74. She also informed the Meeting about scientific surveys of cetaceans which she had the privilege of leading in the protected area in the northern region of Oman (Musandam Governorate). It aims to monitor and document marine mammal species, establish a cetacean's database, and develop maps showing the distribution of marine mammals. Moreover, during these surveys an electronic application (named Spinner) was also developed for recording and storing data in an integrated database, as well as analysing it.
75. She concluded by emphasising that for the Sultanate of Oman, protecting cetaceans is not merely a scientific endeavour—it is a moral responsibility toward nature and toward future generations. Her country considers the protection of natural resources as a shared responsibility, and it will continue to support and encourage international cooperation to enhance the sustainability of marine mammals. It places full confidence in international agreements, including ACCOBAMS, and reaffirms its commitment to active participation and collaboration for a more balanced and sustainable future for the marine environment.
76. The full statement by the representative of the Sultanate of Oman is annexed ([Annex 6](#)) to this report.
77. Following the representative of the Sultanate of Oman's intervention, the Executive Secretary informed the Meeting that she had received a proposal to establish a collaboration Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the relevant authorities in the Sultanate of Oman.
78. The Meeting of the Parties mandated the ACCOBAMS Executive Secretary to negotiate a memorandum of understanding with the Government of Oman taking into account the principles of the ACCOBAMS, to initial the draft text of it and to communicate it to the ACCOBAMS Contracting Parties. If no objections are received by Contracting Parties within the term of sixty days from the date of the communication, the Meeting of the Parties

entrusted the President of the Bureau with the task of signing the memorandum of understanding on behalf of the ACCOBAMS Contracting Parties.

79. Furthermore, the Meeting of the Parties asked the Bureau to draft general rules for the negotiation and conclusion of memoranda of understanding with States and to present a draft resolution on this subject to the next Meeting of the Parties.

IV.2 - Report of the Depositary and status of Ratifications

80. The representative of the Principality of Monaco presented the report of the Depositary of the Agreement, the Department of External Relations and Cooperation of the Principality of Monaco, contained in document ACCOBAMS-MOP9/2025/Doc08. She informed the Meeting that, since the Eighth Meeting of the Parties (MOP8), which was held in Malta, from 29 November to 2 December 2022, the Depositary had not registered any new ratifications of the Agreement. Thus, as of 7 August 2025, the Agreement had 24 Contracting Parties.
81. With regard to the Amendments to the text and Annex 1 of the Agreement, relating to the extension of the geographical area of ACCOBAMS adopted at MOP4 in 2010, the Depositary of the Agreement registered the instruments of ratification of the Hellenic Republic, deposited on 28 April 2023, and of the Republic of Georgia, deposited on 25 August 2023. The Depositary duly informed, through diplomatic channels, the signatories and/or Parties to the Agreement, the Council of the European Union, the Permanent Secretariats of ACCOBAMS and the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS), as well as the United Nations Treaty Service. As of 7 August 2025, the following twelve Parties had approved the Amendments: Bulgaria, Cyprus, France, Georgia, Greece, Italy, Malta, Monaco, Montenegro, Slovenia, Spain and Ukraine. In accordance with Article X, paragraph 3 of the Agreement, the said amendments shall enter into force on the thirtieth day after the date on which two-thirds of the States Parties to the Agreement, i.e. sixteen (16) Parties, have ratified them.
82. The full report of the Depositary appears as [Annex 7](#) to this report.

IV.3 - Report of the Bureau

83. Ms. Marie Thérèse Gambin, the Chair of the Bureau during the triennium 2023-2025, presented document ACCOBAMS-MOP9/2025/Doc09. She emphasised that over the reporting period, the Bureau held four meetings between November 2023 and April 2025, including one meeting of the Extended Bureau. These meetings brought together Bureau members, the Secretariat, the Chair of the Scientific Committee and invited experts. The reports of the four meetings have been submitted to this Ninth Meeting of the Parties as Reference Documents (ACCOBAMS-BU15/2023/Doc13, ACCOBAMS-BU15/2023/Doc14, ACCOBAMS-BU15/2023/Doc15 and ACCOBAMS-BUEXT6/2025/Doc15).
84. She added that throughout 2023 to 2025 the Bureau has addressed a broad range of administrative, budgetary, institutional, and scientific matters. Its aim has been to maintain continuity across the triennium and ensure that MOP9 is equipped with a solid agenda for decision-making in both institutional governance and conservation. The following subjects were addressed by the Bureau:
- Selection of the Executive Secretary: Following the resignation of the Executive Secretary (Ms. Susana Salvador) the Bureau, acting as the recruitment committee, selected Ms. Maÿlis Salivas-Decaux as the new Executive Secretary, who took office on the 1st of January 2025.

- Approval of the financial accounts: The Bureau approved matters related to the accounts and expressed appreciation for the voluntary contributions received. It also examined the issue of outstanding contributions and prepared proposals that are now before this Meeting of the Parties.
- Visibility of the Agreement: The Bureau welcomed the development of a new visual identity and new document templates. It requested that Digital Object Identifiers (DOIs) be assigned to relevant documents to support accessibility and clarity regarding intellectual property.
- Composition of the Scientific Committee: The Bureau reviewed the composition of the Scientific Committee following the changes introduced by Resolution 8.3. It recognised the value of broader participation but noted that the increased costs will require either additional voluntary contributions or an increase in the regular budget. It requested updated Rules of Procedure for the Scientific Committee, particularly concerning the election of its Chair and Vice-Chair.
- Rules of Procedure for the Meeting of the Parties: The Bureau asked the Secretariat for further analysis. Although the number of Bureau members is not in conflict with the Agreement, adjustments would be needed to the Rules of Procedure for the Meeting of the Parties and those of the Bureau. The Bureau noted the procedural and administrative challenges that such changes could create. The Bureau also highly recommended ensuring continuity from one Bureau to the next.
- Partnerships: Following the review of information on 19 collaboration programmes, the Bureau expressed concern at the low number of submissions received. It examined the application received for the status of "ACCOBAMS Partner" and accepted the following organisations as ACCOBAMS Partners: Delphis NGO, We Are Méditerranée, Notre Grand Bleu, and the Department of Comparative Biomedicine and Food Science at the University of Padova. The Bureau recommended withdrawing the status of eight inactive Partners.
- ASI-II: The Bureau devoted considerable attention to the next basin-wide survey, ASI-II, which remains a high priority. Following the shifting in the timeline, the fieldwork of ASI-II is expected to begin in 2026, allowing more time for staff recruitment and fundraising. The official launch of ASI-II was announced at the UN Ocean Conference in Nice in June 2025.
- Supplementary Conservation Grants Fund: Considering the amount available for the Supplementary Conservation Grants Fund (€4,724 by the end of 2024) and that no new contributions had been received. The Bureau decided that no call for proposals could be issued for 2025 unless the funding situation changes.
- Preparations for the Ninth Meeting of the Parties (MOP9): The Bureau reviewed several draft Resolutions that have been circulated by the Secretariat.

85. She concluded by sincerely thanking all Bureau members for their cooperation and constructive engagement, and the Secretariat for its continuous support and hard work.

86. The Meeting took note of the report, commended the activities undertaken and congratulated the Bureau members for their efforts along the triennium.

87. The full report of the Bureau appears as [Annex 8](#) to this report.

IV.4 - Report of the Secretariat

88. Referring to document ACCOBAMS-MOP9/2025/Doc10, the Executive Secretary informed the Meeting about the activities carried out by the Secretariat during the triennium covering a wide range of topics in accordance with the Programme of Work 2023-2025: collision prevention, reduction of bycatch, fight against noise pollution

and marine litter, spatial management, and promotion of sustainable tourism. These actions were carried out in partnership with many regional and international actors.

89. She emphasised that the period 2023-2025 was marked for the Secretariat by a significant strengthening of partnerships and international cooperation. In this regard, collaboration MoUs were signed with UNEP/MAP, SPA/RAC and the Regional Activity Centre for Information and Communication (INFO/RAC). She also informed about the update of the work programme annexed to the MoU with the Black Sea Commission. Furthermore, the Secretariat participated in several meetings of the CMS family and UNEP/MAP, as well as in projects dealing with topics of interest for ACCOBAMS (underwater noise, bycatch, depredation, vessel strikes, etc.).
90. The Executive Secretary informed also the Meeting about the evolution in the Secretariat team stressing that the Secretariat staff comprised six members in 2022 but only three as of November 2025. However, despite this staff reduction the management of the Agreement and the implementation of the programme of work have been ensured, thanks to the commitment and versatility of the team. She added that to strengthen the management of the Agreement, the following two positions of Programme and Project Officer were published on the ACCOBAMS website at the beginning of November and disseminated to the National Focal Points:
- Position 1: Management and monitoring of the second edition of the ACCOBAMS Survey Initiative (ASI-II), in close collaboration with the scientific coordinator.
 - Position 2: Implementation of ACCOBAMS' communication strategy.
91. The Meeting took note of the report, commended the activities undertaken and congratulated the Secretariat for its efforts along the triennium. The full report of the Secretariat is shown as [Annex 9](#) to this report.

IV.5 - Report of the Scientific Committee and its Working Groups

92. Mr. Simone Panigada, Chair of the ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee during the 2023-2025 triennium, introduced document ACCOBAMS-MOP9/2025/Doc11, which contained an overview of the work carried out by the ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee over the past triennium including the reports by (i) the Scientific Committee Regional Representatives on the conservation status of cetaceans and relevant activities in their respective regions, (ii) the Scientific Committee Task Managers, and (iii) the Chairs of the Working Groups. The document included also the full text of fifteen Recommendations issued by the 16th meeting of the Scientific Committee that served as the basis for the preparation of the draft Resolutions submitted to MOP9.
93. Emphasising that the 2023-2025 triennium has been marked by intense scientific activity, strengthened regional collaboration, and significant progress in several priority areas of cetacean conservation, the Chair of the Scientific Committee briefly presented the key topics on which the Scientific Committee focused during the triennium.
94. The Meeting took note of the report and commended the work achieved by the Scientific Committee during the triennium 2023-2025.
95. The full report of the Scientific Committee is shown as [Annex 10](#) to this report.

IV.6 - Reports of the Sub Regional Coordination Units

96. The representative of the Black Sea Commission Permanent Secretariat (BSC PS), also acting as the ACCOBAMS Black Sea Sub-Regional Coordination Unit, presented the Sub-Regional Report, including activities from Non-Parties.
97. She highlighted that, despite regional disruptions caused by the ongoing conflict, the BSC PS continued to fulfil its commitments under the MoU with ACCOBAMS and outlined key achievements over the triennium. These included active participation in ACCOBAMS and regional meetings, the integration of cetacean conservation priorities into major Black Sea strategic documents (the Black Sea Integrated Monitoring and Assessment Programme - BSIMAP 2023-2027, the State of Environment Report, and the regional marine litter plan), and the inclusion of indicators on bottlenose dolphins in captivity and fisheries.
98. She also underlined a major milestone: the joint meeting held in Istanbul in March 2024, gathering ACCOBAMS, BSC, the European Commission's Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries (EU/DG MARE), GFCM, and Black Sea experts. Participants agreed to explore the creation of a collaborative network to address harbour porpoise bycatch through coordinated monitoring, data sharing, research, and policy action. A dedicated Black Sea Sub-Task Group was established to support the ACCOBAMS Emergency Task Force, including work on annual summaries, strandings and bycatch monitoring, and post-mortem sampling.
99. The BSC PS further advanced cooperation through regional projects (European Union for Improving Environmental Monitoring in the Black Sea - EU4EMBLAS; Support the Marine Strategy Framework Directive. (MSFD) implementation in the Black Sea through establishing a regional monitoring system of cetaceans (D1) and noise monitoring (D11) for achieving Good Environmental Status - CeNoBS; Advancing Black Sea Research and Innovation to Co-Develop Blue Growth within Resilient Ecosystems - BRIDGE-BS; Developing Optimal and Open Research Support' for the Black Sea - DOORS Black Sea; Coordination of Marine and Maritime Research and Innovation in the Black Sea - Black Sea CONNECT; and new GEF, World Bank, and FAO initiatives), contributed to marine litter impact assessments under MarineLitterMED, initiated collaboration with naval forces on underwater munitions, and continued efforts to expand cetacean conservation modules in Black Sea universities.
100. She concluded by reaffirming the shared objective of strengthening data availability and quality on Black Sea cetaceans and enhancing regional capacity for marine environmental monitoring in line with the EU MSFD and the Black Sea Strategic Action Plan.
101. The representative of SPA/RAC, acting as the Sub regional coordination unit for the Mediterranean, presented the report of the Mediterranean Sub-Regional Coordination Unit. She recalled that cooperation with ACCOBAMS is guided by MoUs renewed every triennium, with the most recent agreement signed in March 2025.
102. During the triennium, SPA/RAC supported the implementation of national IMAP monitoring programmes in six countries through EU-funded projects, contributed to the 2023 Mediterranean Quality Status Report (MED QSR), and launched two initiatives (Bolstering Mediterranean biodiversity and Marine and Coastal Protected Areas for nature - SEMPA and Supporting the Southern Mediterranean Contracting Parties in Implementing Ecosystem Approach to Achieve Good Environmental Status - EcAp MED PLUS) to continue progress toward Good Environmental Status (GES). Discussions are ongoing to ensure synergies between SEMPA and the ACCOBAMS Survey Initiative II (ASI-II), particularly for cetacean monitoring.

103. SPA/RAC also advanced the review and update of Common Indicator Factsheets (Ecological Objectives EO1, EO2, and EO3) and initiated preparations for the 2026-2027 revision of cetacean-related IMAF indicators, in coordination with the ACCOBAMS Secretariat and Scientific Committee. She reported on progress under the Post-2020 Strategic Action Programme for the Conservation of Biodiversity and Sustainable Management of Natural Resources in the Mediterranean Region (Post-2020 SAPBIO) mid-term assessment and on strengthened work related to cetacean critical habitats, including updates to the Ad hoc Group of Experts for Marine Protected Areas in the Mediterranean (AGEM) and the development of draft Mediterranean Other Effective area-based Conservation Measures (OECM) Guidance.
104. She added that SPA/RAC and the ACCOBAMS Secretariat jointly organised several capacity-building activities, including the Sixth Conference on Cetacean Conservation in South Mediterranean Countries (CSMC6), a MED Bycatch (Understanding Mediterranean Multi-Taxa Bycatch of Vulnerable Species and testing Mitigation) workshop, and support to the 36th European Cetacean Society (ECS) Conference.
105. She concluded by noting that the Mediterranean Action Plan for the conservation of cetaceans (UNEP/MAP Decision IG.25/13) will be evaluated and updated during 2026-2027, in close collaboration with the ACCOBAMS Secretariat, for submission to the Barcelona Convention COP25.
106. The full reports of the Sub Regional Coordinating Units appear in [Annex 11](#) and [Annex 12](#) to this report.

IV.7 - Report of the Follow-up Committee

107. Ms. Imane Tai, Chair of the ACCOBAMS Follow-up Committee, introduced document ACCOBAMS-MOP9/2025/Doc14Rev1 and presented the main considerations and recommendations arising from the fourth Meeting of the Follow-up Committee held on 2-3 September 2025.
108. Ms. Tai informed the Meeting that the Committee had received and considered a new submission from OceanCare concerning the failure by Spain to update the national conservation status of the Mediterranean sub-populations of sperm whales and fin whales. A recommendation was made to Spain to clarify the procedure and timeline for updating its national Red List to align with IUCN and ACCOBAMS standards.
109. The Chair of the Follow-up Committee also reported on the status of two ongoing cases submitted by OceanCare in 2016:
- Regarding the assessment and control by Greece of military activities around South-East Crete: no new information has been received from Greece regarding the implementation of the ACCOBAMS Guidelines to address underwater noise since 2014. The Committee reiterated the importance of applying these guidelines, given the potential impacts of naval activities on vulnerable cetacean species.
 - Regarding the failure by several Parties to implement the ACCOBAMS Conservation Plan for Mediterranean Common Dolphins: only five Parties (Croatia, Cyprus, Malta, Morocco and Spain) have provided updated information so far. The Follow-up Committee urged the Parties concerned to submit the missing information without further delay.
110. Ms. Tai also highlighted a number of positive developments in the implementation of existing obligations, particularly in relation to underwater noise. These included the establishment of the ACCOBAMS Emergency Task Force, the organisation of a joint ACCOBAMS-ASCOBANS Workshop with Navies, and continued progress on the Noise Register as well as on passive acoustic monitoring initiatives. With regard to interactions between

humans and dolphins, she acknowledged the advances made through the creation of the ACCOBAMS Advisory Committee on Semi-Enclosed Facilities established under Resolution 3.13 and noted that the Follow-up Committee had endorsed draft Resolution 9.19 on Semi-Captivity (Passport and Guidelines), recommending its adoption by MOP9.

111. The representative of OceanCare reiterated the importance of the Follow-up Committee and expressed appreciation for the constructive manner in which submissions have been handled. He recalled that Resolution 5.4 established the Committee to facilitate follow-up of the Agreement through non-confrontational means and encouraged Parties subject to submissions to provide the requested information in a timely manner. He stressed that complete input from all concerned Parties is essential to allow proper assessment and to support effective implementation of conservation measures.
112. The Meeting took note of the Report which appears in [Annex 13](#) to this report and commended the work of the Follow-up Committee.

IV.8 - Reports of the ACCOBAMS Partners

113. The Executive Secretary introduced document ACCOBAMS-MOP9/2025/Doc15, presenting the activities carried out by ACCOBAMS Partners under the 2023-2025 Work Programme in the areas of capacity building, public awareness and research. She recalled that Partners are required to submit their activity report using the ACCOBAMS Partner Report template, in accordance with the “Rules and commitments of ACCOBAMS Partners” set out in Annex 2 to Resolution 7.9.
114. The Meeting was informed that 23 Partners had provided reports for the period 2023-2025. The synthesis of the submissions reflects a strong level of engagement, with more than 500 individuals trained, hundreds of awareness-raising events conducted, and numerous research initiatives implemented across the Agreement area.

IV.9 - Budgetary Reports

a) Report on incomes and expenditures relevant to the Trust Fund and external contributions for 2023-2025

115. The Executive Secretary presented the report on incomes and expenditures related to the ACCOBAMS Trust Fund for 2023-2025, as reflected in document ACCOBAMS-MOP9/2025/Doc16Rev1, and indicated that the figures for 2025 covered the period up to 30 June 2025. As of that date, the balance due was €192,439. Late contributions were also received after 30 June.
116. She highlighted that, as requested by the Parties, priority was given to allocating a larger portion of the budget to conservation actions, with 33% allocated for this purpose.
117. She also presented the status of voluntary contributions and co-funding received during the triennium.

b) Report on the Supplementary Conservation Grants Fund

118. The Executive Secretary provided an overview of the incomes and expenditures for the Supplementary Conservation Grants Fund (SCF) over the triennium, as reflected in document ACCOBAMS-MOP9/2025/Doc17. On 30 June 2025, the remaining balance amounted to €25,153, of which €20,496 were still committed to ongoing projects.

119. She indicated that, given the lack of voluntary contributions to replenish the fund, the 6th Extended Bureau decided not to launch a new call for projects.

c) Report by the Fund Management Controller

120. In accordance with Annex 3 to Resolution 7.6, the Executive Secretary presented the report of the fund management controller for the triennium 2023-2025 (ACCOBAMS-MOP9/2025/Doc18) emphasising that all financial reports of the triennium had been approved by the fund management controller.

121. The Meeting endorsed the three budgetary reports and approved the audited accounts relating to the 2023-2025 period.

AGENDA ITEM V – INSTITUTIONAL AND BUDGETARY ARRANGEMENTS

V.1 - Long-term pending contributions

122. The Executive Secretary recalled that, given the substantial amount of unpaid contributions reported, MOP8 had instructed the Bureau, through Resolution 8.2, to propose procedures for managing long-term arrears.

123. During the triennium, the Bureau examined the issue of unpaid contributions and their impact on the proper functioning of ACCOBAMS. While favouring the approach of maintaining good relations with all Parties, the Bureau agreed to propose measures imposing constraints on Parties with long-term unpaid contributions with regard to (i) voting during MOPs, (ii) serving as Chairperson or Vice-Chairperson of the Meeting of the Parties, or as members of the Follow-up Committee, (iii) financial support for the participation of their representatives in ACCOBAMS meetings, and (iv) financial support from the Supplementary Conservation Grants Fund.

124. The Executive Secretary then introduced the draft Resolution 9.2 (Long-term pending contributions) and draft Resolution 9.3 (Amendments to the Rules of Procedure for the Meeting of the Parties), which were reviewed and amended by the Meeting and later adopted as Resolution 9.2 and Resolution 9.3 ([Annex 14](#)).

V.2 - Scientific Committee

125. The Executive Secretary informed the Meeting that during MOP8 (Malta, 29 November – 2 December 2022), following a proposal by Italy, Parties adopted Resolution 8.3, amending the Rules of Procedure of the ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee and increasing the number of Regional Representatives up to twelve. The new composition of the Scientific Committee was adopted on a trial basis with a view to being reconsidered at MOP9. Italy offered to cover the additional participation costs generated by the increased number of Scientific Committee members for 2023-2025.

126. She added that during its 15th Meeting, the ACCOBAMS Bureau (Monaco, Hybrid, 22-23 November 2023), decided to assess the effectiveness of the new composition of the Scientific Committee, as established by Resolution 8.3. It requested the Secretariat to prepare an analysis, taking into account the functionality of the Scientific Committee and the budgetary implications linked with the increased number of Scientific Committee members. To this end, the Secretariat contracted an independent consultant (Dr. Giuseppe Notarbartolo di Sciarra) who reported to the Bureau at its 17th Meeting (Monaco, 14-15 February 2025). The Bureau also requested the Secretariat to prepare a legal analysis about the option of electing the Chair and Vice-Chair from among all Scientific Committee Members.

127. Referring to Article 7.1 of the ACCOBAMS Agreement, the legal advisor of the Secretariat recalled that the Meeting of the Parties should “*entrust the functions of the Scientific Committee to an existing organisation in the Agreement area*” that ensures geographically balanced representation. He emphasised that the MOP of ACCOBAMS had made various decisions regarding the composition of the Scientific Committee; the most recent of these were the amendments to the rules adopted at MOP8. He commented that many of the MOP decisions regarding the composition of the Scientific Committee constituted a broad interpretation of the Agreement, which could be accepted as it does not contradict the spirit of the Agreement. He recommended, however, that the Chair and Vice-Chair be selected from among the representatives of an existing organisation in the Agreement area.
128. The Chair of the Bureau for the period 2023-2025 informed the Meeting that at its last meetings, the Bureau, based on the report by the independent consultant and the views expressed by the Scientific Committee concluded that:
- The new composition of the Scientific Committee as established by Resolution 8.3 has been effective during the trial period; however, it involved an increase in the necessary funds.
 - The increased number of experts from regions is financially feasible only if supported by voluntary contributions or an increase in the budget available for the Scientific Committee.
 - The process of electing the Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson from among members designated by existing organisations in the Agreement Area ensures compliance with Article VII, paragraph 1, of the ACCOBAMS, and guarantees the independence of the Scientific Committee. A decision needs to be made regarding whether by ‘existing organisation’ it is meant a selection from either CIESM or IUCN (and not CMS or International Whaling Commission - IWC).
 - Regarding the participation of one representative from the European Cetacean Society (ECS) in the ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee, the Bureau requested the Secretariat to prepare a note, based on the advice of the consultant, and submit it to the MOP for consideration.
129. She added that the Bureau requested the Secretariat to prepare updated Rules of Procedure for the Scientific Committee, particularly with regard to the election of its Chair and Vice-Chair and submit it for the consideration of MOP9.
130. The representative of IUCN Med informed the Meeting that her organisation appreciates the valuable work of the ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee and recognises its essential role in providing objective and science-based advice that supports the implementation of the Agreement. She added that it is important to ensure that the Committee continues to operate with independence, balance, and scientific integrity, as these are fundamental to maintaining confidence in its work and in the decisions of the Parties.
131. She emphasised that the experts nominated through the IUCN process are selected on the basis of scientific merit, experience, and regional knowledge, ensuring that the Committee benefits from a broad and complementary range of expertise. IUCN Med remains committed to supporting the Scientific Committee and to working constructively with all partners in advancing the objectives of ACCOBAMS.
132. The representative of CIESM highlighted a key principle related to the scientific work of her organisation. While the substance of scientific impartiality and independence is fundamentally important, the perception of that impartiality is equally crucial for maintaining public trust and credibility. It is therefore important to be vigilant about the processes through which scientific advice is generated and adopted. Any element that introduces a potential ambiguity regarding the scientific committee's technical autonomy—even if entirely well-intentioned—could unintentionally be perceived as compromising its independence. The goal of her

organisation is always to safeguard the scientific process and ensure its output is viewed as being fully independent, thereby maximising its effectiveness and acceptance by all stakeholders.

133. The representative of Italy intervened to clarify the rationale behind its recent proposal concerning the ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee (SC) and to share views on the legal analysis provided to the Parties. The proposal's goal was not to undermine the role of international organisations within the SC, whose work is highly valued. Instead, the aim was to align the SC's Rules of Procedure (RoP) with international standards and to ensure wider participation of the Parties in the governance of this key subsidiary body, emphasising principles like equality, inclusiveness, and cooperation.
134. The Italian proposal was based on an interpretation of Article VII, paragraph 1, of the ACCOBAMS Agreement (which entrusts SC functions to an existing, geographically-balanced organisation) in light of the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties (Article 31, paragraph 3). The original purpose of Article VII, paragraph 1, was to ensure the SC's technical expertise, independence, and balanced representation. While the Agreement considered designating a single existing organisation as the SC to achieve geographically balanced representation, a review of reports shows the functions were never truly entrusted to an existing organisation, nor was geographically balanced representation (e.g., North/South, East/West, Mediterranean/Black Sea) fully secured.
135. The legal analysis acknowledges that various past resolutions on the SC's composition constitute a "subsequent practice" that establishes the Parties' agreed interpretation of the treaty. However, the analysis deems the option of electing the SC's Chair and Vice-Chair from among all Committee members as contrary to the object and purpose of Article VII, paragraph 1 (independence and balanced representation), suggesting an amendment to the Agreement (Article X) would be required.
136. The representative of Italy contended that geographical balance could be achieved through an appropriate rotation mechanism for the chairmanship, which would also foster transparency and enhanced multilateral cooperation, preventing excessive influence by one party. Furthermore, based on the fundamental international law principle of good faith, SC members are presumed to act in the interests of the Agreement, not national interests. Therefore, the chairmanship by a representative of a Contracting Party is not inherently sufficient to raise doubts about the Committee's independence, unless there is evidence to the contrary. Examples like the IWC Scientific Committee demonstrate that a body chaired by Contracting Party representatives can function well with transparency and impartiality.
137. The representative of Italy maintained that since the ACCOBAMS Agreement nowhere restricts the Chair/Vice-Chair roles to existing organisations, the SC's RoP adopted at the last MOP, which allows the Chair to be elected from among all SC members, does not require an amendment to the ACCOBAMS Agreement.
138. The Slovenian representative stated that all members of the Scientific Committee should be presumed impartial and objective unless proven otherwise, regardless of who nominates them. Electing the Chair and Vice-Chair from among the members reinforces impartiality and representativeness, as peers choose the most suitable candidates. If a member were perceived as biased, they would likely not be elected. The representative noted that concerns about impartiality could apply to any member, including those nominated by regional or international organisations, not only by Parties, and that implying otherwise would be inequitable. Electing the Chair and Vice-Chair from all members is consistent with the spirit of the Agreement and with practices of other intergovernmental organisations (IGOs), such as the International Whaling Commission. Several delegates also highlighted that the Scientific Committee's work has been exemplary, demonstrating impartiality.

139. Following interventions by several delegations, the Chair noting that reaching, in the plenary, a consensus on the composition of the Scientific Committee and the procedure for electing its Chair and Vice-Chair was difficult he proposed that a working group coordinated by the representative of Monaco would meet to review draft Resolution 9.4 (Scientific Committee) and provide feedback to the plenary.
140. The working group met and agreed on a series of amendments to draft Resolution 9.4 and reported to the Meeting who reviewed the draft Resolution as amended by the working group and later adopted it as Resolution 9.4 ([Annex 14](#)).

V.3 - Work Programme and Budget for 2026-2028 triennium

141. The Executive Secretary introduced draft Resolution 9.5 on “Work Programme and Budget for the triennium 2026-2028” emphasising that the proposed Work Programme was prepared based on progress made in the implementation of ongoing activities under the 2023-2025 Work Programme, and according to the priorities identified by Parties during the Sixth Meeting of ACCOBAMS National Representatives (Online, 24-25 June 2024), recommendations from the Sixteenth Meeting of the Scientific Committee (Barcelona, 2-5 December 2024), and recommendations from different workshops/activities carried out during the 2023-2025 triennium.
142. The Executive Secretary also presented the explanatory note on the budget contained in the document presenting draft Resolution 9.5 and recalled that the 8th Ordinary Meeting of the Parties had tasked the Secretariat with preparing and submitting to MOP9 several growth scenarios for the 2026-2028 budget. In response to this mandate, and following the Bureau’s guidance, the ACCOBAMS Secretariat developed three budgetary scenarios for the 2026-2028 triennium. These scenarios consider several parameters, including inflation, salary adjustments, the development of the new Strategy, and the composition of the Scientific Committee.
- Scenario A: 0% increase (zero nominal growth), with a total triennial budget of €863,800.
 - Scenario B: 3% increase (intermediate growth), with a total triennial budget of €894,000.
 - Scenario C: 9% increase (real nominal growth), with a total triennial budget of €943,500.
143. The Executive Secretary also highlighted the significant support provided by the Host Country, Monaco, in line with the financial arrangements set out in Resolution 6.2. This support includes substantial contributions—covering, among other elements, key Secretariat staff salaries—as well as important in-kind contributions such as office premises and accommodation for the Secretariat.
144. She then proposed to allocate the remaining funds from the 2023-2025 triennium to key conservation actions, and in particular to the ASI-II, which will be the flagship project of the next triennium. She highlighted that ASI-II encompasses a wide range of conservation actions and will be coordinated by a dedicated project officer.
145. The Meeting decided to establish a working group coordinated by the representative of Malta in order to review draft Resolution 9.5 on “Work Programme and Budget for the triennium 2026-2028”.
146. After several sessions of the Working Group, the representative of Malta, informed the Meeting that following a detailed review of the annexed table to draft Resolution 9.5, the Working Group reached general agreement to support the 3% growth scenario, combined with a 1% minimum contribution.
147. The Meeting reviewed and revised the draft Resolution which was later adopted as Resolution 9.5, “Work Programme and Budget for the triennium 2026-2028” ([Annex 14](#)).

148. The Meeting agreed that, because of financial constraints, Romania joins the consensus reached on Resolution 9.5 on the condition that its annual contribution to the ACCOBAMS Trust Fund 2026-2028, as determined on the basis of the UN scale 2026-2028, will be paid as follows: 50% of the annual contribution in 2026, 75% of the annual contribution in 2027, 100% of the annual contribution in 2028 plus the rest of the unpaid contribution for 2026 and 2027.

V.4 - ACCOBAMS Partners

a) Overview of the state of collaboration with Partners

149. The Executive Secretary recalled that the Secretariat had informed the Bureau that some Partners lacked the time and personnel needed to meet the documentation requirements of Resolution 7.9. The Bureau therefore asked the Secretariat to prepare proposed revisions to the relevant annexes and, after reviewing them, welcomed the amendments aimed at easing these requirements and requested the preparation of a draft resolution.
150. The Meeting reviewed and revised the draft Resolution, which was subsequently adopted as Resolution 9.9 “ACCOBAMS Partners” ([Annex 14](#)).

b) New requests for partnership

151. The Executive Secretary informed the Meeting of a new partnership request from the Ionian Dolphin Conservation E.T.S. and indicated that, in accordance with the procedure set out in Resolution 7.9, the Secretariat transmitted the application and relevant documentation to the Italian National Focal Point for advice (ACCOBAMS-MOP9/2025/Doc27).
152. The Meeting agreed to grant the status of ACCOBAMS Partner to Ionian Dolphin Conservation E.T.S.
153. The representative of Greece informed the Meeting about two new applications and invited the Meeting to review and consider them although both were submitted after the deadline. Following the Meeting’s agreement, the late submissions were circulated to the Parties for examination.
154. After consultation, the Meeting agreed to grant ACCOBAMS Partner status to ARION - Cetacean Rescue and Rehabilitation Research Center and to NCC - Nature Conservation Consultants Ltd.

V.5 - Communication

a) ACCOBAMS Communication Strategy

155. The Executive Secretary updated the Meeting on the Secretariat’s efforts to implement the ACCOBAMS Communication Strategy for 2023-2028, which was adopted at MOP8. Key initiatives included: the updating of the ACCOBAMS visual identity, enhancements to the ACCOBAMS website, including direct access to the NETCCOBAMS platform and the promotion of the “High Quality Whale Watching®” label. Additionally, a comprehensive Social Media Strategy for ACCOBAMS has been developed and the assignment of Digital Object Identifiers (DOIs) to relevant ACCOBAMS documents has been initiated to enhance accessibility and reference. Furthermore, the Secretariat represented ACCOBAMS at various national and international events to enhance visibility and share information with broader audiences.

b) NETCCOBAMS

156. Referring the draft Resolution 9.8, Alessio Maglio, expert of the Secretariat, delivered a comprehensive presentation on the advancements made since 2020, as well as the planned improvements to enhance the functionality and usability of the NETCCOBAMS online platform. Key areas of focus included underwater noise monitoring, national reporting, vessel strikes, strandings, and collaborations with UNEP/MAP - INFO/RAC, the Mediterranean Database on Cetacean Strandings (MEDACES), and other regional initiatives.
157. The representative of Italy expressed gratitude to the Secretariat for its initiatives related to NETCCOBAMS, encouraging continued development to increase its utility for the Parties. She also acknowledged the ongoing cooperation with INFO/RAC and advocated for expanded collaboration on additional issues and topics.
158. The Meeting reviewed and revised the draft Resolution, which was subsequently adopted as Resolution 9.8 on NETCCOBAMS ([Annex 14](#)).

AGENDA ITEM VI – IMPLEMENTATION OF AND COMPLIANCE WITH ACCOBAMS RESOLUTIONS**VI.1 - ACCOBAMS Follow-up Committee****a) Recommendations**

159. The Executive Secretary recalled that based on recommendations from the Fourth Meeting of the ACCOBAMS Follow-up Committee, the Secretariat prepared the draft Resolution 9.6 (Endorsement of follow-up Committee Recommendations) and the draft Resolution 9.7 (Amendments to the Follow-Up procedure).
160. The legal advisor of the Secretariat presented briefly draft Resolution 9.6 with its two parts:
- Resolution.9.6.A: Follow-up submission by OceanCare on the failure by Spain to update the conservation status of the Sperm Whale (*Physeter macrocephalus*) and the Fin Whale (*Balaenoptera physalus*) in the Mediterranean from the current category of 'vulnerable' to 'endangered' according to the IUCN Red List status of cetacean species and the ACCOBAMS Resolution 8.12.
 - Resolution 9.6.B: Follow-up of submission by OceanCare on the assessment and control by Greece of military activities around south-east Crete and follow up of submission by OceanCare on the failure by Albania, Algeria, Croatia, Cyprus, Egypt, France, Greece, Italy, Lebanon, Libya, Malta, Monaco, Montenegro, Morocco, Slovenia, Spain, Syria, Tunisia to implement the ACCOBAMS conservation plan for Mediterranean Common Dolphins.
161. The Legal Advisor followed by presenting draft Resolution 9.7 proposing amendments to the Follow-up procedure. The amendments are mainly intended to improve the procedure, especially by allowing the submitting Party or Partner to participate in the consideration of the submission by the Committee and present their views.
162. The Meeting reviewed and revised the draft Resolutions, which were subsequently adopted as Resolution 9.6 and 9.7 ([Annex 14](#)).

b) Election of new members

163. The Executive Secretary presented a document containing a list of expert candidates proposed by Parties and Partners for membership in the ACCOBAMS Follow-up Committee. The list is contained in document ACCOBAMS-MOP9/2025/Doc30.

164. The 16 Parties eligible to vote, and present in the Meeting room, were invited to elect two members from the candidates proposed by Parties, by secret ballot. Algeria and Greece served as tellers.
165. The election followed the procedures outlined in Article 18 of the Rules of Procedure for the Meeting of the Parties.
166. Ms. Marie Thérèse Gambin (Malta) received the highest vote total (10) and was elected as a full-term member of the ACCOBAMS Follow-up Committee.
167. Each of the remaining three candidates received 2 votes, necessitating a second voting round to select the alternate member, following which Ms. Imane Tai (Morocco) secured the highest votes (7) and was elected as the alternate member.
168. Considering that the Partners had only one candidate, Mr. Dimitar Popov (Green Balkans NGO), he was declared elected without voting procedure.
169. Since the term of the previously elected full-term member, Ms. Aurelie Moulins (CIMA Foundation) concluded at the end of MOP9, the Meeting agreed to reinstate her as the alternate member from the Partners of the ACCOBAMS Follow-up Committee.

VI.2 - ACCOBAMS Strategy

170. The Executive Secretary informed the Meeting that the Secretariat was mandated by MOP8 to undertake a review of the ACCOBAMS Strategy (2018-2025) with the objective of drafting a new Strategy for the period 2026-2037. Following two calls for Voluntary Contributions in 2023 to support this activity, the Bureau acknowledged that, without sufficient funding by February 2024, it would not be feasible to complete the assessment and draft the new Strategy. As no funds have been received to date, it is proposed that the current Strategy (2018-2025) be extended for the triennium 2026-2028. The necessary budget for the assessment and drafting of the new Strategy has been included in the proposed budget (Draft Resolution 9.5).
171. The Meeting unanimously agreed to extend the current Strategy (2018-2025) for the 2026-2028 triennium and to incorporate the budget required for the assessment and drafting of a new Strategy into the 2026-2028 budget.

AGENDA ITEM VII - IMPLEMENTATION OF THE AGREEMENT: TECHNICAL AND SCIENTIFIC ISSUES

VII.1 - Cetacean population estimates and distribution

172. The Executive Secretary recalled that the ACCOBAMS Survey Initiative (ASI) constitutes the major conservation initiative for ACCOBAMS for the next triennium, and provided an overview of its objectives and status, as described in document ACCOBAMS-MOP9/2025/Doc31.
173. She emphasised that ASI-II aims to deliver reliable information on cetacean abundance and distribution, identify critical habitats, and support national and international conservation policies. Building on the achievements of ASI-I, which provided unprecedented cetacean data and established a robust methodological framework for large-scale monitoring, ASI-II integrates capacity-building, coordinated aerial and ship-based surveys, data

analysis for trend assessment and mapping, conservation measures, and a strong component on awareness and communication.

174. The Executive Secretary reminded that ASI-II was officially launched at the UN Ocean Conference in Nice in June 2025 and further explained that preparatory work since then has mobilised Parties, secured contributions, conducted fundraising, and recruited the scientific and operational team. She further noted that the first Steering Committee meeting, held in October 2025, validated its Terms of Reference and the governance structure for ASI-II.
175. The Executive Secretary emphasised that the minimum estimated ASI-II budget needed is €3.3 million and noted that, while part of it has been secured through financial or in-kind support, additional funding remains essential for the successful implementation of the project.
176. The Chair of the Scientific Committee then presented draft Resolution 9.11 on abundance and distribution, reaffirming the fundamental importance of the synoptic ASI-II survey and the Long-Term Monitoring Programme (LTMP) for ACCOBAMS' capacity to achieve its objectives. He recalled that field operations are scheduled to begin in 2026 across the Mediterranean, with a potential survey in the Black Sea in 2027, and called upon Parties to support the implementation phase.
177. The representative of France indicated that the financial contribution to ASI-II amounts to €500,000, with the secondary objective of leveraging European funds (the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund - FEAMPA), potentially increasing French support to a total of €1.6 million.
178. The representative of UNEP/MAP highlighted the opportunity for collaboration between ASI-II and the EU-funded SEMPA Project. Under the IMAP component, cetacean monitoring and assessment will be conducted in several beneficiary countries within the framework of the UNEP/MAP Ecosystem Approach Policy and Roadmap and its IMAP, using common indicators on distributional range, population abundance, and demographic characteristics. UNEP/MAP is committed to ensuring that data collected through SEMPA contribute to ASI and that ASI data feed into the IMAP Infosystem, ultimately supporting the preparation of the next Mediterranean Quality Status Report (MED QSR).
179. The Chair of the SC and ASI-II Scientific Coordinator confirmed the great interest and added value of collaborating with UNEP/MAP and confirmed his availability of discussing ways to better align SEMPA objectives with those of ASI-II and vice-versa.
180. The representative of SPA/RAC recalled that, under Ecological Objective 1, IMAP assesses whether cetaceans maintain a natural distribution, stable populations and healthy life cycles. She noted that SPA/RAC has developed factsheets for each indicator to ensure harmonised and coherent monitoring across the region. She further explained that, as IMAP implementation has significantly advanced, and in line with the recommendations of the 2023 MED QSR, COP 23 mandated a revision of the Ecosystem Approach and IMAP, including the integration of climate-change impacts and the latest scientific knowledge. The revised factsheets will be submitted to the Correspondence Group on Monitoring (CORMON) meeting in June 2026.
181. In this context, the representative of SPA/RAC requested the support of the Secretariat and the involvement of the ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee to review the 2017 factsheets, identify methodological gaps and agree on a timeline for their update.

182. The Meeting reviewed the draft Resolution which was later adopted as Resolution 9.11 “Abundance and distribution, including ACCOBAMS Survey Initiative II and the ACCOBAMS Long-Term Monitoring Programme (LTMP)” ([Annex 14](#)).

VII.2 - Population structure

183. The Executive Secretary introduced draft Resolution 9.13 aiming at encouraging the collection and preservation of cetacean tissue samples for genetic research, promoting the implementation of ACCOBAMS Best Practices on Cetacean Population Genetics, and harmonising procedures for sample exchanges among ACCOBAMS Parties.
184. The Meeting revised the draft Resolution, which was later adopted as Resolution 9.12 on “Population Structure” ([Annex 14](#)).

VII.3 - Monitoring cetaceans’ status

a) Monitoring purposes

185. The Chair of the Scientific Committee presented Draft Resolution 9.12, titled “Species List for Monitoring Purposes”, which aims to establish a sub-regional list of cetacean species for monitoring purposes to assist ACCOBAMS Parties in developing specific monitoring plans.
186. Following extensive discussions, the relevance and utility of this list were questioned by several Parties. Consequently, it was decided to withdraw the draft Resolution 9.12 and to request the Scientific Committee to further explore the matter.

b) Post-War plan for Black Sea cetaceans

187. The Vice-Chair of the Scientific Committee introduced Draft Resolution 9.10, which aims to develop and implement a comprehensive plan to mitigate the impacts of war on cetaceans, their habitats, and their prey in the Black Sea region.
188. The Meeting reviewed and revised the draft Resolution, which was subsequently adopted as Resolution 9.10 on “Post-War Plan for Black Sea Cetaceans” ([Annex 14](#)).
189. The representative of Ukraine expressed gratitude for the acceptance of the Resolution, highlighting its significance for regional development.
190. The representative of the Black Sea Commission thanked all those involved in the development of this plan and expressed appreciation for the efforts of those who advocated for and endorsed it. As a sub-regional body, the Commission is committed to promoting the implementation of this plan.

VII.4 - Functional stranding networks and responses to emergency situation

191. The Executive Secretary introduced Draft Resolution 9.14, which aims to enhance the management and response to cetacean stranding events through the support of the ACCOBAMS Emergency Task Force for Stranding Events (AETFS) and the establishment of a specific “Black Sea” Sub-Task. This initiative seeks to improve data collection, facilitate the exchange of tissue samples, and promote the use of advanced

technologies for post-mortem investigations. The Draft Resolution also proposes the establishment of an emergency fund.

192. Additionally, Alessio Maglio, expert of the Secretariat informed the Meeting of a newly established link between the Mediterranean Database on Cetacean Strandings (MEDACES) and the NETCCOBAMS platform, which serves as a gateway for accessing data and information related to cetacean conservation. Ongoing development will create a dedicated module for a dashboard that will provide regular stranding bulletins utilising MEDACES data.
193. The representative of SPA/RAC congratulated the ACCOBAMS Secretariat for successfully integrating MEDACES into NETCCOBAMS. She noted that MEDACES has been in operation since 2001 under the Barcelona Convention, with support from the University of Valencia, Spain. Since then, SPA/RAC and ACCOBAMS have collaborated to enhance this database. SPA/RAC expressed its approval of the idea to report on MEDACES at the ACCOBAMS MOP, utilising the analyses generated by NETCCOBAMS.
194. The Meeting revised the draft Resolution, which was subsequently adopted as Resolution 9.13 on “Stranding Issues (ACCOBAMS Emergency Task Force for Stranding Events, Functioning Stranding Networks)” ([Annex 14](#)).

VII.5 - Interactions with fisheries / aquaculture

195. The Vice-Chair of the ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee presented draft Resolution 9.15, which aims to mitigate negative interactions with fisheries and other human activities within the ACCOBAMS area. She reminded the Meeting that bycatch remains one of the greatest threats to cetaceans, emphasising the importance of addressing this issue as a leading cause of cetacean mortality.
196. The representative of ASCOBANS conveyed a request from the ASCOBANS Advisory Committee seeking guidance from the Meeting of the Parties on the procedure for endorsing recommendations of the Joint Bycatch Working Group. Following discussion, it was agreed that recommendations arising from meetings of the Joint Bycatch Working Group of ACCOBAMS and ASCOBANS would be submitted to the ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee and the ASCOBANS Advisory Committee for adoption. In light of the respective meeting schedules, it was further agreed that adoption may, when necessary, be undertaken through a silent procedure conducted via email correspondence.
197. The Meeting reviewed the draft Resolution which was later adopted as Resolution 9.14 “Interactions between fisheries and cetaceans” ([Annex 14](#)).

VII.6 - Anthropogenic noise

198. The Executive Secretary provided a brief overview of the main activities conducted during the 2023-2025 triennium, highlighting strong collaborations with UNEP/MAP and UNEP/ASCOBANS. She emphasised that ACCOBAMS made significant progress in addressing underwater noise pollution in the Mediterranean, including the drafting of the first regional technical assessment of underwater noise within the framework of the MED QSR, the development of updated methodological guidance for noise mitigation, and the organisation of a joint ACCOBAMS/ASCOBANS workshop with navies and technical experts. She further explained that these efforts focused on data sharing, harmonising monitoring methods, and aligning management strategies with international frameworks such as the EU MSFD and the Barcelona Convention. She acknowledged the active contribution of Parties in providing data and expertise, which helped to identify noise hotspots and implement practical mitigation measures.

199. The Chair of the Scientific Committee presented the report of the Joint Noise Working Group (JNWG) (ACCOBAMS-MOP9/2025/Inf26), prepared by Ms. Sigrid Lüber and Mr. Yanis Souami, Co-Chairs of the JNWG. He recalled that the JNWG is composed of experts from science, policy, and relevant civil society organisations affiliated with CMS, ACCOBAMS, and ASCOBANS. Since MOP8, the Group has provided technical feedback on regional action plans, workshop Terms of Reference (ToRs), and ACCOBAMS Noise Hotspot reports, contributed to CMS Technical Series guidance on best practices for mitigating shipping, seismic, and pile-driving noise, and advised on noise thresholds and regulatory criteria. The Chair noted the voluntary nature of the Group's work, the ambitious work plan, and the challenges posed by an increasing workload and some overdue meetings. He concluded by commending the JNWG for its valuable contributions to regional noise mitigation and policy support.
200. The Chair of the Scientific Committee then introduced draft Resolution 9.16, noting its aim to encourage the adoption of international guidelines, support the development of quiet zones, promote the exchange of information among stakeholders, and highlighted the link with NETCCOBAMS.
201. The representative of UNEP/MAP welcomed the draft Resolution 9.16 and highlighted the significant advances made since 2019 in collaboration with ACCOBAMS, including the development of assessment methodologies and threshold values for two IMAP Candidate Common Indicators under Ecological Objective 11—impulsive and continuous underwater noise—which were incorporated into the 2023 MED QSR.
202. He further explained that, building on these results, the third cycle of IMAP (2026-2035) proposes upgrading these indicators from candidate to full common indicators, with endorsement expected at COP24. He encouraged Contracting Parties to integrate underwater noise monitoring into national programmes and indicated that updated IMAP Guidance Fact Sheets for Indicators 26 and 27 provide detailed methodologies, monitoring approaches, and assessment procedures. He concluded with the need for continued coordination between UNEP/MAP Programme for the Assessment and Control of Marine Pollution in the Mediterranean—MED POL, INFO/RAC, and ACCOBAMS, as well as technical capacity-building to strengthen national monitoring and assessment of underwater noise.
203. The representative of OceanCare welcomed the progress made by UNEP/MAP in proposing ocean noise as a common indicator for adoption at COP24. He expressed the view that the proposed draft Resolution is very important and should be adopted by the Parties and further emphasised the need for industry representatives, in their role as ACCOBAMS Partners, to contribute data to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the impacts of impulsive noise-generating activities across the Agreement area.
204. The representative of IOGP commented on document ACCOBAMS-MOP9/2025/Inf25 concerning the Mediterranean assessment of anthropogenic underwater noise. While welcoming the report's caution regarding data limitations, he noted the presence of factual inaccuracies and statements that he considered insufficiently supported. He stressed the need for scientifically robust and verifiable data to ensure the quality of recommendations addressed to policymakers. He further encouraged the Secretariat and the JNWG to ensure a thorough and transparent review process for the next iteration of the assessment, involving a wider range of experts, including from industry.
205. Following difficulties to reach consensus for the adoption of the Resolution and the requests for amendments from several Parties, a working group was established to review the most challenging elements and revise the draft Resolution. The representative of Greece, who chaired the Working Group, reported on this work and presented the amendments agreed upon within the draft Resolution.

206. The Meeting reviewed the draft Resolution as amended by the working group, which was subsequently adopted as Resolution 9.15 on “Anthropogenic Noise” ([Annex 14](#)).

VII.7 - Vessel strikes

207. The Executive Secretary provided a brief overview of the main activities conducted over the triennium. She noted that the Secretariat has focused on strengthening regional cooperation and supporting conservation initiatives and highlighted the ShiPrint Project, which aims to protect whales in the North-Western Mediterranean by developing vessel tracking tools, organising workshops for the shipping sector, and raising public awareness through exhibitions. These efforts have been carried out in collaboration with OceanCare and SINAY to assist Parties in reducing vessel strikes and promoting sustainable maritime activities.
208. The Chair of the Scientific Committee introduced draft Resolution 9.17 on ship strikes, aimed at mitigating the adverse impacts of vessel collisions on cetacean species, particularly large whales. He presented the main elements of the draft Resolution, emphasising the importance of synergies for stronger outcomes and highlighting links with the North-Western Mediterranean Sea Particularly Sensitive Sea Area (NW Med PSSA).
209. The representative of OceanCare welcomed the efforts of stakeholders in mitigating the risk of vessel strikes on cetaceans in the Mediterranean. He particularly supported the promotion of collaboration between ACCOBAMS and national Hydrographic Offices, notably the Hellenic Hydrographic Office, to raise awareness among transiting ships through the revision of navigational information and the implementation of effective traffic management measures in the Hellenic Trench IMMA. He emphasised that ACCOBAMS’ involvement and the transfer of expertise would be pivotal in rendering effective several currently recommended measures.
210. The Meeting reviewed the draft Resolution, which was later adopted as Resolution 9.16 on “Vessel Strikes” ([Annex 14](#)).

VII.8 - Cetacean Watching

211. The Executive Secretary informed the Meeting that the main objective of draft Resolution 9.18 (Commercial cetacean-watching activities in the ACCOBAMS Area) is to revise and simplify the regulations governing the use of the collective certification mark "High Quality Whale-Watching®" to ensure sustainable practices, enhance national implementation, and facilitate replication in other regions.
212. The Chair of the Whale Watching Working Group (WWWG), Ms. Marina Sequeira, introduced the draft Resolution 9.18 emphasising that it highlights the need for legally enforceable whale watching regulations, encourages collaboration with relevant organisations, and promotes implementation of pilot studies to define whale watching carrying capacity in geographical areas where commercial whale watching is intensively practiced.
213. Considering the development via operators of unregulated dolphin-watching activities in recent years and opportunistic dolphin-watching trips offered by locals in some enclosed Greek gulfs, the Meeting invited the Greek Government to liaise with scientists working locally to address this matter urgently, with the view of mitigating current and potential pressure on cetacean subpopulations (e.g. the Critically Endangered bottlenose dolphin’s subpopulation in the Gulf of Ambracia, Gulf of Corinth, etc.).

214. The Meeting reviewed and amended the presented draft Resolution which was later adopted as Resolution 9.17 ([Annex 14](#)).

VII.9 - Marine litter and chemical & biological pollution

215. The Vice-Chair of the Scientific Committee introduced draft Resolution 9.19 which was prepared taking into consideration Recommendation 16.12 of the Scientific Committee. The main objective of this draft Resolution is to enhance regional collaboration for data collection and analysis on marine litter, particularly focusing on cetaceans. The draft Resolution aims to include cetaceans as indicator species for monitoring marine debris and to promote joint efforts to understand the toxicological effects of marine litter. It also aims to develop new diagnostic techniques to evaluate the impact of plastics and other stressors on cetaceans.

216. The Meeting reviewed and amended the draft Resolution which was later adopted as Resolution 9.18 ([Annex 14](#)).

VII.10 - Captivity related issues

217. The Executive Secretary indicated that the main objective of draft Resolution 9.20 is to establish a standardised process for the identification and management of cetaceans kept in semi-captivity.

218. The Chair of the ACCOBAMS Advisory Committee on Semi-Enclosed Facilities, Mr. Joan Gonzalvo, introduced the draft Resolution which includes the adoption of a genetic passport template, and the creation of best practice guidelines for the installation and management of semi-enclosed facilities. It aims to ensure proper identification, prevent genetic contamination, and promote the welfare of cetaceans in semi-captivity. He provided detailed presentation of its annexes (Annex 1: Genetic Passport Template, Annex 2: Guidelines for Best Practices during the Installation and Management of Semi-enclosed Facilities for Cetacean Species in the ACCOBAMS Area, and Annex 3: Note on Procedural Steps for Requesting Advice from the ACCOBAMS Advisory Committee on Semi-Enclosed Facilities).

219. Following the presentation of the draft Resolution, a substantive discussion took place that led to its review and amendment. It was later adopted as Resolution 9.19 ([Annex 14](#)).

VII.11 - Area-based measures for cetacean conservation

220. The Executive Secretary informed the Meeting that, during the triennium, the Secretariat assisted the Scientific Committee Task Manager in organising two key workshops: one in Monaco on redefining the Cetacean Critical Habitats (CCH) process, and another in Catania, Italy, focused on human activity data and mapping for ACCOBAMS. She indicated that relevant information from these workshops was integrated into NETCCOBAMS, and that the collaboration on this subject was reinforced with UNEP/MAP, SPA/RAC, GFCM, and IUCN Med.

221. The Chair of the Scientific Committee introduced draft Resolution 9.21 on “Area-based measures for cetacean conservation” aimed at enhancing the protection of cetacean habitats. He explained that it focuses on revising the existing CCH framework, integrating relevant conservation tools, and fostering collaboration with regional and international partners. It also highlights the importance of mapping cetacean distributions and human activities, reassessing Important Marine Mammal Areas (IMMAs), and ensuring the proper use and interpretation of official maps.

222. He recalled that the IMMA process in the Mediterranean began in 2016 and is intended to be conducted every ten years. He indicated that it was agreed to postpone the next IMMA updates until after ASI-II, to allow the integration of new maps and abundance estimates into the process.
223. The representatives of Malta and Portugal expressed concerns regarding the proposed changes to the name of the CCH, noting that the modification could shift the focus from habitat protection towards human activities. The Chair of the Scientific Committee explained the rationale behind the proposal, clarifying that while the IMMA process identifies important habitats based solely on biological and ecological criteria, the CCH takes a step further by overlaying these areas with human pressures to identify zones requiring specific management. He emphasised that the concept remains consistent, and the name change aims to avoid redundancy between IMMA and CCH concepts.
224. The representative of Greece made a statement, shown in [Annex 15](#) to this report.
225. A working group, chaired by Malta, was established to refine the draft Resolution, clarify the connections between IMMA and the revised CCH, and address other outstanding issues and proposals of amendments. The representative of Malta, who chaired the Working Group, reported on this work and presented the amendments agreed upon within the draft Resolution.
226. The Meeting reviewed the draft Resolution as amended by the Working Group, which was later adopted as Resolution 9.20 on “Area-based measures for cetacean conservation” ([Annex 14](#)).

VII.12 - Cetacean culture

227. The Executive Secretary reported that, following a CMS proposal, the Scientific Committee welcomed the topic of cetacean culture and social learning, recognising its relevance for defining populations and informing conservation, and agreed to propose its inclusion in the 2026-2028 Work Programme for consideration by the Meeting of Parties.
228. The UNEP/ASCOBANS representative reported that the ASCOBANS Advisory Committee had established a working group on cetacean culture and recommended fostering synergies and collaboration, proposing to combine the ACCOBAMS working group with the ASCOBANS working group on cetacean culture, that would liaise with the CMS expert working group on conservation implications of animal culture and social complexity.
229. The representative of Monaco supported this proposal, emphasising the importance of coordination between groups to avoid duplication of efforts.
230. The Meeting took note of the proposal for a joint ACCOBAMS/ASCOBANS group on cetacean culture and social learning and agreed to include cetacean culture in the ACCOBAMS 2026-2028 Work Programme.

AGENDA ITEM VIII – ANY OTHER BUSINESS

231. The representative of Ukraine made a statement, shown in [Annex 16](#) to this report and invited Parties to support it. Representatives from Bulgaria, Cyprus, Georgia, Greece and Slovenia supported the statement made by Ukraine.
232. The Executive Secretary informed the Meeting that she received a letter from ECS thanking MOP9 for the re-inclusion of the Organisation in the Scientific Committee.

AGENDA ITEM IX – DATE AND VENUE OF THE TENTH MEETING OF THE PARTIES

233. The Chair recalled that it was customary for the Parties to offer or announce their intention to consider the possibility of hosting the next Meeting of the Parties.
234. The Meeting requested that the Secretariat pursue contacts with ACCOBAMS Parties in order to define, in consultation with the Bureau, the place and date of the next Meeting of the Parties, which should be held in 2028. In case of absence of proposals, it is foreseen that the Meeting will take place in Monaco.
235. The Secretariat revised the corresponding draft Resolution, which was later adopted as Resolution 9.21 ([Annex 14](#)).

AGENDA ITEM X – ADOPTION OF RESOLUTIONS

236. The participants wanted to pay tribute to Cyprus, as the organiser of the Ninth Meeting of the Parties to ACCOBAMS, and for this purpose, they adopted Resolution 9.22 ([Annex 14](#)).
237. Further to the work of the Meeting, the ACCOBAMS Parties adopted the following Resolutions:

Resolution 9.1	Granting the right to vote
Resolution 9.2	Long-term pending contributions
Resolution 9.3	Amendments to the Rules of Procedure for the Meeting of the Parties
Resolution 9.4	Scientific Committee
Resolution 9.5	Work Programme and Budget 2026-2028
Resolution 9.6	Endorsement of Follow-up Committee recommendations
Resolution 9.7	Amendments to the Follow-up procedure
Resolution 9.8	NETCCOBAMS
Resolution 9.9	ACCOBAMS Partners
Resolution 9.10	Post-war Plan for Black Sea cetaceans
Resolution 9.11	Abundance and distribution, including ACCOBAMS Survey Initiative II and the ACCOBAMS long-term monitoring programme (LTMP)
Resolution 9.12	Population structure
Resolution 9.13	Stranding issues (ACCOBAMS Emergency Task Force for Stranding Events, functioning stranding networks)
Resolution 9.14	Interactions between fisheries and cetaceans
Resolution 9.15	Anthropogenic underwater noise

Resolution 9.16	Vessel strikes
Resolution 9.17	Commercial whale watching activities in the ACCOBAMS area
Resolution 9.18	Marine debris
Resolution 9.19	Cetacean Passport and Semi captivity Guidelines
Resolution 9.20	Area-based measures for cetacean conservation
Resolution 9.21	Date and venue of the Tenth session of the Meeting of the Parties
Resolution 9.22	Tribute to Organisers

AGENDA ITEM XI – ADOPTION OF THE REPORT OF THE MEETING

238. The Meeting reviewed the draft Report prepared by the Secretariat and adopted it as amended.

AGENDA ITEM XII – CLOSURE OF THE MEETING

239. After exchanging the usual civilities, the Chair closed the Meeting at 17.45 on Friday 21 November 2025.

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ANNEX II - WELCOME ADDRESSES

(addresses are shown in chronological order)

**WELCOME ADDRESS BY MS MARIE THERESE GAMBIN
CHAIR OF ACCOBAMS DURING THE TRIENNIUM 2023 - 2025**

Distinguished National Focal Points and Country Representatives,
Distinguished ACCOBAMS Executive Secretary,
Distinguished CMS Executive Secretary,
Distinguished Observers,
Distinguished Colleagues and Friends,

It is a great pleasure to welcome you all to the 9th Meeting of the Parties to ACCOBAMS, here in Cyprus. Let me begin by sincerely thanking our gracious hosts for their warm hospitality. It is a true pleasure to be together once again, surrounded by the Mediterranean – the very sea we all work so hard to protect.

As I look back over the three years since our last gathering in Malta, I feel a deep sense of gratitude. These years have not been without their challenges – in our seas, in our societies, and in our daily lives. Yet, through it all, the ACCOBAMS community has remained united, guided by the same conviction that brought us together in the first place: that cooperation is the only way to safeguard our shared marine heritage.

I would like to take this moment to express my heartfelt appreciation to Mrs. Susana Salvador, our former Executive Secretary, for her hard work and passion in advancing the conservation of cetaceans. Her contributions have been truly instrumental.

And today, we extend our congratulations to Ms. Maylis Salivas, who is now several months into her tenure as Executive Secretary, and while this is certainly not her first MOP, it is her first in this key role. I am sure we all agree that over the years, her dedication and drive toward the goals of ACCOBAMS have been remarkable, and I can personally attest that she continues to approach her work with the same determination and commitment.

I also wish to sincerely thank the entire ACCOBAMS Secretariat, with special mention of Ms. Camille Montiglio and Mrs. Frida Nigri. Over these past years, the Secretariat has been there to coordinate our work, keeping the spirit of ACCOBAMS vibrant and active even in difficult times. It is a genuine pleasure working with such a committed team. Appreciation also goes to Ms. Julie Belmont and Ms. Salomé Calley.

The continuous support of the Chair of the Scientific Committee, Mr. Simone Panigada, and of our distinguished experts – notably Professor Tullio Scovazzi and Mr. Chedly Rais, but not only - has likewise been invaluable. Their professionalism, insight, and unwavering commitment have been at the heart of our collective progress. The work and efforts of the Sub-regional Coordination Units also deserve acknowledgement.

When we think of the species and ecosystems we strive to protect, it is easy to focus on the challenges – and there are many. But today, let us also recognise how far we have come. We have built stronger partnerships, deepened our knowledge, and reinforced regional cooperation – and that is truly worth celebrating.

As we begin this MOP, I encourage everyone to bring that same spirit of collaboration, openness, and optimism into our discussions. The coming days are an opportunity not only to take stock of our achievements but to shape the path ahead – one that keeps the Mediterranean Sea and Black Sea alive, thriving, and full of the magnificent creatures that remind us why this work matters.

Thank you once again to our hosts, to the Secretariat, and to all of you for your dedication, friendship, and collaboration over these years. I wish us all a fruitful, engaging, and inspiring meeting.

Thank you.

**WELCOME ADDRESS BY MRS. MELANIE VIRTUE
ON BEHALF OF MRS. AMY FRAENKEL, EXECUTIVE SECRETARY OF THE CONVENTION ON MIGRATORY SPECIES**

Dear President of the Bureau,
Dear Executive Secretary Maýlis Salivas,
Your Excellencies and distinguished delegates.

I would also like to take this opportunity to warmly welcome Maýlis Salivas as the new Executive Secretary of ACCOBAMS and wish her every success as she takes up this important role.

It is an honour for me to address all of you on behalf of the CMS Family at the opening of this Meeting of the Parties to the Agreement on the Conservation of Cetaceans of the Black Seas, Mediterranean and Contiguous Atlantic Area.

My name is Melanie Virtue, and I am representing the CMS Executive Secretary.

ACCOBAMS, as one of the flagship Agreements of the CMS Family, continues to embody the very spirit of our shared mission: bringing together Range States to protect migratory species that no single nation could conserve alone, and doing so in a way that yields real and lasting results. I would like to commend the ACCOBAMS Secretariat and its Parties for your unwavering commitment and achievements in advancing this goal.

The true strength of the CMS Family lies in collaboration. Cooperation between CMS, ASCOBANS, and the ACCOBAMS Secretariat has long been constructive, forward-looking, and inspiring. Together, we have coordinated strategies, shared expertise, and advanced joint initiatives such as the Joint Noise Working Group. ASCOBANS also continues to engage with ACCOBAMS on more targeted activities, which my colleague Jenny Renell will present in more detail later in the session.

At this 9th Meeting of the Parties, the proposed resolutions before you highlight the multiple and cumulative threats facing cetaceans today: from interactions with anthropogenic noise, to vessel strikes, marine litter and pollution, and area-based measures. It is encouraging to see that this meeting also brings attention to cetacean culture, a topic that CMS has been advancing in recent years and which has now been introduced within ASCOBANS as well.

While the proposed resolutions are tailored to the ACCOBAMS region, they address issues of truly global concern. Actions taken by ACCOBAMS Parties will not only strengthen conservation in the Mediterranean and adjacent seas but also contribute to the broader recognition that these challenges demand international cooperation and coordinated global responses. Through your decisions, you are helping to ensure the health, resilience, and biodiversity of our oceans for generations to come.

This meeting takes place at a pivotal moment for marine conservation. The 16th meeting of the Convention on Biological Diversity took place from 25 to 27 February 2025, endorsing the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. The 2025 UN Ocean Conference was held in Nice, France, from 9 to 13 June 2025, adopting the “Nice Ocean Action Plan.

And of course, the required 60 ratifications for the BBNJ Agreement were reached on 19 September 2025. The treaty will enter into force on 17 January 2026. CMS actively engages in and with these processes and frameworks, promoting issues of key importance to migratory species.

We look forward to continuing this dialogue and to seeing many of you again at CMS COP15 which will happen in Campo Grande, Brazil in March 2026, as we work together to advance the conservation of cetaceans and other migratory species worldwide.

I applaud the work of ACCOBAMS Parties, the ACCOBAMS Secretariat, and the Government of Cyprus as host of this meeting and wish you all a productive few days to come on this lovely island.

Thank you.

**WELCOME ADDRESS BY MS. MAYLIS SALIVAS
EXECUTIVE SECRETARY OF ACCOBAMS**

Dear Chair of the ACCOBAMS Bureau, Mrs Marie Therese Gambin,
Dear representative of the Ministry of Agriculture, Rural Development and Environment of Cyprus, Mr. Savvas Michaelides
Dear Mayor of Limassol, Mr Yiannis ARMEFTIS,
Dear representative of the Convention for Migratory Species, Ms. Melanie Virtue,
Distinguished Representatives of ACCOBAMS Parties and non-Parties,
Distinguished Partners and Observers,
Dear Colleagues, dear Participants,

It is with deep emotion and gratitude that I welcome you today for the first time as Executive Secretary of ACCOBAMS, here in Limassol, at the Ninth Meeting of the Parties. For over fifteen years, I have had the privilege to serve within the ACCOBAMS Secretariat and today, I am especially honored by the trust placed in me by the Bureau and the Parties, and I thank you sincerely for entrusting me with this important responsibility.

I would also like to pay tribute to my predecessor, Ms. Susana Salvador, whose dedication and vision have greatly shaped ACCOBAMS and inspired our collective work.

We are in Cyprus, a country at the crossroads of cultures and marine biodiversity, at a time when our mission is more vital than ever. The challenges facing cetaceans and marine ecosystems are complex, but our community remains united by a shared commitment to conservation, science, and cooperation.

The agenda of our meeting is ambitious: from advancing the second edition of the ACCOBAMS Survey Initiative, strengthening long-term monitoring, and tackling issues such as bycatch, ship strikes, and underwater noise, to enhancing collaboration with others IGOs and partners.

I am confident that the spirit of Cyprus—its hospitality, its culture, and its dedication to the marine environment—will guide our discussions and decisions in the coming days. The knowledge, but also the dedication, and the passion of all ACCOBAMS Parties, ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee, Sub regional coordination Units, Secretariat, Follow-up Committee, partners organisations, and experts are our greatest strengths in ACCOBAMS.

So... let us reaffirm together ACCOBAMS' role as a trusted regional mechanism and knowledge hub, and ensure that our actions are guided by science, inclusivity, and sustainability—sustainability not only for the Agreement itself, but for the species we are committed to protect.

Thank you.

**WELCOME ADDRESS BY MR. YIANNIS ARMEFTIS
MAYOR OF LIMASSOL**

Ladies and Gentlemen,
Distinguished delegates,
Dear friends,

On behalf of the Municipality of Limassol, it is with great honour and pleasure that I welcome you to our city on the occasion of the 9th Meeting of the Parties of the Agreement of the Conservation of Cetaceans of the Black Sea, the Mediterranean Sea and the contiguous Atlantic area – ACCOBAMS.

It is with particular joy that we host in our city, for the first time, a Meeting of the Parties of this very important Agreement. Your presence here today – representatives of governments, international organisations, scientific institutions and civil society – sends a strong message about our shared responsibility to protect the marine environment and, in particular, the whales, dolphins and seals that inhabit our seas.

Allow me to extend a warm welcome to the Executive Secretary of ACCOBAMS, Ms. Maýlis Salivas, to the Chairperson of the ACCOBAMS Bureau, Ms. Marie Therese Gambin, to the representatives of UNEP/MAP, CMS, CIESM, IUCN, WWF and other organisations, as well as to all delegates from the 24 Parties of the Agreement. Your presence in Limassol honours us.

Limassol is a coastal city whose identity, history and economy are closely tied to the sea. We are a port city, a centre for international shipping, tourism and services and, at the same time, a community that enjoys and depends on the marine environment.

As a city with a large commercial port, intense coastal activity and a constantly growing population, Limassol is fully aware that it is part of both the challenge and the solution. It is our duty to ensure that economic development, the blue economy and tourism go hand in hand with strong environmental protection.

In this effort, the role of the Department of Fisheries and Marine Research is crucial. As the responsible authority representing Cyprus in ACCOBAMS, the Department of Fisheries and Marine Research works systematically to monitor cetacean populations, to identify threats and to promote effective conservation measures at national and regional level.

At local level, the Municipality of Limassol cooperates closely with the Department of Fisheries and Marine Research and other stakeholders to prevent and control marine pollution, to protect aquatic organisms and habitats, and to support the sustainable management of our coastal and marine ecosystems. Through joint initiatives – from monitoring and public awareness activities to clean-up campaigns and environmental education – we seek to translate international commitments into concrete action on our own shores.

We see Limassol not only as a host city for this Meeting, but also as an active partner in the wider regional effort to protect the Eastern Mediterranean.

We also believe that investing in a healthy marine environment is not an obstacle to development, but a foundation for sustainable progress. A clean, vibrant sea supports responsible tourism, sustainable fishing and aquaculture, innovative blue-economy activities and a higher quality of life for residents and visitors. The protection of cetaceans and marine biodiversity is, in this sense, not only an environmental imperative, but also a smart economic and social choice.

In closing, I would like to congratulate the Department of Fisheries and Marine Research and all the stakeholders involved for the excellent organisation of this Meeting, and to thank ACCOBAMS and its Parties for the trust they have shown in Cyprus and in Limassol as the host city.

I wish you every success in your endeavours, which will strengthen the protection of cetaceans and the marine environment for the future.

Welcome to Limassol. I wish you a very successful Meeting.

**WELCOME ADDRESS BY MR. SAVVAS MICHAELIDES
ON BEHALF OF THE ACTING DIRECTOR-GENERAL FOR THE ENVIRONMENT
MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE, RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND ENVIRONMENT, REPUBLIC OF CYPRUS**

Distinguished delegates, representatives of international organisations, colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

On behalf of the Acting Director-General for the Environment of the Ministry of Agriculture, Rural Development and Environment of the Republic of Cyprus, it is a great pleasure and honour to welcome you all to Cyprus and to the 9th Meeting of the Parties to the Agreement on the Conservation of Cetaceans of the Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea and Contiguous Atlantic Area — *the ACCOBAMS Agreement*.

This is the first time that Cyprus has the privilege of hosting this important gathering, and we are truly delighted to see so many of you here today — representatives from the 24 Parties to the Agreement, partner organisations, scientific institutions, and intergovernmental bodies such as the European Commission, REMPEC, the Barcelona Convention – UNEP/MAP, and the Convention on Migratory Species.

Your participation demonstrates a strong, shared commitment to the conservation of cetaceans — whales, dolphins, and porpoises — and to the broader goal of protecting the marine ecosystems of our region.

Cyprus, as a Mediterranean island nation, is acutely aware of the challenges facing our shared marine environment: pollution, habitat loss, climate change, and increasing human pressures.

A few years ago, during the **2016–2017 cetacean surveys conducted in Cypriot waters**, I had the privilege of witnessing firsthand the magic of these encounters, the sight of striped and bottlenose dolphins gliding gracefully alongside our research vessel, the coordinated surfacing of a herd of the elusive rough-toothed dolphins, and the playful behaviour of a sperm whale that was re-observed after ten years. I still remember the rhythmic clicks and whistles captured by our hydrophones hundreds of metres below the surface, and the rare acoustic traces of deep-diving species such as the Cuvier's beaked whale, near the Eratosthenes Seamount.

But I will also never forget the **sudden, deafening sound of military sonar** resonating near our research vessel, a stark reminder of the many human pressures that still threaten these magnificent creatures. **These moments remind us why our work truly matters**, because every sighting, every sound, and every life beneath the waves tells the story of an ocean that still has hope, if we choose to protect it.

Through the ACCOBAMS framework, we reaffirm our collective responsibility to address these challenges by strengthening scientific cooperation, policy coordination, and regional partnerships.

This meeting offers a valuable opportunity for open dialogue, exchange of experience, and the development of concrete actions to ensure that our seas remain healthy, resilient, and full of life. It is also a chance to renew our common vision — a future in which people and marine life coexist in balance and harmony.

On behalf of the Ministry, I wish to express sincere appreciation to the ACCOBAMS Secretariat for its excellent cooperation, and to the Department of Fisheries and Marine Research for its initiative and dedication in organising this event.

We warmly welcome all delegates and observers to Limassol and to Cyprus. May your discussions be productive, your collaborations inspiring, and your stay here both pleasant and memorable.

Thank you.

ANNEX III - RULES OF PROCEDURE FOR THE MEETING OF THE PARTIES

PURPOSE

Article 1

1. These rules of procedure shall apply to any Session of the Meeting of the Contracting Parties to the Agreement on the Conservation on Cetaceans of the Black sea, Mediterranean Sea and contiguous Atlantic area, convened in accordance with article III of the Agreement.
2. Insofar as they are applicable, these rules shall apply *mutatis mutandis* to any other meeting held in the framework of the Agreement on the Conservation on Cetaceans of the Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea and contiguous Atlantic area.

DATE AND PLACE OF MEETINGS

Article 2

1. Ordinary sessions of the Meeting of the Parties shall be held at intervals of not more than three years.
2. The Meeting of the Parties shall take place in the country chosen by the previous Meeting of the Parties on the basis of a formal invitation that should have been issued to this effect by the responsible authority of that country. If more than one Party issues an invitation to host the next session of the Meeting of the Parties, and two or more invitations are maintained after informal consultations, the Meeting of the Parties shall decide on the venue of the next session by secret ballot.
3. If no invitation has been received, the Meeting of the Parties shall be held in the country where the Secretariat has its seat, unless other appropriate arrangements are made by the Secretariat of the Agreement or the Secretariat of the Convention.
4. Extraordinary sessions of the Meetings of the Parties shall be convened by the Agreement Secretariat on the written request of at least two thirds of the Parties.

DELEGATES, CREDENTIALS, OBSERVERS

Article 3

Representatives

1. A Party to the Agreement (hereafter referred to as a "Party¹") shall be entitled to be represented at the Meeting by a delegation consisting of a Head of Delegation and such Alternative Representatives and Advisers as the Party may deem necessary.
2. The Representative of a Party shall exercise the voting rights of that Party. In his/her absence, an Alternative Representative of that Party shall act in his place.
3. States or regional economic integration organisations that have ratified, accepted or approved the Agreement or have signed it without reservations in respect of ratification, acceptance or approval or have acceded to it are represented at the Meetings of the Parties and exercise their voting rights, even though the Agreement has not yet entered into force for them.
4. Logistic and other limitations may require that no more than four delegates of any Party be present at a plenary session. The Secretariat shall notify Parties, observers and other participants of any such limitations in advance of the Meeting.

¹ See Articles I, paragraph 3.i), and XIV of the Agreement. A Party is a State which has deposited with the Government of the Principality of Monaco its instrument of ratification, acceptance, approval or accession in due time before the Meeting.

Article 4
Credentials

1. The Representative or any Alternative Representative of a Party shall, before exercising the voting rights of the Party, have been granted powers by, or on behalf of, a proper authority, such as the Head of State, the Head of Government or the Minister of Foreign Affairs or the head of an executive body of any regional economic Organisation, enabling them to represent the Party at the Meeting and to vote.
2. Such credentials shall be submitted to the Secretariat of the Agreement at the beginning of the Meeting.
3. A Credentials Committee of not more than five representatives shall examine the credentials and shall report thereon to the Meeting. Pending a decision on their credentials, delegates may participate provisionally in the Meeting.
4. If credentials are submitted in a language other than one of the working languages of the Meeting (French and English), they shall be accompanied by a suitable translation into one of these two languages to permit their efficient validations by the Credentials Committee.

Article 5
Observers²

1. The United Nations, its Specialized Agencies, the International Atomic Energy Agency and any State not a Party to the Agreement may be represented at the Meeting by observers
2. Any Body or Agency technically concerned *inter alia* with the conservation of cetaceans and fisheries management, which is either:
 - a) an international Agency or Body; or
 - b) an international non-governmental Agency or body, or a national governmental Agency or body; or
 - c) a national non-governmental Agency or Body which has been approved for this purpose by the State in which it is located;

and which has informed the Secretariat of the Agreement of its desire to be represented at the Meeting by observers, shall be permitted to be represented unless, for those referred to in paragraph 2b and 2c, at least one-third of the Parties present object.

3. Bodies and Agencies desiring to be represented at the Meeting by observers shall submit the name of their representatives and in the case of Bodies and Agencies, referred to in paragraph 2b and 2c, of this Article, evidence of the approval of the State in which they are located, to the Secretariat of the Agreement prior to the opening of the Meeting.
4. Logistic and other limitations may require that no more than two observers from any non-Party State, Body or Agency be present at the Meeting. The Secretariat shall notify Parties, observers and other participants of any such limitations in advance of the Meeting.

AGENDA
Article 6

1. The Secretariat shall prepare the provisional agenda of each Meeting, in consultation with the Convention Secretariat and the Sub Regional Coordination Units.
2. The provisional agenda of each ordinary session of the Meeting of the Parties shall include, as appropriate:

² See Agreement, Article III, paragraph 4

- a) Items arising from the articles or the Annexes of the Agreement;
 - b) Items, the inclusion of which has been decided at a previous Meeting or which emanate from decisions taken at a previous Meeting;
 - c) Items referred to in paragraph 6 of the present article;
 - d) Any item proposed by a Party, the Scientific Committee or the Secretariat.
3. The Secretariat shall, in consultation with the Bureau, include any item that has been proposed by a Party and has been received by the Secretariat after the provisional agenda has been produced, but before the opening of the Meeting, in a supplementary provisional agenda.
 4. The Meeting of the Parties shall examine the provisional agenda together with any supplementary provisional agenda. When adopting the agenda, it may add, delete, defer, or amend items. Only items, which are considered by the Meeting of the Parties to be urgent and important, may be added to the agenda.
 5. The provisional Agenda for an extraordinary session of the Meeting of the Parties shall consist only of those items proposed for consideration in the request for this session. The provisional agenda and any necessary supporting documents shall be distributed to the Parties at the same time as the invitation to the extraordinary session.
 6. Any item of the agenda of an ordinary session of the Meeting of the Parties, consideration of which has not been completed at the session, shall be included automatically in the agenda of the next session, unless otherwise decided by the Meeting of the Parties.

DOCUMENTS

Article 7

The documents for each ordinary session of the Meeting of the Parties, as per Article 6 paragraph 5 and proposals received from the Parties, as per Article 12 of the Rules of Procedure, shall be distributed to the Parties in the two working languages by the Secretariat at least sixty days before the opening of the Meeting.

BUREAU

Article 8

1. At opening session of each ordinary Meeting, the acting Chairperson, or in the absence of the Chairperson, a representative of the same Party or in its absence the Head of the Delegation of the host country of the Meeting of the Parties, shall preside until the Meeting of the Parties has elected its Chairperson.
2. At the commencement of the first sitting of each ordinary Meeting³, a Chairperson and a maximum of four Vice Chairpersons shall be elected from among the representatives of the Parties present at the Meeting, based on informal consultations conducted by the Secretariat.
3. The Chairperson shall participate in the Meeting in that capacity and shall not at the same time exercise the rights of a representative of a Party. The Party concerned shall designate another representative who shall be entitled to represent the Party in the Meeting and to exercise the right to vote.
4. If the Chairperson and/or one of the Vice-Chairpersons resign or are otherwise unable to complete the assigned term of office or to perform the functions of the office, a representative of the same Party shall be named by the Party concerned to replace the said officer for the remainder of that office's mandate.
5. For the purpose of the Meeting of the Parties and the Meeting of the Bureau, and throughout session, one of the Vice Chairpersons will be Reporter.

³ See Agreement, Article VI, paragraph 1

RULES OF ORDER AND DEBATE

Article 9

Powers of Presiding Officer and Vice-Presiding

1. In addition to exercising powers conferred elsewhere in these Rules, the Presiding Officer shall at plenary sessions of the Meeting:
 - a) open and close the session;
 - b) direct the discussions;
 - c) ensure the observance of these rules;
 - d) accord the right to speak;
 - e) put questions to the vote and announce decisions;
 - f) rule on points of order; and
 - g) subject to these Rules, have complete control of the proceedings of the Meeting and the maintenance of order.

2. The Presiding Officer may, in the course of discussion at a plenary session of the Meeting, propose to the Meeting of the Parties:
 - a) time limits for speakers;
 - b) limitation of the number of times the members of a delegation or the observers from a State not a Party, body or agency may speak on any question;
 - c) the closure of the list of speakers;
 - d) accord the right of reply to any delegate after the closure of the speakers;
 - e) the adjournment or the closure of the debate on the particular subject or question under discussion; and
 - f) the suspension or adjournment of the session.

3. Without prejudice to Article 8, paragraph 4, for the debates the Presiding officer may be supply by the Vice-Presiding.

Article 10

Seating, Quorum

1. Delegations shall be seated in accordance with the alphabetical order of the names of the Parties in the French language.

2. A quorum for plenary sessions of the Meeting shall consist of more than one-half of the Parties having delegations at the Meeting. No plenary session shall take place in the absence of a quorum.

Article 11

Right to Speak

1. The Presiding Officer shall call upon speakers in the order in which they signify their desire to speak, with precedence given to the delegations of the Parties.

2. A delegate or observer may speak only if called upon by the Presiding Officer, who may call a speaker to order if the remarks are not relevant to the subject under discussion.

3. A speaker shall not be interrupted except on a point of order. The speaker may, however, with the permission of the Presiding Officer, give way during their speech to allow any delegate or observer to bring complement on a particular point in his speech.

4. The Chairperson of a committee or working group may be accorded precedence for the purpose of explaining the conclusions arrived at by that committee or working group.

Article 12

Submission of Proposals for Amendment of the Agreement and its Appendices

1. As a general rule, subject to any provisions of the Agreement itself,
 - a) proposals shall have been communicated at least 150 days before the session to the Secretariat, which shall have circulated them to all Parties in the working languages of the Meeting⁴,
 - b) proposals arising out of discussion of the foregoing may be discussed at any plenary session of the Meeting provided copies of them have been circulated to all delegations not later than the day preceding the session.
2. The Presiding Officer may also permit the discussion and consideration of urgent proposals arising after the period prescribed with the subparagraph a) of this Article provided that they relate to proposed amendments which have been circulated in accordance with the subparagraph b) of this Article and that their consideration will not unduly inhibit the proceedings of the Meeting. The Presiding Officer may, in addition, permit the discussion of motions as to procedures, even though such motions have not been circulated previously.
3. After a proposal has been adopted or rejected by the Meeting it shall not be reconsidered unless a two-thirds majority of the Representatives participating in the Meeting so decide. Permission to speak on a motion to reconsider a proposal shall be accorded only to a delegate from each of two Parties wishing to speak against the motion, after which the motion shall immediately be put to the vote.

Article 13

Point of Order

1. During the discussion of any matter, a delegate may rise to a point of order, and the Presiding Officer in accordance with these Rules shall immediately decide the point of order. A delegate may appeal against any ruling of the Presiding Officer. The appeal shall immediately be put to the vote, and the decision of the Presiding Officer shall be maintained unless a majority of the Representatives present and voting otherwise decide. A delegate rising to a point of order may not speak on the substance of the matter under discussion.
2. The following motions shall have precedence in the following order over all other proposals or motions before the Meeting:
 - a) to suspend the sitting;
 - b) to adjourn the sitting;
 - c) to adjourn the debate on the particular subject or question under discussion;
 - d) to close the debate on the particular subject or question under discussion.

VOTING

Article 14

Methods of Voting

1. Without prejudice to the provisions of Article 4, paragraph 1, each delegation shall have one vote. Regional economic integration organisations, in matters within their competence, shall exercise their right to vote with the number of votes equal to the number of their member States which are Parties. In such case, the member States of such organisations shall not exercise their right individually⁵.
2. Representatives of Parties which are three or more years behind in paying their subscriptions on the date of the opening session of the Meeting of the Parties shall not be eligible to vote. However, the Meeting of the Parties may allow such Parties to continue to exercise their right to vote if it is satisfied that the delay in payment arises from exceptional circumstances.

⁴ See Agreement, Article X, paragraph 2

⁵ See Agreement, Article III, paragraph 5.

3. The Meeting shall normally vote by show of hands, but any Representative may request a roll-call vote. The roll-call vote shall be taken in the French alphabetical order. The Presiding Officer may require a roll-call vote on the advice of the tellers where they are in doubt as to the actual number of votes cast and this is likely to be critical to the outcome.
4. All votes in respect of the election of officers or of prospective host countries for the next Meeting shall be by secret ballot and, although it shall not normally be used, any Representative may request a secret ballot for other matters. If seconded, the question of whether a secret ballot should be held shall immediately be voted upon. The motion for a secret ballot may not be conducted by secret ballot.
5. Voting by roll-call or by secret ballot shall be expressed by "Yes", "No" or "Abstain". Only affirmative and negative votes shall be counted in calculating the number of votes cast.
6. Procedural decisions are taken by a simple majority.
7. If votes are equal, a second vote shall be taken. If the vote is also equal, the motion or amendment shall not be carried.
8. The Presiding Officer shall be responsible for the counting of the votes and shall announce the result. Tellers appointed by the Secretariat may assist the Presiding Officer.
9. After the Presiding Officer has announced the beginning of the vote, it shall not be interrupted except by a Representative on a point of order in connection with the actual conduct of the voting. The Presiding Officer may permit Representatives to explain their votes either before or after the voting, and may limit the time to be allowed for such explanations.

Article 15

Majority

Except where otherwise provided for under the provisions of the Agreement, these Rules or the Terms of Reference for the Administration of the Trust Fund, all votes on procedural matters relating to the forwarding of the business of the Meeting shall be decided by a simple majority of votes cast, while all other decisions shall be taken by a two-thirds majority of votes cast.

Article 16

Procedure for Voting on Motions and Amendments

1. A delegate may move that parts of a proposal or of an amendment be voted on separately. If objection is made to the request for such division, the motion for division shall be voted upon first. Permission to speak on the motion for division shall be accorded only to a delegate from each of two Parties wishing to speak in favour of and a delegate from each of two Parties wishing to speak against the motion. If the motion for division is carried, those parts of the proposal or amendment that are subsequently approved shall be put to the vote as a whole. If all operative parts of the proposal or the amendment have been rejected, the proposal or the amendment shall be considered to have been rejected as a whole.
2. When an amendment is moved to a proposal, the amendment shall be voted on first. When two or more amendments are moved to a proposal, the Meeting shall vote first on the amendment furthest removed in substance from the original proposal and then on the amendment next furthest removed there from, and so on until all amendments have been put to the vote. When, however, the adoption of one amendment necessarily implies the rejection of another amendment, the latter amendment shall not be put to the vote. If one or more amendments are adopted, the amended proposal shall then be voted upon. A motion is considered an amendment to a proposal if it merely adds to, deletes or revises part of that proposal.

3. If two or more proposals relate to the same question, the Meeting shall, unless it decides otherwise, vote on the proposals in the order in which they have been submitted. The Meeting may, after voting on a proposal, decide whether to vote on the next proposal.

Article 17

Elections

1. If in an election to fill one place no candidate obtains the required majority in the first ballot, a second ballot shall be taken restricted to the two candidates obtaining the largest number of votes. If in the second ballot the votes are equally divided, the Presiding Officer shall decide between the candidates by drawing lots.
2. If in the first ballot there is a tie amongst candidates obtaining the second largest number of votes, a special ballot shall be held amongst them to reduce the number of candidates to two.
3. In the case of tie amongst three or more candidates obtaining the largest number of votes in the first ballot, a special ballot shall be held amongst them to reduce the number of candidates to two. If a tie then results amongst two or more candidates, the Presiding Officer shall reduce the number to two by drawing lots, and a further ballot shall be held in accordance with paragraph 1 of this Article.

Article 18

Election of Members of the Follow-up Committee

1. The election of members of the Follow-up Committee shall be held by secret ballot, unless, in the absence of any objection by one Party, the Meeting of the Parties decides on the members by consensus without taking a ballot.
2. Before the elections begins, the Chairperson shall appoint two tellers from among the delegates. He/she shall hand to them the list of States Parties and of organisations and institutions having the status of ACCOBAMS Partners (hereinafter referred to as "ACCOBAMS Partners") entitled to vote, as well as the lists of candidates nominated respectively by States Parties and ACCOBAMS Partners.
3. The Secretariat shall prepare voting papers with the list of candidates nominated by States Parties and shall distribute them to the States Parties entitled to vote.
4. The Secretariat shall prepare voting papers with the list of candidates nominated by ACCOBAMS Partners and shall distribute them to the ACCOBAMS Partners entitled to vote.
5. Each delegation shall cast its vote by encircling the names of those candidates (three in the case of States Parties and two in the case of ACCOBAMS Partners) for whom it desires to vote.
6. The States Parties and the ACCOBAMS Partners shall deposit their voting papers in the ballot box according to the roll call made by the Chairperson in the alphabetical order.
7. The tellers shall proceed to count the voting papers and to read the names encircled under the supervision of the Chairperson.
8. Voting papers on which more names have been circled than there are seats to be filled shall be considered invalid.
9. The candidates obtaining the greatest number of votes shall be declared elected up to the number of seats to be filled.
10. If there still remain seats to be filled, there shall be another round of voting.
11. If two or more candidates obtain the same number of votes and, as a result, the number of these candidates is greater than the remaining number of seats to be filled, there shall be an additional round of voting restricted to

those candidates who obtained the same number of votes. If in this additional round of voting two or more candidates obtain the same number of votes, the Chairperson shall draw lots among them.

12. After each round of voting the Chairperson shall announce the results.

SECRETARIAT

Article 19

1. The Agreement Executive Secretary shall be the Secretary of the Meeting of the Parties.
2. The Secretariat shall provide and direct the staff as required by the Meeting of the Parties.

Article 20

1. The Secretariat shall⁶ :
 - a) Arrange for interpretation at the Meeting;
 - b) Prepare, receive, translate, reproduce and distribute the documents which will be useful during the Meeting;
 - c) Draft the report of the Meeting, under the guidance of the Reporter, for consideration by the Bureau first and for final approval by the Meeting of the Parties;
 - d) Make and arrange for keeping of sound recordings of the Meeting;
 - e) Arrange for the custody and preservation of the documents of the Meeting
 - f) Publish and circulate the official documents which result from the Meeting;
 - g) Generally perform all other work that the Meeting of the Parties may require.

LANGUAGES AND RECORDS

Article 21

Official and Working Languages

1. French and English shall be the official and working languages of the Meetings.
2. The official documents of the Meeting shall be distributed in those two languages.
3. Speeches made in any of the working languages shall be interpreted into the other working language.

Article 22

Other Languages

1. A delegate may speak in a language other than a working language. He shall be responsible for providing interpretation into a working language, and interpretation into the other working language may be based upon that interpretation.
2. Any document submitted to the Secretariat in any language other than a working language shall be accompanied by a translation into one of the two working languages, this translation being trustworthy.

Article 23

Report

1. The report of the Meeting shall be circulated to all Parties in the official languages of the Meeting.
2. Committees and working groups shall decide upon the form in which their report shall be presented.

⁶ See Article IV of the Agreement.

PUBLICITY OF DEBATES

Article 24

Plenary Sessions

All plenary sessions of the Meeting shall be open to the public, except that in exceptional circumstances the Meeting may decide, by a two-thirds majority of Representatives present and voting, that any single session be closed to the public.

Article 25

Sessions of Committees and Working Groups

As a general rule, sessions of committees and working groups shall be limited to the representatives and to observers invited by the Chairpersons of the committees or working groups.

THE BUREAU, OTHER COMMITTEES AND WORKING GROUPS

Article 26

1. During the Meeting of the Party, the Bureau and the Reporter of the Meeting shall meet as often as necessary on request of his Chairman.

Article 27

Credentials Committee and Working Groups

1. In addition to the Credentials Committee, the Meeting of the Parties may establish working groups as may be necessary to enable them to carry out their functions. They shall define the terms of reference and composition of each working group, the size of which shall be limited according to the number of places available in assembly rooms.
2. The Meeting of the Parties may decide that any such working group may meet in the period between ordinary Meetings.
3. The Credentials Committee and each working group shall elect their own officers.
4. Insofar as they are applicable, these Rules shall apply *mutatis mutandis* to the proceedings of committee and working groups; however, interpretation may not be provided in sessions of the committee and working groups.

AMENDMENT

Article 28

These Rules may be amended as required by decision of the Meeting.

ANNEX IV - AGENDA

I. Welcome addresses

II. Organisational issues

- 1) Rules of Procedure for the Meeting of the Parties to ACCOBAMS
- 2) Granting the right to vote
- 3) Establishment of the Credentials Committee
- 4) Report by the Credentials Committee
- 5) Election of the Bureau
- 6) Admission of Observers
- 7) a) Adoption of the Agenda
b) Adoption of the supplementary Agenda

III. Opening Statements

IV. Progress reports of the Agreement

- 1) National Reports
- 2) Report of the Depositary and status of Ratifications
- 3) Report of the Bureau
- 4) Report of the Secretariat
- 5) Report of the Scientific Committee and its Working Groups
- 6) Reports of the Sub Regional Coordination Units
- 7) Report of the Follow-up Committee
- 8) Report of ACCOBAMS Partners
- 9) Budgetary Reports

V. Institutional and budgetary arrangements

- 1) Long-term pending contributions
- 2) ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee
- 3) Work Programme and Budget for 2026-2028
- 4) ACCOBAMS Partners
- 5) Communication

VI. Implementation of and compliance with ACCOBAMS Resolutions

- 1) ACCOBAMS Follow-up Committee
- 2) ACCOBAMS Strategy

VII. Implementation of the Agreement: technical and scientific issues

- 1) Cetacean population estimates and distribution
- 2) Population structure
- 3) Monitoring cetaceans' status
- 4) Functional stranding networks and responses to emergency situations
- 5) Interactions with fisheries / aquaculture
- 6) Anthropogenic noise
- 7) Vessel strikes
- 8) Cetacean Watching

- 9) Marine litter and chemical & biological pollution
- 10) Captivity related issues
- 11) Area-based measures for cetacean conservation
- 12) Cetacean culture

VIII. Any Other business

IX. Date and venue of the Tenth Meeting of the Parties

X. Adoption of Resolutions

XI. Adoption of the Meeting Report

XII. Closure of the Meeting

ANNEX V - OPENING STATEMENTS

(Statements are shown in chronological order)

STATEMENT BY GEORGIA
(Delivered by the ACCOBAMS National Focal Point)

Mr. Chair,
Distinguished Delegates,
Colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

As this is the first time Georgia takes the floor, I would like to thank the ACCOBAMS Secretariat and the Government of Cyprus for hosting this important meeting.

It is a great honour for me to address this Meeting of the Parties on behalf of Georgia. This is my first time participating in an ACCOBAMS MOP, and I feel both honoured and fully aware of the responsibility.

Georgia remains strongly committed to the objectives of ACCOBAMS and recognises the importance of regional cooperation for the effective protection of marine biodiversity in the Black Sea and the wider ACCOBAMS region. As a Black Sea coastal country, Georgia understands its role in safeguarding cetacean populations and ensuring the health of our shared marine environment.

In recent years, Georgia has continued to strengthen its marine conservation efforts. This includes improving cetacean monitoring, enhancing data collection, collaborating with scientific institutions, and expanding cooperation with regional partners. We also emphasise raising awareness among local communities and stakeholders about the importance of reducing threats such as pollution, bycatch, habitat degradation, and underwater noise.

We believe that only through strong regional cooperation and shared commitment can we ensure the long-term survival of cetaceans across the ACCOBAMS area. Georgia remains fully committed to ACCOBAMS objectives and to working hand in hand with all Parties and partners to achieve our common goals.

Thank you.

STATEMENT BY GREECE
(Delivered by the ACCOBAMS National Focal Point)

Distinguished Chair,
Honourable delegates,
Esteemed colleagues,
Representatives of international organisations and observers,

On behalf of the Government of the Hellenic Republic and as the National Focal Point for ACCOBAMS, it is my great honour to participate to the Ninth Meeting of the Parties of the Agreement on the Conservation of Cetaceans of the Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea and Contiguous Atlantic Area.

Greece is profoundly committed to the protection of cetaceans and to the preservation of the fragile marine ecosystems of our shared seas. The Mediterranean is not only a cradle of history and culture, but also a sanctuary of exceptional biodiversity, whose survival depends on our collective and coordinated action. In this spirit, we participate with a clear purpose: to advance science-based policies, enhance regional cooperation, and reinforce our determination to safeguard these remarkable species for future generations.

Over the years, ACCOBAMS has demonstrated how multilateral environmental agreements can deliver tangible results through collaboration, capacity building and shared responsibility. As pressures on marine life continue to increase – from climate change and underwater noise to pollution, ship strikes, bycatch and habitat degradation – our commitment must be stronger, more innovative, and more united than ever.

Greece remains dedicated to supporting ACCOBAMS initiatives, strengthening monitoring and research, and engaging coastal communities, scientists, and maritime sectors in our common mission for conservation.

Hellenic Republic – National Party Statement
ACCOBAMS MOP9 / /2025/Doc07

The Hellenic Republic (GREECE) is pleased to submit the following national statement to the Ninth Meeting of the Parties to ACCOBAMS, highlighting recent progress and policy actions undertaken to strengthen marine mammal conservation and to support the implementation of the ACCOBAMS objectives in the Eastern Mediterranean.

1. Legislative and Institutional Progress

Greece has adopted comprehensive measures establishing the **Nationally Coordinated Network for Monitoring and Management of Strandings of Marine Wildlife**, covering cetaceans, Mediterranean monk seals, sea turtles and chondrichthyans (Official Gazette 3376/B/19.05.2023 and 3926/B/20.06.2023).

Within this framework:

- The **Cetacean Rescue and Rehabilitation Research Center “ARION”** is designated as coordinator for cetaceans.
- The **Hellenic Society for the Study and Protection of the Mediterranean Monk Seal (MOM)** coordinates actions for monk seals.
- **ARCHELON** serves as the coordination body for sea turtles.
- **iSea** is responsible for the chondrichthyans (sharks, rays, chimeras).

Greece has also enacted legislation regulating the **establishment and operation of First Aid Centers and Stations for the Care of Wild Animals** (Official Gazette 4744/B/08.09.2022).

Furthermore, the Ministry of Environment and Energy, in cooperation with NECCA, is designing the **National Databank for Marine Species Population Monitoring and Strandings**, a digital, georeferenced system expected to become fully operational by **2026**, supporting scientific and management needs at national and regional level. At present has undergone open consultation.

2. Action Plans for Priority Marine Mammals

Joint Ministerial Decisions put into force the national **Action Plan for the Mediterranean monk seal (*Monachus monachus*)** (Official Gazette 5100/B/10.09.2024) and the **Action Plans for *Tursiops truncatus* and *Phocoena phocoena*** (Official Gazette 73/B/17.01.2025). These plans operationalize targeted conservation priorities and strengthen national alignment with ACCOBAMS instruments.

3. LIFE MareNatura Multi-Country Project (2023–2029)

Greece is a core implementing country of the **LIFE MareNatura Project (LIFE22-NAT-EL-101113792)**, co-financed by the **LIFE Programme of the European Commission (75%)** and the **A.G. Leventis Foundation**, involving **14 partner organisations** in Greece and Italy.

The project focuses on nine threatened priority species, including:

- *Monachus monachus*
- *Caretta caretta* and *Chelonia mydas*
- *Physeter macrocephalus*, *Ziphius cavirostris*, *Tursiops truncatus*, *Phocoena phocoena*, *Delphinus delphis*
- *Puffinus yelkouan* and *Larus audouinii*

The initiative introduces **multidisciplinary large-scale surveys** in the Ionian, Southern Adriatic and Aegean Seas to identify biodiversity hotspots, feeding grounds, congregation sites and migration corridors.

4. Expansion of Marine Protected Areas to Meet the 30% Target

Marine protected areas (MPAs) in Greece currently cover **18.3%** of national marine waters. Pursuant to Art. 174, Law 5037/2023, Greece will expand MPAs to **30% by 2030**, including the establishment of two new **Marine National Parks**:

- 1) **Aegean Marine National Park** – >8,000 km²
- 2) **Ionian Marine National Park** – >14,000 km²

These areas will enhance protection for:

- *Monachus monachus* colonies
- Critical cetacean habitats (including *Physeter macrocephalus*, *Ziphius cavirostris*, *Stenella coeruleoalba*)
- Important migratory bird sites and *Caretta caretta* nesting areas
- *Posidonia oceanica* meadows, sea caves, reefs and deep-sea coral ecosystems

5. Collision Risk Mitigation and Ship Strike Prevention

A **Monitoring and Early Warning System for Large Marine Mammals** is under development in the maritime area between **Kythira, Cape Tainaro and Cape Maleas**. Implemented through a Memorandum of Understanding with **OceanCare**, the **Pelagos Cetological Research Institute** and **ITE-University of Crete**, the **SaveWhales System** aims to reduce ship strikes by enabling speed reductions and navigation adjustments. The project budget is **€3 million**.

6. Marine Habitat Mapping and Natura 2000 Management Plans

Greece is undertaking a **national marine habitat mapping initiative** covering all **118 marine Natura 2000 areas** (18.3% of national marine waters). Findings will support marine spatial planning, blue economy strategies, and MPA management.

The Ministry of Environment and Energy has commissioned **23 Special Studies Plans and Management Plans** for **446 Natura 2000 sites**, currently undergoing public consultation prior to institutional adoption.

Conclusion

The Hellenic Republic reaffirms its commitment to the ACCOBAMS Agreement and to strengthening conservation and research efforts in the Eastern Mediterranean. Greece remains fully dedicated to:

- advancing marine mammal protection,
- enhancing transboundary scientific collaboration,
- promoting innovation in monitoring and threat mitigation,
- and contributing to the long-term ecological resilience of the Mediterranean Sea.

We thank the Secretariat and all Contracting Parties for their continued cooperation and constructive engagement. May our deliberations over the coming days lead to meaningful outcomes that honour our obligations and deepen the solidarity among our nations.

Regarding the presented information for **GRE** on the Table of page 5,6,7,8 correction of the following should be made:

1) National authorities, administrations are designated or mandated for ACCOBAMS implementation	Y
2) National NGOs are supporting activities on cetaceans	Y
3) National research centres, universities are working on cetaceans	Y
4) National Rescue Centres	Y
5) National Dolphinarium	Y
6) National Whale watching operators	Y
7) National laws and regulations concerning cetaceans are in place	Y
8) Funds are earmarked for for research, monitoring, and management of cetaceans	Y
9) Country is Party to relevant international or regional conventions, commissions, and agreements	Y
10) Country has bilateral or multilateral fishing agreement relevant to the scope of the Agreement	NI
11) Research programs and research projects related to cetaceans (national, bi-lateral or multi-lateral) are conducted	Y
12) Cetacean stranding network(s) are in place	Y
13) Data is sent to the MEDACES Database	Y
14) Population Genetics/ Samples have been collected	Y
15) Assessment of cetaceans statues in national waters has been developed	Y
16) Conservation management plan for cetacean species has been developed	Y
17) Interactions between fisheries and cetacean (by catch and depredation) exist or are planned	Y
18) Actions / measures to reduce impacts of navigation exist or are planned	Y
19) Actions / measures to reduce impacts of underwater anthropogenic noise exist or are planned	Y
20) ACCOBAMS regional noise registry is filled	NI
21) Actions / measures to reduce impacts of Whale watching, and other commercial tourism activities exist or are planned	Y
22) Actions/ measures to reduce impacts of pollution, including marine debris, exist or are planned	Y
23) Emergency plans for specific situations (pollution, strandings) exist or are planned	Y
24) Management measures regarding dolphin captivity and dolphinariums exist or are planned	Y
25) Marine protected areas (MPA), fisheries areas, fisheries reserves, or other effective spatial conservation measures (OECM-CBD) exist or are planned	Y
26) Events (meeting, symposium, awareness activities, etc.) are organised / attended and products (newsletter, brochure, leaflet, poster, video, sticker, etc.) are produced and disseminated	Y
27) Capacity building on cetaceans, including training sessions, lectures and syllabus are realised at the national level or attended abroad	Y

STATEMENT BY ITALY
(Delivered by the ACCOBAMS National Focal Point)

Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great honour for me to participate to this 9th Meeting of the Parties to the ACCOBAMS Agreement.

Allow me first to congratulate the Secretariat for the excellent work carried out for the organisation of this Meeting and to thank the Government of Cyprus for hosting the MOP in such a beautiful island of our Mediterranean Sea.

We have a challenging triennium in front of us, as one of our priorities will be the implementation of the second edition of the Accobams Survey Initiative, which indeed represents an ambitious monitoring project providing us at the same time with a great opportunity, not only to enhance scientific knowledge of cetaceans in the ACCOBAMS area, but also to strengthen regional cooperation leading to greater knowledge sharing, capacity building and to the pooling of experience and know-how. Coordination and cooperation among Countries as well as synergy and coordination with other regional Conventions and Agreements of the ACCOBAMS area will be essential to ensure the success of ASI2 and to define the conservation status of the relevant species.

Data collected through this initiative will address the reporting needs of the MSFD, the Habitat Directive and IMAP in the framework of the Barcelona Convention and may provide several crucial information on the species. Furthermore, the collected data can be compared with previous ASI editions, shedding light on possible changes in the species' status and distribution due to the emerging forcing mechanism of climate change, besides others.

In line with Italy's long-lasting commitment to cetacean conservation and to the work of the ACCOBAMS Agreement, including the first edition of ASI in 2018, Italy hereby confirms its will to support also ASI2 by providing an important in-kind contribution, which includes aerial surveys and the experience of relevant personnel.

We have a very busy agenda in front of us, therefore I would like to conclude by wishing you a fruitful and inspiring Meeting which I believe will ensure progress towards our shared objectives.

Thank you.

STATEMENT BY LIBYA
(Delivered by the ACCOBAMS National Focal Point)

Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen,

First of all, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the Republic of Cyprus for the warm hospitality and the excellent organisation in hosting MOP9 in this beautiful city.

I would also like to extend my congratulations to Ms. Maÿlis Salivas on her new position as Executive Secretary of ACCOBAMS. We wish her every success in this important role.

Over the last triennium, several key activities have been implemented:

As part of the IMAP Project, supported by SPA/RAC, a two-day training workshop was held on 31 May – 1 June 2023 in collaboration with Omar Mukhtar University. This was followed by the field survey in Ain Al-Gazala, conducted between 18 and 28 August 2023, during which eight field trips were completed.

On 25 December 2023, the Ministry of Environment, in cooperation with SPA/RAC, organised a conference in Tripoli to present the results of the IMAP/EcAp surveys.

Additionally, on 4 September 2025, four stranded Sperm Whales (*Physeter macrocephalus*) were reported in Eastern Libya, near Ajdabiya.

Most recently, in October, and within the framework of the SEMBA Project, a workshop on marine mammals was held in Zwara.

Thank you.

STATEMENT BY SLOVENIA
(Delivered by the Slovenian Representative)

Distinguished Chair,
Distinguished Delegates and Madam Secretary,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Firstly, Slovenia is grateful to the Republic of Cyprus for hosting this meeting and to the government and people of Cyprus for the great hospitality.

Slovenia would like to congratulate you for chairing this meeting. We would like to thank the Secretariat for its devoted and engaged work on conservation of cetaceans in the past triennium. We express our congratulation to the Republic of Malta for chairing the Agreement in the period from the last MOP and thank the Scientific Committee and the Bureau for the work done in the preparation of this meeting.

We look forward to a successful meeting and progress that can be achieved through constructive deliberations on issues of importance to this Agreement, especially those addressing environmental pressures, long term monitoring programme, and the workplan and the budget.

Thank you.

STATEMENT BY UNEP/MAP**(Delivered by Dr. Ilias Mavroeidis, UNEP/MAP-Barcelona Convention Secretariat)**

Dear colleagues,

I would like to start by thanking ACCOBAMS and Cyprus for inviting us to participate in MOP9 and for hosting the meeting in the beautiful coastal city of Limassol. Also, for the opportunity to confer this opening statement in which I can briefly refer to our collaboration with ACCOBAMS as well as to the upcoming COP24 of the Barcelona Convention and its Protocols. Since this is the first time I take the floor, I would also like to congratulate Maylis for her new role in ACCOBAMS. And Lavrentios for chairing.

ACCOBAMS is a key partner for UNEP/MAP and we are very pleased with our long collaboration. In our last COP23 in Portoroz, Slovenia, we signed a new MoU to further institutionalize our collaboration. This collaboration is crucial for advancing the implementation of the Ecosystem Approach in the Mediterranean; it is mainly related to Ecological Objective 1 of the EcAP on Biodiversity, to Ecological Objective 10 on Marine Litter and to Ecological Objective 11 on Energy including Underwater Noise. It is currently strengthened through the key synergies between the UNEP/MAP SEMPA Project funded by the EU and the 2nd Edition of the ACCOMBAMS Survey Initiative.

These strengthened synergies through the SEMPA project are related to the implementation of the UNEP/MAP Integrated Monitoring and Assessment Programme and the monitoring and assessment of Cetaceans in some of the beneficiary countries, Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, and Tunisia. It will ensure maximum efficiency, while data collected will be mutually beneficial to both ACCOBAMS and the MAP-Barcelona Convention system and will feed the next Quality Status Report of the Mediterranean.

Dear colleagues,

2025 represents a landmark anniversary year for the UNEP/MAP-Barcelona Convention system. A high-level event was held on 10 June 2025, during the United Nations Ocean Conference (UNOC-3), in Nice, France to celebrate the 50th anniversary of UNEP/MAP and the 30th anniversary of the Post-Rio Barcelona Convention, which culminated with the Declaration of Ministers of the Mediterranean.

The year will conclude with the 24th Meeting of the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention and its Protocols (COP 24) which will take place from 2 to 5 December 2025 in Cairo, Egypt, in a crucial global and regional moment of renewed momentum for the enhanced Ocean Governance Agenda, after UNOC-3 and just before UNEA-7.

The theme of the COP and of the Ministerial Discussions is “Sustainable Blue Economy for a resilient and healthy Mediterranean”. The Agenda of COP 24 will include the adoption of a number of decisions and strategic documents: the Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development 2026-2035, the Regional Climate Change Adaptation Framework 2026-2035, the revised Ecosystem Approach Policy and Roadmap for the Mediterranean, the Mandate of the Regional Activity Centre on Climate Change and the Terms of Reference of its Focal Points, the Summary for Policymakers of the MedECC Special Report on interlinking climate change with the Water - Energy - Food - Ecosystems (WEFE) Nexus in the Mediterranean Basin, a decision on Marine Pollution from Ships (which includes a Roadmap for Transitioning to Low Carbon Shipping in the Mediterranean Sea), the Updated Mediterranean Offshore Action Plan 2026-2035 in the framework of the Offshore Protocol, the Implementation of Updated National Action Plans (NAPs) under the Land-Based Sources Protocol, containing Measures and Timetables for their Implementation, as well as the UNEP/MAP Programme of Work and Budget for 2026 – 2027.

I would especially like to refer to the Decision on the revised Ecosystem Approach Policy and Roadmap for the Mediterranean and the updated third cycle of IMAF (2026–2035). This decision, following the work and advances made through the collaboration between UNEP/MAF and ACCOBAMS, proposes upgrading the two IMAF Indicators on impulsive and continuous underwater noise from candidate to full common indicators.

COP 24 is also expected to adopt an ambitious Ministerial Declaration, the Cairo Declaration, aligned with the recent global and regional high-level commitments and momentum. Finally, COP 24 will place special emphasis on the role of women and youth for achieving a sustainable blue economy.

Following the commitments that will be taken by Mediterranean countries in our COP 24, we are looking forward to further strengthen our joint work with ACCOBAMS during the next biennium 2026-2027.

Thank you.

STATEMENT BY THE BLACK SEA COMMISSION PERMANENT SECRETARIAT (BSC PS)
(Delivered by Ms. Iryna Makarenko)

Thank you Chair, congratulations on being elected and much luck for upcoming chairmanship,

Your Excellences,
Mr. ACCOBAMS Chair,
ACCOBAMS Executive Secretary,
Distinguished participants of the Meeting,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great honour for me to be here today, and I would like to extend my gratitude to the Government of Cyprus and ACCOBAMS Secretariat for hosting and excellent organisation of this distinguished meeting in beautiful Limassol and for this chance to be given a floor on behalf of the Black Sea Commission' Permanent Secretariat.

As you may know, the Black Sea Commission was created as an executive body to implement the provisions of the Convention on the Protection of the Black Sea Against Pollution also known as Bucharest Convention, and being a Regional Sea Convention, the Black Sea Commission is responsible for promoting the implementation of Bucharest Convention and its Protocols, it was established to, *inter alia*, monitor and assess pollution, control pollution from land-based sources, ensure conservation of biological diversity, address environmental safety aspects of shipping, address environmental aspects of management of fisheries and other marine living resources and, last but not least, promote integrated coastal zone management and maritime policy.

As you may know, within these commitments, since 2002, in accordance with the provisions of the relevant Memorandum of Understanding between the Black Sea Commission and ACCOBAMS, the Permanent Secretariat of the Black Sea Commission (BSC) has an honour to serve as Black Sea Sub Regional Coordination Unit for ACCOBAMS in regards to the conservation of the cetaceans of the Black Sea. It is my pleasure to mark today an outstanding level of cooperation between our organisations and a solid intention to continue our efforts in the Black Sea region together with other relevant partners.

Let me also thank Malta and Ms. Marie-Terese for excellent chairmanship and congratulate Maylis for the well-deserved post and thank for continuous support of our Black Sea efforts.

I will be given a floor later today to present the report of our sub-regional unit, concluding my address, let me wish every success as well as long years of prosperity and well-being to your distinguished organisation. Let me also wish success to this meeting and our future endeavours aimed at conservation of cetaceans in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea region.

Thank you very much for your kind attention.

STATEMENT BY ASCOBANS
(Delivered by Ms. Jenny Renell, ASCOBANS Coordinator)

Dear President of the Bureau,
Dear Executive Secretary,
Your Excellencies and distinguished delegates.

I would also like to congratulate Ms. Salivas for her new role as Executive Secretary and wish her success in guiding the work of ACCOBAMS.

ASCOBANS is the sister agreement of ACCOBAMS in the Baltic, North East Atlantic, Irish and North Seas. Our cetacean-conservation mandates create clear opportunities for close cooperation and synergy with ACCOBAMS.

Joint work between our Agreements continues to be strong. This is reflected in several active groups, including the Joint Noise Working Group, the Joint Bycatch Working Group, and the ASCOBANS Common Dolphin Group. Collaboration was further strengthened through the Joint ACCOBAMS–ASCOBANS Workshop with Navies on Underwater Noise and Cetaceans, held in Toulon in November 2024, which facilitated information-sharing with national navies and NATO and helped identify concrete next steps for improved mitigation of underwater noise.

In addition, ACCOBAMS and ASCOBANS share some of the Agreement Area and three Range States - France, Portugal, and Spain.

The 10th Meeting of the Parties to ASCOBANS took place in September 2024, in Odense, Denmark. Parties adopted several resolutions of possible interest to ACCOBAMS, including those on conservation on beaked whales, maritime spatial planning, mitigating the impacts of recreational activities, underwater noise, ocean energy and shallow-water mining. The Resolutions are available on the [ASCOBANS website](#).

The 29th Meeting of the ASCOBANS Advisory Committee was held online in September this year. It agreed on a number of priority actions and endorsed the establishment of new working groups, including on unusual mortality events and mass strandings, and on cetacean culture; and endorsed recommendations in the reports on white-beaked and Atlantic white-sided dolphins, and in the report on protecting beaked whales in the NE Atlantic. These can be found on the [ASCOBANS website](#).

ACCOBAMS and ASCOBANS have a long history of close and constructive cooperation, and I look forward to continuing working together.

Thank you.

STATEMENT BY CIESM

(Delivered by Ms. Alessia Rodriguez Y Baena on behalf Mrs. Laura Giuliano, Director general)

Mr. Chairperson,
Madame Executive Secretary,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Dear colleagues,

I am delighted to be among you. On behalf of our Director General, Laura Giugliano, and our Commission, we stress the paramount importance of scientific impartiality and independence. This commitment is vital for the advice we prepare. It is reflected in our contributions to the Scientific Committee of ACCOBAMS, mirroring the robust integrity of bodies like the CIESM Scientific Council, where scientists are elected by scientists—a model of scientific excellence and professional autonomy.

This commitment to scientific rigor is the foundation of the trust placed in us by our State Parties and the wider public. Maintaining this credibility is our collective responsibility. The integrity of our work, ensuring that all our recommendations are robust and objective, not only reinforces the legitimacy of the subsequent decisions taken, but also assures the long-term effectiveness of our regional cooperation. We pledge to uphold and defend these principles at every stage of our future collaboration.

Thank you.

STATEMENT BY IUCN - CENTRE FOR MEDITERRANEAN COOPERATION
(Delivered by Ms. Belén Quintana Martín-Montalvo, IUCN-med representative)

Distinguished delegates,
Dear participants,

It is a great pleasure to address you at the 9th Meeting of the Parties to ACCOBAMS — an important occasion to reaffirm our collective commitment to conserving cetaceans and the marine ecosystems of our shared region.

The IUCN Centre for Mediterranean Cooperation is pleased to maintain its long-standing collaboration with ACCOBAMS, founded on science, partnership, and a shared vision for the conservation of marine biodiversity in the Mediterranean and beyond.

We follow the work of the Agreement with great interest, particularly the efforts to strengthen implementation, enhance coordination, and ensure that decisions are informed by the best available science. IUCN Med remains ready to contribute within its mandate, supporting the objectives and activities of ACCOBAMS whenever our expertise can be of value.

IUCN Med thanks the Secretariat, the host country and all participants for their dedication and continued commitment to this important mission.

Thank you.

**STATEMENT BY THE PERMANENT SECRETARIAT OF THE PELAGOS AGREEMENT
(Delivered by Mrs. Maria Betti, Executive Secretary of the Pelagos Agreement)**

Excellences, distinguished delegates

Let me firstly to thank Cyprus authorities for hosting this meeting.

I congratulate with Maiylis Salivas as new Executive Secretary as well as the incoming Chairperson and the new Bureau. In my role of Executive Secretary of the Pelagos Agreement I would like to express the importance of the collaboration with ACCOBAMS for the protection of the habitat of marine mammals.

Among all activity under the umbrella of the MoU between the two agreements, I particularly wish to mention the High-Quality Whale Watching developed together and registered by ACCOBAMS. Nowadays is well implemented in the Pelagos Sanctuary.

I am sure that the collaboration will continue in a very efficient manner as also reaffirmed during the MOP 10 of the Pelagos Agreement, hold in Monaco last 12 and 13 November.

I wish to all of us a very fruitful meeting here in Limassol.

STATEMENT BY WWF
(Delivered by Ms. Laura Pintore)

WWF is pleased to attend the ninth Meeting of Parties to ACCOBAMS and would like to warmly thank Cyprus for generously hosting this important MOP9. WWF is also grateful to the Secretariat for the invitation. We believe that ACCOBAMS set out an important set of objectives and targets the key issues that need to be addressed if we are to secure better conservation status for cetaceans in Mediterranean and Black Sea waters. While we want to recognise the recent successes in cetacean conservation we are highly concerned on a number of threats that cetaceans face in the region, particularly with respect to bycatch, marine traffic impacts and hydrocarbon exploration. There is an urgent need to strengthen conservation efforts to address these critical issues particularly in this era of blue growth.

WWF is also looking forward to contributing to the ACCOBAMS strategy in several ways: through research on specific country-based work including: Italy's Le Vele del Panda programme, the MedBycatch project across multiple Mediterranean countries, WWF Greece's Hellenic Trench initiative, the Blue Panda scientific sailing campaigns, and additional conservation and monitoring actions led by WWF offices throughout the region; and through supporting the second ACCOBAMS Survey Initiative, which provides an invaluable data collection initiative about the diversity and distribution of cetacean populations in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea, and has proven to also contribute to the data collection of other threatened species.

We hope to remain engaged with the ACCOBAMS Secretariat and member Parties in the future and look forward to a productive meeting to advance on the issues of most concern to cetacean conservation in the region and beyond.

STATEMENT BY THE GENERAL FISHERIES COMMISSION FOR THE MEDITERRANEAN (GFCM)

Dear ACCOBAMS Chairperson,
Executive Secretary,
Distinguished Delegates and Participants,

On behalf of the GFCM, I am pleased to address the Ninth Meeting of the Parties to ACCOBAMS and to reaffirm our strong commitment to the long-standing and fruitful collaboration established between our organisations in advancing sustainable fisheries and the conservation of marine mammals and other vulnerable species across our shared seas.

Over the past years, the GFCM and ACCOBAMS have continued to work closely to monitor and mitigate interactions between fisheries and vulnerable species, including through joint initiatives and field activities implemented in several Mediterranean subregions, such as the MedBycatch and Depredation projects. More recently, this cooperation has been further strengthened through various initiatives focused on monitoring and mitigation trials aimed at reducing the impact of fishing activities on vulnerable species, carried out in collaboration with national research institutes and local fishing communities.

This fruitful collaboration has also led to a recent joint GFCM–ACCOBAMS publications on bycatch and depredation, encompassing both the Mediterranean and the Black Sea, and further consolidating our shared scientific foundation and commitment to evidence-based management. These joint efforts, framed under the implementation of the Regional Plan of Action for the conservation of vulnerable species (RPOA-VUL), have contributed to improving data collection, testing mitigation measures, and promoting awareness among fishers, in full coherence with the GFCM 2030 Strategy and ACCOBAMS conservation objectives.

The GFCM reiterates its commitment to further strengthening this collaboration and to continue to demonstrate how effective fisheries management and the conservation of marine biodiversity can advance together under shared sustainability goals.

Yours sincerely,

Miguel Bernal

Executive Secretary
General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean

ANNEX VI - STATEMENT BY THE SULTANATE OF OMAN

(Delivered by Ms. Aida Al Jabri, Sultanate of Oman Representative)

Distinguished Chair,
Honor secretary and coordinators,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is an honour to join you today at this Meeting, carrying with me the voice of the Sultanate of Oman... and the voice of the sea we all strive to protect.

In Oman, we follow with great admiration and appreciation the valuable efforts undertaken by the ACCOBAMS to protect cetaceans and conserve their marine habitats. Your work—through scientific surveys, knowledge exchange, and capacity-building—has created a regional cooperation network that stands as a model to be emulated. We highly value this important role.

The Sultanate of Oman's commitment to the protection of marine mammals is deep and firmly rooted in its environmental vision. From this commitment, many initiatives have emerged, including:

- * The establishment of marine protected areas, most recently the announcement of a new general marine reserve with a strong focus on conserve cetaceans.
- * Over 20 years of scientific surveys, research, and satellite tracking of the Arabian Sea humpback whales. And currently we are working with IWC to develop a regional management plan to protect the Arabian sea humpback whale.
- * A national, multi-agency team comprising government entities, NGOs, and academic institutions dedicated to responding, studying, and documenting cases of stranding and mortalities of marine mammals and sea turtles.
- * Scientific surveys of cetaceans in the protected area in the northern region of Oman, Musandam Governorate, which I had the privilege of leading this survey. The project aims to monitor and document marine mammal species, establish a cetacean's database, and develop maps showing the distribution of marine mammals. Moreover, during these surveys an electronic application was also developed for recording and storing data in an integrated database, as well as analysing it. We named this application Spinner.

It has become clear to us that protecting these creatures is not merely a scientific endeavour, it is a moral responsibility toward nature and toward future generations.

The Sultanate of Oman believes that the protection of natural resources is a shared responsibility, and it will continue to support and encourage international cooperation to enhance the sustainability of marine mammals. We place our full confidence in international agreements, including ACCOBAMS, and reaffirm our commitment to active participation and to working alongside you for a more balanced and sustainable future for our marine environment.

In closing, we are here because the sea unites us... and because cetaceans remind us of how deeply humanity is connected to nature. Let us continue this joint effort and let our collaboration today illuminate the path for generations to come.

Thank you.

ANNEX VII - REPORT OF THE DESPOSITARY AND STATUS OF RATIFICATIONS¹



The Depositary of the Agreement, the Department of External Relations and Cooperation of the Principality of Monaco, has the honour to submit this report to the States Parties to the Agreement on the Conservation of Cetaceans in the Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea and Contiguous Atlantic Area (ACCOBAMS).

Since the Eighth Meeting of the Parties (MOP8), held in Valletta (Malta) from 29 November to 2 December 2022, no new ratifications of the Agreement have been registered by the Depositary.

Thus, as of 7 August 2025, the Agreement had 24 Contracting Parties (Table 1).

With regard to the Amendments to the text and Annex 1 of the Agreement, relating to the extension of the geographical area of ACCOBAMS adopted at MOP4 in 2010, the Department of External Relations and Cooperation registered the instruments of ratification of the Hellenic Republic, deposited on 28 April 2023, and of the Republic of Georgia, deposited on 25 August 2023.

The Department of External Relations and Cooperation duly informed, through diplomatic channels, the signatories and/or Parties to the Agreement, the Council of the European Union, the Permanent Secretariat of ACCOBAMS and that of the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS), as well as the United Nations Treaty Service.

As of 7 August 2025, 12 Parties had approved the Amendments (Table 2).

For the record, in accordance with Article X, paragraph 3 of the Agreement, the said amendments shall enter into force on the thirtieth day after the date on which two-thirds of the States Parties to the Agreement, i.e. sixteen (16) Parties, have ratified them.

¹ Monaco, on the 07/08/2025

Table 1

The following table shows the status of the Contracting Parties to the Agreement as of 7 August 2025.

COUNTRY / PAYS	SIGNATURES	RATIFICATIONS		ENTRY INTO FORCE ENTRÉE EN VIGUEUR
	Dates	Tool / Instrument	Deposit of the tool Dépôt de l'instrument	
ALBANIA	24/11/1996	25/05/2001	03/07/2001	01/10/2001
ALGERIA		19/03/2007(AA)	25/09/2007	01/12/2007
BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA				
<i>BULGARIA</i>	16/09/1999	23/09/1999	10/11/1999	01/06/2001
CROATIA	24/11/1996	03/05/2000	10/07/2000	01/06/2001
CYPRUS	24/11/1996	30/01/2006	14/02/2006	01/05/2006
<i>EGYPT</i>		04/03/2010	19/04/2010	01/07/2010
EUROPEAN UNION				
<i>FRANCE</i>	24/11/1996	26/02/2004 (AA)	10/03/2004	01/06/2004
GEORGIA	24/11/1996	30/03/2001	31/05/2001	01/06/2001
GREECE	24/11/1996*	24/11/1996*	24/11/1996*	01/06/2001
ISRAEL				
<i>ITALY</i>	24/11/1996	10/02/2005	24/06/05	01/09/2005
<i>LEBANON</i>		05/05/2004(A)	13/12/2004	01/03/2005
<i>LIBYAN ARAB JAMAHIRIYA</i>		12/05/2002	18/06/2002	01/09/2002
<i>MALTA</i>	23/03/2001*	23/03/2001*	23/03/2001*	01/06/2001
<i>MONACO</i>	24/11/1996	25/04/1997	30/04/1997	01/06/2001
<i>MONTENEGRO</i>		17/02/2009 (AAA)	18/05/2009	01/08/2009
MOROCCO	28/03/1997	13/05/1999	05/07/1999	01/06/2001
PORTUGAL	24/11/1996	30/09/2004 (A)	15/10/2004	01/01/2005
ROMANIA	28/09/1998	13/06/2000	17/07/2000	01/06/2001
RUSSIA				
SLOVENIA		12/07/2006	25/09/2006	01/12/2006
<i>SPAIN</i>	24/11/1996	07/01/1999	02/02/1999	01/06/2001
SYRIA		07/02/02 (A)	22/03/2002	01/06/2002
TUNISIA	24/11/1996	31/12/2001	15/01/2002	01/04/2002
TÜRKIYE		29/05/2017 (AA)	03/11/2017	01/02/2018
<i>UKRAINE</i>		09/07/2003	23/10/2003	01/01/2004
UNITED KINGDOM				

* Signature valid for ratification / Signature valant ratification

A = Adherence / Adhésion

AA = Approval / Approbation

AAA= Accession / Accession

Table 2

The following table shows the status of Contracting Parties that have ratified the Amendments as of 7 August 2025:

COUNTRY / PAYS	RATIFICATIONS		ENTRY INTO FORCE ENTRÉE EN VIGUEUR
	Tool / Instrument	Deposit of the tool Dépôt de l'instrument	
ALBANIA / ALBANIE			
ALGERIA / ALGERIE			
BULGARIA / BULGARIE	08/02/2012 ³	14/03/2012	
CROATIA / CROATIE			
CYPRUS / CHYPRE	11/08/2014 ³	22/08/2014	
EGYPT / EGYPTE			
FRANCE/FRANCE	15/10/2016 ²	10/11/2016	
GEORGIA / GEORGIE	03/08/2023 ³	25/08/2023	
GREECE / GRECE	01/02/2023 ³	28/04/2023	
ITALY / ITALIE	13/07/2021 ¹	04/08/2021	
LEBANON / LIBAN			
LIBYAN ARAB JAMAHIRIYA / LIBYE			
MALTA / MALTE	10/01/2022 ³	26/01/2022	
MONACO/ MONACO	24/02/2011 ²	02/03/2011	
MONTENEGRO/ MONTENEGRO	03/12/2014 ³	09/07/2015	
MOROCCO / MAROC			
PORTUGAL/PORTUGAL			
ROMANIA / ROUMANIE			
SLOVENIA / SLOVENIE	09/06/2016 ²	09/06/2016	
SPAIN / ESPAGNE	26/11/2012 ¹	10/01/2013	
SYRIA /SYRIE			
TUNISIA / TUNISIE			
TÜRKIYE			
UKRAINE / UKRAINE	26/11/2012 ³	02/01/2013	

1 = Ratification / ratification

2 = Approval / Approbation

3 = Acceptance / Acceptation

NB: 16 approvals are needed for the entry into force of the amendments / 16 approbations sont nécessaires pour l'entrée en vigueur des amendements

ANNEX VIII - REPORT OF THE BUREAU

During the 2023-2025 triennium the composition of the Bureau was as follows:

- Chairperson: Ms. Marie Thérèse GAMBIN (Malta);
- Vice-Chairperson: Mr. Milad FAKRI (Lebanon);
- Vice-Chairperson: Ms. Marina SEQUEIRA (Portugal) ;
- Vice-Chairperson: Ms. Milena BATAKOVIC (Montenegro);
- Vice-Chairperson: Ms. Yana VELINA (Bulgaria).

Four Meetings of the Bureau were held during the 2023-2025 triennium:

- The Fifteenth Bureau Meeting (BU15, Online and in Monaco, 22-23 November 2023),
- The Sixteenth Bureau Meeting (BU16, Online, 18 June 2024), which was exclusively dedicated to follow up the progress of the second edition of the ACCOBAMS Survey Initiative (ASI-II).
- The Seventeenth Bureau Meeting (BU17, Online and in Monaco, 13-14 February 2025),
- The Sixth Meeting of the Extended Bureau (BUEXT6, Online and in Nice, 23-24 April 2025).

All the Meetings of the Bureau were attended by the Bureau Members- or alternates-, the Chair of the ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee (Mr. Simone PANIGADA), an expert assisting the Secretariat (Mr. Chedly Rais) and by members and experts working with the ACCOBAMS Secretariat.

The Sixth Meeting of the Extended Bureau was also attended by:

- Six National Representatives: Ms Aimilia DROUGAS (Greece), Ms Cristina FARCHI (Italy), Ms. Angela BARTOLO (Malta), Ms. Céline IMPAGLIAZZO (Monaco), Ms. Elvira GARCIA-BELLIDO CAPDEVILA (Spain) and Ms. Maria MORENO DE PINTOS (Spain);
- Two experts appointed during BU17: Mr. Mohammed MALOULI IDRISSE and Mr. Giuseppe NOTARBARTOLO DI SCIARA;
- Two representatives of the ACCOBAMS Sub-regional Coordination Units (SRCUs): Ms. Lobna BEN NAKHLA (SPA/RAC) and Ms. Iryna MAKARENKO (BSC-PS);
- Two representatives of Cyprus as the Party hosting the next ACCOBAMS Meeting of the Parties (MOP9): Ms. Yianna SAMUEL and Mr. Lavrentios VASILIADES.

A report was prepared by the Secretariat after each Meeting. All four reports are presented to the Ninth Meeting of the Parties as reference documents:

- ACCOBAMS-BU15/2023/Doc13
- ACCOBAMS-BU16/2024/Doc04
- ACCOBAMS-BU17/2025/Doc15
- ACCOBAMS-BUEXT6/2025/Doc15

Moreover, and in accordance with the Recruitment procedure for the Executive Secretary foreseen in Resolution 7.3, the Bureau acted as Recruitment Committee and met in October 2024 to interview the shortlisted candidates for the position of Executive Secretary

The purpose of the present report is to provide an overview on the main issues addressed by the Bureau during the 2023-2025 triennium.

I. ADMINISTRATIVE AND BUDGETARY MATTERS

1) Secretariat personnel

During the Fifteenth Meeting of the Bureau, the Executive Secretary reported that Ms. Célia Le Ravallec resigned from her position as Project Officer in mid-November 2023. Although a vacancy announcement was issued in October 2023, and applications were received until 31 December 2023, the initial recruitment process did not result in a successful appointment. Subsequently, the Secretariat informed the Chair of the Bureau that the second expert recruited to fill the position has been on extended medical leave for several months. Consequently, some of the activities that had been planned beforehand were being reconsidered and, in some cases, would not be developed as planned, notably due to the lack of sufficient human resources at the Secretariat.

Following the anticipated departure of the former Executive Secretary, Ms. Susana Salvador, the Bureau acted as the Recruitment Committee.

In July 2024, the Secretariat published on the ACCOBAMS website the vacancy notice for the Executive Secretary, in English and French.

Five candidates were selected and invited for a face-to-face interview in Monaco on 15 October 2024. Acting as Recruitment Committee, the Bureau selected Ms. Maylis Salivas-Decaux for the position of ACCOBAMS Executive Secretary and she officially started with this position on 1st January 2025.

Ms. Maylis Salivas-Decaux's position as ACCOBAMS Project Officer at the Secretariat was not filled in 2025. Following the Bureau's guidance, the budget from "ACCOBAMS Project Officer (1102)" was transferred to "External assistance (1203)" under Annex 3, paragraph 15 of Resolution 8.2² This enables the Secretariat to hire consultants for administrative tasks and fundraising for ASI-II.

2) Budgetary matters

Report on incomes and expenditures:

The Secretariat regularly informed the Bureau about the Trust Fund and the Supplementary Conservation Grant Fund (SCF). Reports on incomes and expenditures for 2022, 2023 and 2024 were also presented by the Secretariat.

The Bureau approved the properly validated 2022 and 2023 accounts as well as proposed activities for 2024 and 2025, and commended:

- the financial supports provided by some countries through voluntary contributions offered during the triennium (Monaco, Spain and Italy), in addition to the use of earlier voluntary contributions (Italy, Malta) and co-fundings;
- the work of the Secretariat to develop projects and activities supported through co-funding (EU projects, MAVA Foundation, UNEP/MAP, IUCN Med, FAO GFCM and CIESM).
- During BU15, the Bureau requested the Secretariat to indicate in the future the specific amount of expenditures effected on unspent voluntary contributions provided by the Parties, including whether it is a partial amount of the unspent voluntary contribution or otherwise.

² [Resolution 8.2](#), Annex 3 Terms of Reference for administration of the budget, Article 15: "The ACCOBAMS Secretariat can, if needed, transfer funds up to 20% from one budget line of the approved budget to another budget line within the same budget section. If the needed transfer of funds within the same budget section is higher than 20% of the budget line from which the transfer is made, the Secretariat shall request the authorization of the Bureau."

Long-term Pending Contributions

During MOP8, the Parties requested the Bureau to develop a plan to address the issue of long-term unpaid contributions in time for the next Meeting of the Parties.

The Bureau advised the Secretariat to contact all Countries with more than 3 unpaid annual contributions in order to consult them on how best to present their respective invoices, favouring the approach of preserving good relationships between all Countries.

During the BU17 Meeting, the Bureau agreed on proposed restrictions related to (a) voting rights, (b) eligibility for elections, and (c) access to funding under the Supplementary Conservation Fund (SCF).

The Bureau requested the Secretariat to prepare a specific draft Resolution on the matter for the MOP9.

3) Communication Strategy

In 2025, ACCOBAMS updated its visual identity by renewing the templates for the Secretariat documents and social media posts. The Bureau appreciated the work done regarding the ACCOBAMS Communication Strategy and encouraged the continued use of the new template.

At BU15, the Bureau requested the Secretariat to assign Digital Object Identifier (DOI) to all relevant ACCOBAMS documents to facilitate access. A consultant was hired by the Secretariat to implement the DOI system on the ACCOBAMS website. At BU17, the Bureau welcomed the progress made by the Secretariat on this matter and agreed that the DOI information, landing pages, and documents should be updated once a decision has been reached on authorship and citation.

Regarding the “Legal assessment of authorship and intellectual property rights” provided by the Secretariat’s Legal Advisor during BUEXT6, the Bureau requested the Secretariat to follow further the matter related to DOIs, as well as the authorship and intellectual property rights aspects, for follow-up on their actual application.

II. INSTITUTIONAL ISSUES

1) Scientific Committee

Composition of the Scientific Committee following amendments to its Rules of Procedure

Following Resolution 8.3 adopted at the MOP8, which led to a wider participation of ACCOBAMS Parties in the Scientific Committee (SC), the Bureau decided to consider the effectiveness of the new composition of the SC and invited the Secretariat and the SC to (a) prepare an examination on the subject that takes into account the functionality of the SC and the budgetary implications linked to the increased number of SC members ; (b) propose options for the designation of SC regional representatives to be appointed by the Parties.

At BU17, a consultant, Dr Giuseppe Notarbartolo di Sciara, was engaged to develop a proposal on the matter and was invited by the Bureau to provide recommendations, based on his conclusions, regarding the effectiveness of the composition of the SC during the 2023-2025 triennium on a real basis.

At BUEXT6, the Bureau concluded that the new composition of the SC as established by Resolution 8.3 has been effective but involved an increase in the necessary funds. This increase is hence feasible only if supported by voluntary contributions or an increase in the budget available to the SC.

The Bureau also recognised the need to clarify the election of the Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson of the SC to be in compliance with Article VII, paragraph 1, of the ACCOBAMS. It requested the Secretariat to prepare revised Rules of Procedure for the SC to be annexed to draft Resolution 9.4 (Scientific Committee).

The Bureau discussed the issue of having a participant to the SC from the European Cetacean Society (ECS) due to its legal status as a private association. During BU17, the Bureau decided to submit to the MOP9 the request received by the Secretariat from the Chair of the ECS.

Nominations

The Bureau recommended approving the nominations of the CIESM and IUCN experts, and of the representatives of CMS and IWC, proposed for the SC for the 2026-2028 triennium.

It also requested the Secretariat to submit a call to the Parties for the submission of nominations for Regional Representatives who will become members of the SC for the 2026-2028 triennium, and to inform the organisations that the nomination of the experts and representatives will be submitted to the MOP9.

2) Italian proposal to amend the rules of Procedure to the Meeting of the Parties

At BU15, as agreed during the MOP8, the Bureau considered Italy's proposal to amend the Rules of Procedure of the Meeting of the Parties to increase the number of Vice-Chairpersons.

The Bureau did not approve the Italian proposal and requested the Secretariat to look into the composition of similar subsidiary bodies in other intergovernmental organisations.

Such document, along with an analysis of the composition of the ACCOBAMS Bureau, was presented by the Secretariat's Legal Advisor at BU17.

The Bureau concluded that the number of Bureau members does not conflict with the ACCOBAMS but requires changes to the Rules of Procedure for the Meeting of the Parties and the Bureau.

The Bureau noted the procedural and administrative challenges that these changes would entail and requested the Secretariat to prepare a note for the MOP9 based on the reports from the legal advisor regarding the composition of the Bureau, while also indicating the importance of maintaining continuity between one Bureau and the next.

3) ACCOBAMS Partners

Programmes of Collaboration with the Secretariat for 2023-2025

During BU15, the Secretariat presented an information document presenting 19 collaboration programmes from ACCOBAMS Partners, following Resolution 7.9. Bureau Members expressed concern over the low number of submissions. The Executive Secretary noted reminders have been sent and that the document does not reflect the actual commitment of Partners.

The Bureau requested the Secretariat to follow up with non-responding partners and to request the assistance of respective National Focal Points.

New requests for ACCOBAMS Partnership

The Bureau recognised the key role of partnership networks in improving the outreach of ACCOBAMS. Members decided to grant the status of ACCOBAMS Partner to:

- Delphis NGO - after having postponed the decision during the MOP8-,
- "We Are Méditerranée" Association,
- "Notre Grand Bleu" Association,

- the Department of Comparative Biomedicine and Food Science (BCA) of the University of Padova (Italy)

Review of the ACCOBAMS Partners status

Following the Secretariat's concerns over the value of requested documentation compared to actual collaboration, the Bureau welcomed proposed amendments by the Secretariat to Resolution 7.9 aiming to ease the documentation requirement and requested the Secretariat to prepare a draft Resolution.

The Secretariat informed the Bureau that following the request of the Fourteenth Meeting of the Bureau (Online, 18-19 January 2022), the Secretariat addressed an official letter to the 8 ACCOBAMS Partners that have been silent and non-collaborative for a number of years with ACCOBAMS, in order to advise them on the likely withdrawal of their current status of ACCOBAMS Partner. No reply from these 8 ACCOBAMS Partners has been received. In this context, during BU15, the Bureau also decided to withdraw partnership status to the eight entities (American Society for International Law - Wildlife Interest Group, Association Ecologique Marine Barbarous, Association protection des Cétacés et de l'Environnement Marin, Cybelle Planète, Dipartimento di Scienze della Terra dell'Ambiente e della Vita (DISTAV), Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes de Montpellier (EPHE), Spanish Cetacean Society (SEC) and Whalecraft).

III. PROJECTS

1) Next synoptic basin-wide surveys in the ACCOBAMS Area (ASI-II)

During BU15, the Bureau concluded that the next basin-wide survey in the ACCOBAMS area is a priority for the ACCOBAMS.

BU16, held online on 18 June 2024, was a focused session dedicated exclusively to the ASI-II.

In light of current constraints, the BU16 concluded that the original timeline for the ASI-II project must be revised, particularly regarding the fieldwork phase.

BU16 agreed to initiate the project as soon as feasible, with the aim of launching the first ASI-II fieldwork in 2026. This delay will allow time for countries and the Secretariat to intensify efforts in securing the necessary funding and to recruit essential coordination personnel, including a full-time project manager, administrative assistant, and scientific coordinator, as stipulated in the governance framework of the project.

Additionally, the Bureau emphasised leveraging the political momentum surrounding the 2025 United Nations Ocean Conference (UNOC) to enhance the visibility and support for ASI-II.

At BU17, the Bureau welcomed and supported the initiative by the Secretariat to organise, during the 3rd United Nations Ocean Conference (UNOC3 - Nice, June 2025), a side-event dedicated to the formal launch of the Second ACCOBAMS Survey Initiative (ASI-II).

The Bureau invited the Secretariat to:

- transfer the available budget of the Budgetary Line "ACCOBAMS Project Officer (1102)" to the to the Budgetary Line "External assistance (1203)", in accordance with paragraph 15 of Annex 3 of the Resolution 8.23;
- launch Calls for the appointment of a Scientific Coordinator and consultants to assist the Secretariat in initiating ASI-II using, where necessary, remaining funds from ASI-1, and funds from Budgetary Line "External assistance (1203)".

³ [Resolution 8.2](#), Annex 3 Terms of Reference for administration of the budget, Article 15: "The ACCOBAMS Secretariat can, if needed, transfer funds up to 20% from one budget line of the approved budget to another budget line within the same budget section. If the needed transfer of funds within the same budget section is higher than 20% of the budget line from which the transfer is made, the Secretariat shall request the authorization of the Bureau."

Considering the urgency to recruit coordination personnel and the Scientific Coordinator (SC), at BU17, the Bureau asked the Secretariat to launch Calls for the appointment of a SC and consultants to assist the Secretariat in initiating ASI-II. The Bureau welcomes Ms. Julie BELMONT which was accepted by the Secretariat following the selection process as an expert to provide support for the development of ASI-II. The Bureau also stressed during BUEXT6 the necessity to appoint a Scientific Coordinator before UNOC3. It agreed to mobilise ASI-I Steering Group to support the recruitment of a SC, in coordination with the Bureau and with the Scientific Committee Task Manager on Cetacean Population Estimates and Distribution (Mr. Tilen GENOV).

2) Projects funded by the Supplementary Conservation Grants Fund

The Secretariat regularly provided updates to the Bureau on projects funded under the Supplementary Conservation Grants Fund (SCF).

During BU17, the Secretariat informed the Bureau that there were no new voluntary contributions to the SCF in 2024, therefore, the remaining funds amounted to 4 724€ at the end of 2024. If there will be no additional voluntary contributions to the SCF in the coming months, the Secretariat will not be in a position to issue a new call for projects under the SCF.

The Secretariat launched a Call for Voluntary Contributions in March 2025 with a specific emphasis on SCF and reported during BUEXT6 that no additional voluntary contributions were made to the SCF.

The Bureau decided that there will be no new call for proposals in 2025 and requested the Secretariat to approach Monaco regarding the use of the remaining amount of its voluntary contributions, which was expected to be used under the SCF 2025.

IV. PREPARATION OF THE NINTH MEETING OF THE PARTIES (MOP9)

At BUEXT6, the Cyprus representative reported that finalising the Memorandum of Understanding with the Secretariat is nearly complete. Hotel arrangements are almost finalised, venue input from the Secretariat has been considered, and work on the meeting logo continues with appreciation for the national team's efforts. He expressed confidence that all preparations would be concluded by mid-May and looked forward to a productive meeting.

The Bureau welcomed the information provided by Cyprus about the ongoing preparation for MOP9 and wished for a fruitful meeting.

At the meeting, the Bureau addressed the following subjects, which are to be included in draft Resolutions for submission at MOP9:

- Granting the right to vote
- Long-term Pending Contributions
- Amendments to the Rules of Procedure for the Meeting of the Parties
- Scientific Committee
- Work programme and Budget 2026-2028
- Recommendations of the ACCOBAMS Follow-Up Committee
- NETCCOBAMS
- ACCOBAMS Partners
- Post-War plan for Black Sea cetaceans
- Abundance and distribution, including ACCOBAMS Survey Initiative II and the ACCOBAMS Long-Term Monitoring Programme (LTMP)
- Species List for monitoring purposes
- Population Structure
- Strandings Issues (ACCOBAMS Emergency Task Force for Stranding Events, functioning stranding networks)

- Interactions between fisheries and cetaceans
- Anthropogenic Underwater Noise
- Vessel Strikes
- Commercial whale watching activities in the ACCOBAMS area
- Marine debris
- Semi-captivity (Passport and Guidelines)
- Area-based measures for cetacean conservation

ANNEX IX - REPORT OF THE SECRETARIAT

Introduction

According to Article IV, paragraph 2, f), at each ordinary session of the Meeting of the Parties, the Agreement Secretariat shall provide a report on the work carried out by the Agreement Secretariat, the Sub-Regional Co-ordination Units, the Bureau, and the Scientific Committee

This document is a report on the activities carried out by the ACCOBAMS Secretariat, based on the Work Programme 2023-2025 adopted during the Seventh Meeting of the Parties (Malta, 29 November – 2 December 2022).

The report was prepared by the ACCOBAMS Secretariat in order to inform the Meeting on the status of each action planned under the 2023-2025 Work Program. It describes activities carried out in relation to administrative and scientific matters, as well as collaborations with other institutions, during the 2023–2025 triennium. The present report covers the period from December 2022 to October 2025.

The Secretariat attended in person and online meetings and workshops. Each time, it took the opportunity to present relevant activities, particularly those that contributed to enhance the Agreement's visibility, as well as to disseminate information material and to explore ways of strengthening relevant cooperation/collaboration for the implementation of ACCOBAMS. These meetings are non-exhaustively indicated in [Annex 1](#).

MANAGEMENT OF THE AGREEMENT (MA)

MA1	INVOLVEMENT OF KEY STAKEHOLDERS
MA1a	Strengthen involvement of all key stakeholders in ACCOBAMS's operations

Expected outcomes	
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Proposed Action(s)	Means of implementation	<i>Status for the current triennium⁴</i>	<i>Detailed developments</i>
<p>Ensure ACCOBAMS institutional functioning / governance / process</p> <p>Strengthen involvement of all riparian Countries to encourage accession to the Agreement</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organising ACCOBAMS Institutional Meetings: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Meeting of the Parties - Scientific Committee Meetings - Bureau Meetings • Inviting Observers, including riparian Countries Non-Parties, and relevant experts to ACCOBAMS Meetings • Liaising with the Depositary to encourage accession to the Agreement of riparian states 	Completed	<p><u>Ensure ACCOBAMS institutional functioning / governance / process:</u></p> <p><u>Meeting of Parties:</u> The Ninth Meeting of the Parties to ACCOBAMS (MOP9) is held on 18-21 November 2025 in Cyprus.</p> <p><u>Scientific Committee Meetings:</u> The Fifteenth Meeting of the Scientific Committee (SC15) of ACCOBAMS was convened at Ramada Hotel in Tunis, Tunisia, on 10-11 May 2023.</p> <p>The Sixteenth Meeting of the Scientific Committee (SC16) of ACCOBAMS was convened at Balmoral Hotel in Barcelona, Spain, on 2-5 December 2024.</p> <p><u>Bureau Meetings:</u> The Fifteenth Meeting of the Bureau (BU15) of ACCOBAMS was held in Monaco on 22-23 November 2023.</p> <p>The Sixteenth Meeting of the Bureau (BU16) of ACCOBAMS was held online on 18 June 2024, dedicated to the examination of progress of ASI 2 project.</p> <p>The Seventeenth Meeting of the Bureau (BU17) of ACCOBAMS was held in Monaco and online on 13-14 February 2025.</p> <p>The Sixth Meeting of the Extended Bureau (BUEXT6) of ACCOBAMS was held in Nice on 23-24 April 2025.</p>

⁴ Possible status regarding the 2023-2025 PoW:

Ongoing - Partially completed – Completed - Not implemented

<p>Establish/strengthen partnerships and collaborations with all relevant IGOs, NGOs, and international/national entities</p> <p>Establish synergies with the European Union policies (MSFD, HD), Barcelona Convention, Bucharest Convention and other relevant Agreements and Organisations strategies</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishing MoU with relevant IGOs, government bodies, scientific organisations, Universities, NGOs and relevant organisations. • Participating in relevant Meetings, fora and WG • Contributing to the development of relevant regional policies documents / reports • Ensuring dialogue between regional Conventions to facilitate the reporting by Countries in the framework of other Conventions 	<p>Completed</p>	<p><u>Regarding cooperation with the Barcelona Convention:</u> The ACCOBAMS Secretariat has cooperated with the Barcelona Convention in the 2023 Quality Status Report of the Mediterranean Sea (2023 MED QSR), a report presenting the assessment findings related to the quality of the Mediterranean coastal and marine ecosystems as described by several indicators. This cooperation included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The production of the report’s chapters dedicated to underwater noise. - Supporting the preparation of a methodology for monitoring floating marine litter through aerial surveys based on the ACCOBAMS Survey Initiative. <p>The Secretariat participated in main UNEP/MAP meetings.</p> <p><u>Regarding cooperation with the Black Sea Commission:</u> ACCOBAMS and of the Black Sea Commission have jointly organised a meeting to take stock of common subjects in relation to the Black Sea 6-7 March 2024, in Istanbul, in the premises of the Black Sea Commission Permanent Secretariat.</p> <p><u>Regarding cooperation with the Convention of Migratory Species (CMS):</u> The Secretariat has participated in different CMS Family meetings: 14th CMS COP (February 2024), 10th ASCOBANS MOP (September 2024), and CMS SC (September 2024) to identify and address shared concerns.</p> <p><u>Regarding participation to relevant international events:</u> The Secretariat addressed the One Ocean Science Congress held in Nice on 3–6 June 2025, which took place in the framework of UNOC 3, with three technical presentations focused on regional efforts to advance marine conservation in the Mediterranean:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “Mitigating dolphin depredation in Mediterranean fisheries” – a session organised in collaboration with GFCM and SPA/RAC, presenting results and lessons learned to balance cetacean conservation and sustainable fisheries. - “Assessing anthropogenic underwater noise pollution in the Mediterranean Sea” – organised with OceanCare and the Tethys Research Institute, exploring the impact of noise on marine ecosystems and restoration efforts. - “Addressing underwater noise and vessel strikes in the North-Western Mediterranean PSSA” – based on the ACCOBAMS study developed in the framework of the 2023 Med QSR of the Barcelona Convention. <p>The ACCOBAMS Secretariat participated in BEFF in Monaco on 7-8 June 2025 in Monaco.</p> <p>The ACCOBAMS Secretariat participated to the Third United Nations Ocean Conference (UNOC3) held in Monaco and Nice on 9-13 June 2025, as ACCOBAMS was designated as an accredited IGO.</p>
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<p>Enforce communication within the ACCOBAMS community and strengthen exchanges of information on national and regional projects / activities / initiatives</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Using NETCCOBAMS platform as sharing/consultation tool - Exchange of information on national reports and regional projects / activities / initiatives 	<p>Completed</p>	<p>NETCCOBAMS is regularly presented to relevant events.</p> <p>During SC15, Dimitar Popov was appointed as the coordinator of the Working Group established by Resolution 8.7.</p> <p>A consultant was contracted by the Secretariat to assist in the dissemination of NETCCOBAMS.</p> <p>ACCOBAMS has updated its social media editorial plan and regularly dedicates posts to inform about project activities, outputs, reports, meetings and other initiatives.</p>
<p>Reinforce synergies with and between Partners</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Considering new applications for ACCOBAMS Partnership Organising meetings of ACCOBAMS Partners in order to share expertise/ knowledge / information Reviewing the ACCOBAMS Partners status 	<p>Completed</p>	<p>An overview of the Partner status was presented to the BU15 for advice on next steps.</p> <p>A subsequent proposal of amendments of Annex 1 and Annex 2 to Resolution 7.9 (ACCOBAMS Partners) made by the Secretariat was welcomed by the Bureau during BU17 (Doc08) and reviewed during BUEXT 6 held in Nice on 23-24 April 2025. A draft Resolution is presented to MOP9.</p>

MA2	ENSURE ADEQUATE FUNDING, IN PARTICULARLY FOR CONSERVATION ACTIVITIES
MA2a	Mobilising and diversifying funding sources

Expected outcomes	
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Proposed Action(s)	Means of implementation	Status for the current triennium	Detailed developments
Fund projects under the SCF related to cetacean conservation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Launching a new ACCOBAMS call for proposals for projects related to cetacean conservation 	Not implemented	During the Extended Bureau Meeting, Bureau decided that there will not be a new call for proposals in 2025, under the Supplementary Conservation Grants Fund, in view of the lack of voluntary contributions
Diversify funding sources to develop projects /actions in line with ACCOBAMS priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Launching call for voluntary contributions Exploring and examining international funding opportunities for cetacean conservation projects in the framework of partnership with donors Developing proposal for a sponsorship program Organising encounters with relevant potential donors Leveraging existing partnerships and collaborations with all IGOs, NGOs, and international/ national entities Securing national funds to be used as cofundings to support project proposals developed by national organisations 	Ongoing	<p>The Secretariat circulated a detailed list of activities for 2023-2025 subject to call for voluntary contributions.</p> <p><u>As part of the call for projects under the Pelagos initiative, ACCOBAMS is involved in 3 projects:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Shiprint, to reduce the impact of maritime traffic on the marine environment, notably by decreasing noise pollution, greenhouse gas emissions, and the risk of collisions with endangered whales. This project aims to support the implementation of Associated Protective Measures (APMs) within the Northwestern Mediterranean Sea Particularly Sensitive Sea Area (NW Med PSSA). It includes tracking AIS-equipped vessels, organising workshops, raising awareness, and developing guidelines for a whale-safe certificate - Pelagos Consortium, which aims at establishing a group of different stakeholders within the Pelagos Sanctuary to apply an ecosystem approach to the area; this will consist of four different pillars, with the ACCOBAMS Secretariat participating to different actions on research, outreach, stakeholders' engagement. - Climate change, aiming to enhance real-time monitoring, reduce ship strikes, and analyse phenological changes in whale behaviour. <p>ACCOBAMS is also part of the Together for the Med network which is currently finalising a project to submit to new supporters. The Secretariat participated as a member of the Steering Committee to the network's workshop held in Marsa, Tunis, Tunisia in March 2025.</p>
Strengthen national capacities in cetacean conservation project development and fundraising	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sharing information on funding opportunities Organising training workshop for FPs and relevant national stakeholders on project development and fundraising 	Not implemented	No voluntary contribution nor external funds were identified to organise a training workshop on project development and fundraising.

MA3	IMPLEMENTATION OF AND COMPLIANCE WITH ACCOBAMS
MA3a	Improve the level of implementation of and compliance with ACCOBAMS Resolutions as well as the monitoring of its progress

Expected outcomes	
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Proposed Action(s)	Means of implementation	<i>Status for the current triennium</i>	<i>Detailed developments</i>
Revise the ACCOBAMS Strategy (2018-2025) and propose a new one after evaluating overall Agreement's effectiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evaluating the overall Agreement's effectiveness Preparing an ACCOBAMS Strategy (2026-2037) in collaboration with all ACCOBAMS bodies 	Ongoing	<p>No voluntary contribution nor external fundings were identified to revise the ACCOBAMS Strategy (2018-2025) and propose a new one after evaluating the overall Agreement's effectiveness.</p> <p>During their 15th Meeting, Bureau members agreed that unless sufficient funds were received prior to February 2024, there would not be enough time to assess the 2018-2025 Strategy and to draft a new one. In such case, they proposed to extend the ongoing Strategy for another 3 years</p>
Reinforce the involvement of National Focal Points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Disseminating the guide on the role of the ACCOBAMS National Focal Point Providing regular update on the implementation of Resolutions by Parties Organising the Meeting of National Representatives with sub-regional meetings to develop the 2026-2028 Programme of Work by identifying actions related to cetacean conservation, according to national priorities 	Completed	<p><u>Meeting of National Representatives:</u> The Sixth Meeting of ACCOBAMS National Representatives was held online on 24-25 June 2024 and included sub-regional meetings.</p>
Propose remedy actions in cases of non-follow-up with ACCOBAMS Resolutions and infringements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Convening a Follow up Committee meeting Applying Follow up Procedures 	Completed	<p>The Fourth Meeting of the Follow up Committee took place in Nice on 2-3 September 2025</p> <p>The Committee followed up on two previous submissions and considered a new submission presented by OceanCare regarding the conservation status of two cetaceans' species in the Mediterranean: the sperm whale (<i>Physeter macrocephalus</i>) and the fin whale (<i>Balaenoptera physalus</i>).</p> <p>Finally, the Committee provided guidance on the follow up of existing obligations and commitments since the 3rd Meeting of the Follow-up Committee held online, on 29-30 March 2022.</p>

MA4	ACCOBAMS EXTENSION AREA
MA4a	Ensure implementation of the ACCOBAMS's cetacean conservation standards in the adjacent areas

Expected outcomes	
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Proposed Action(s)	Means of implementation	<i>Status for the current triennium</i>	<i>Detailed developments</i>
Promote the ratification of Amendment for geographical extension of the Agreement area to the Atlantic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Liaising with the Depositary to encourage relevant national authorities to ratify the Amendment for geographical extension of the Agreement area to the Atlantic • Providing all Focal Points with explanatory note on the Amendment • Providing support to National Focal Points to solve problems regarding the ratification of the Amendment through the organisation of trilateral meetings between the National Focal Point, the Secretariat and an ACCOBAMS legal advisor 	Completed	Greece has ratified the Amendment in January 2023 and Georgia in August 2023. At present, 12 Parties have ratified the Amendment for geographical extension of the Agreement area to the Atlantic.

CONSERVATION ACTIONS (CA)

CA 1 a	Cetacean population estimates and distribution
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Expected outcomes	Improved knowledge of cetacean populations in the ACCOBAMS Area Global distribution and abundance of cetaceans in the Mediterranean Sea and Black Seas established, based on results of survey
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Proposed Action(s)	Means of implementation	<i>Status for the current triennium</i>	<i>Detailed developments</i>
<p>Promote the implementation of the Long-Term Monitoring Programme, taking into consideration monitoring and reporting obligations of countries (MSFD, Barcelona Convention, Bucharest Convention)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secure funds for implementing ASI2, including by investigating the existence of possible funding at national / regional levels • Development and implementation of a simulation framework to examine the performance of different future survey strategies (synoptic, regional/national) • Undertaking synoptic basin-wide surveys in the ACCOBAMS Area with a focus on abundance and trends in 2024/2025 (ASI2) with the support of an ASI Contact Group to define the implementation conditions/protocol related to logistics (research platform, human means, equipment, training...) and administration (survey restrictions, permits...), and of the SC to review and update as necessary the field and analytical protocols 	<p>Ongoing</p>	<p><u>In relation with the next basin wide surveys:</u></p> <p>In accordance with MOP8 & Resolution 8.10, a project proposal developed by the Scientific Committee and the Secretariat was circulated to the Parties beginning of October 2023 (see document ACCOBAMS-BU15/2023/Inf04). During 1st half of 2024, Parties were invited to indicate:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the number of voluntary contributions and/or in-kind support for the implementation of ASI2. - their national contacts for the LTMP Contact Group. <p>The Long-Term Monitoring Program (LTPMP) Contact Group met online three times in 2024 and twice in 2025 in order to collect information on allocated contributions to support ASI2 project.</p> <p>A dedicated Bureau Meeting was organised on 18 June 2024.</p> <p>SC16 provided recommendation regarding the implementation of ASI2.</p> <p>ASI2 was officially launched during UNOC 2025 (June 2025, Monaco & Nice, France).</p> <p>A working document titled “State of Play of the ASI2 Project” will be presented during MOP9.</p> <p><u>In relation with MSFD and synchronisation / standardisation of existing monitoring efforts:</u></p> <p>Within the EU-funded ABIOMMED project, the Secretariat is coordinating the Work</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promoting synchronisation and standardisation of existing monitoring efforts to contribute to LTMP purpose (coordination meetings at the sub-regional level, Working Group on cetaceans monitoring...) • Collaborating with relevant organisations, such as the Barcelona Convention (EcAp-Med III), the Bucharest Convention and the European Commission (MSFD), 		<p>Package “<i>Streamlining Descriptor’s D1 selected criteria regarding mammal’s species groups (small, toothed cetaceans, deep diving toothed cetaceans and baleen whales) towards coordinated monitoring and assessment in the Mediterranean region</i>”. ACCOBAMS supports in particular the coordination of a working group composed by the researchers/managers appointed by the MSFD national competent authorities for cetaceans monitoring in each EU Mediterranean and Black Sea country.</p> <p>Several meetings were organised in 2023 with WG members to collect relevant information to support the preparation of ABIOMMED deliverable “Review on the national context of MSFD implementation in order. A face-to-face meeting of the Working group on cetacean monitoring under MSFD in the scope of the ABIOMMED project was organised in Rome, Italy, on 14-15 June 2023.</p> <p>The final Meeting of ABIOMMED project was held in December 2023.</p> <p><u>In relation with the Ecosystem Approach process of the Barcelona Convention:</u></p> <p><u>The Secretariat has participated in several Meetings:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Meeting of the Ecosystem Approach Correspondence Groups on Monitoring (CORMON), Biodiversity and Fisheries held in Athens, Greece on 9-10 March 2023. - the Integrated Meeting of the Ecosystem Approach Correspondence Groups (CORMONs) held in Athens, Greece, on 27-28 June 2023. During this second meeting, the Parties to the Barcelona Convention acknowledged the importance and the richness of the ASI data and they emphasised the importance and urgency that ACCOBAMS finalise the necessary steps towards launching the next basin survey initiative and encouraged the Contracting Parties to provide the necessary contributions. - the Meeting of the Ecosystem Approach Correspondence Group on Monitoring (CORMON) Biodiversity and Fisheries held in Athens, Greece on 7-8 April 2025 and the 11th Meeting of the SAPBIO National Correspondents.
<p>Promote the use of ASI data by increasing the visibility of ASI (and future) datasets and related results and encourage further analyses</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing NETCCOBAMS functionalities to create a repository system for ASI data • Promoting ASI data and results in relevant fora, also through the Special Issue in Frontiers of Marine Science • Sharing ASI data following received requests in accordance with ASI Terms of use and 	<p>Ongoing</p>	<p>ASI data are in NETCCOBAMS.</p> <p>The ASI data and results have been used for the preparation of the 2023 MED Quality Status Report, in particular for the assessment of CI3 “Species distributional range”, CI4 “Population abundance of selected species”, CI5 “Population demographic characteristics”, as well as for CI 23 “Trends in the amount of litter in the water column including microplastics and on the seafloor”.</p> <p>Several scientific publications based on the ASI datasets were published in the ASI Special Issue in Frontiers of Marine Science.</p> <p>ASI data is regularly shared in response to requests received and in accordance with ASI</p>

	<p>archiving/monitoring of the requests</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collecting outputs of work and analysis conducted following ASI full dataset requests to be used by the SC to give best scientific advice 		<p>Terms of use.</p> <p>The Secretariat organised 2 specific events in 2024 to increase the visibility of ASI results:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ACCOBAMS side-event “Why do we care about whales and dolphins” during the Monaco Ocean Week on 20 March 2024, Joint ACCOBAMS/We Are Méditerranée event at the Monaco Yacht Club, on 27 March 2024. <p>Specific side events have been proposed during Barcelona Convention and CMS COP</p> <p>The Executive Secretary met different stakeholders to promote ASI during the triennium</p>
<p>Promote data collection at sub-regional and national levels (in coherence with ACCOBAMS survey methodologies)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facilitating exchanges and coordination between Parties on sub-regional surveys Organising training activities on monitoring methods/protocols and data analysis for smaller-scale surveys (at local, national and sub-regional levels) Develop handbooks on standardised monitoring methods (aerial surveys, boat-based surveys, acoustic surveys...) Collaborating with relevant organisations, such as Barcelona Convention (EcAp-Med III), the Bucharest Convention and the European Commission (MSFD) 	<p>Completed</p>	<p>The ACCOBAMS Secretariat organised a workshop “Advances in Marine Mammal Telemetry: Technologies, Analyses, Best Practices, and Future Perspectives Advances in Marine Mammal Telemetry: Technologies, Analyses, Best Practices, and Perspectives” during the 36th Annual Conference of the European Cetacean Society held in Ponta Delgada, Azores on 12-16 May 2025.</p>
<p>Promote data collection from multidisciplinary surveys (such as fisheries / acoustic surveys), innovative technologies (UAV, satellite) and of platforms of opportunity (ferries, whale watching vessels, navy vessels, etc..)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Undertaking activities in pilot areas to collect data using multidisciplinary surveys (such as fisheries / acoustic surveys), innovative technologies (UAV, satellite) and platforms of opportunity (ferries, whale watching vessels, navy vessels, 	<p>Ongoing</p>	<p>Preliminary discussions were held with the experts responsible for the studies carried out during the 2019-2022 triennium, concerning the use of multidisciplinary surveys and platform of opportunities such as ferries.</p>

	<p>etc..) based on recommendations of previous studies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initiating collaboration with existing regional fisheries surveys (MEDITS, MEDIAS) and relevant organisations such as GFCM and ICCAT • Collaborate with relevant existing networks (FLT) and initiatives/projects (ex. CONCEPTU MARIS Life project) • Organising meetings/workshops to discuss possible synergies and shared methodology and data analysis • Developing protocols on standardised monitoring methods for multidisciplinary surveys/ Ferries • Update the "Guidelines for the Monitoring of the Range of Cetaceans, Abundance and Demographic Characteristics of Populations" • Regularly review « Best Available Technologies » and assess potential contribution to LTMP 		
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CA 1 b	Population Structure
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Expected outcomes	<p>Improved knowledge on population structure in the ACCOBAMS Area and species conservation management plans completed</p> <p>Exchange of samples is facilitated for joint analysis</p> <p>Data exchange is facilitated for basin wide analysis</p>
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Proposed Action(s)	Means of implementation	<i>Status for the current triennium</i>	<i>Detailed developments</i>
<p>Improve photo ID data collection and dissemination:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Update and harmonise protocols on data collection for photo ID - Share photo ID data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organising experts meeting for best practices guide on how to collect data for comparison • Organising regional experts' trainings on analysis on photo ID including AI (Artificial Intelligence)– draft ToR to facilitate exchanges or a harmonised relevant database • Facilitating data sharing and the creation of large-scale photo-id catalogues for in-depth analysis 	Not implemented	<p>No voluntary contribution nor external funding were identified to improve photo ID data collection and dissemination.</p>
<p>Improve data collection on cetacean populations genetic in the ACCOBAMS Area</p> <p>Development of genetical identification of population structure (particularly for Mediterranean), including e.g. eDNA</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishing and promoting a common protocol on data collection on cetacean populations genetic • Facilitating the creation of a general database/archive/inventory on existing samples/tissues in ACCOBAMS Area • Disseminating databases and guidelines to stakeholders • Facilitating analysis of existing 	Ongoing	<p>ACCOBAMS Best Practices on cetacean population genetics were translated into French.</p> <p>A webinar on the collection and analysis of data on cetacean population genetics was held via Zoom on 8 November 2023.</p> <p>A poster was presented during the ECS Conference in 2024.</p>

	<p>tissue samples (including those from biopsies) to address questions on stock structure and genetic diversity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Organising workshop about genetic population structure (including e-DNA) for marine mammals in the framework of international scientific events or meetings• Collaborating with relevant organisations (CITES, ABS Nagoya Protocol...)		
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CA 1 c	Monitoring cetacean status
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Expected outcomes	<p>Regional conservation plans (Med and BS) for cetacean are promoted at the national level</p> <p>Relevant conservation management plans are developed and implemented</p> <p>National Action Plans are developed and implemented in several Countries</p>
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Proposed Action(s)	Means of implementation	<i>Status for the current triennium</i>	<i>Detailed developments</i>
Support in implementing Regional Conservation Plans for cetaceans (in Black Sea and in Mediterranean Sea)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supporting the BSC in the revision of the Regional Conservation Plan for cetacean in Black Sea, taking into consideration the IWC Conservation Management Plan. Supporting the SPA/RAC in the implementation of the Mediterranean Action Plan for Cetaceans adopted by Parties to the Barcelona Convention 	Ongoing	<p>The Secretariat works in close collaboration with the 2 sub-regional coordination units (BSC and SPA/RAC)</p> <p>Black Sea experts will revise the Black Sea Conservation Plan based on CeNoBS results and will consider drafting a multi-species CMP to be presented to the next Scientific Committee Meeting.</p>
Develop/ revise/ implement relevant Conservation Management Plans for cetacean species	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organising Experts Workshop(s) to develop/ revise/ Conservation Management Plans for cetacean species, taking into account all national conservation plans Initiating focus on Black Sea with preliminary document Supporting the implementation of relevant actions of the approved Conservation Management Plans for cetacean species with emphasise of coordination actions and organisation of stakeholders' workshop Starting the development of CMP for other Mediterranean species such as 	Ongoing	<p>To date, four CMPs are under development on: fin whales, Risso's dolphins, common dolphins and bottlenose dolphins.</p> <p>During SC16 next steps towards Ziphius and Sperm Whale CMPs were presented.</p>

	<p>Cuvier’s beaked whales and sperm whales</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Derived CMP actions are cross-cutting and considered in the framework of other specific activities 		
<p>Facilitate the Development/ revision/ implementation of National Action Plans for cetaceans</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting the revision / development of National Action Plans for cetaceans in collaboration with SRCUs and national authorities, through participatory process involving all relevant organisations (NGOs, associations, national partners...) • Establishment of national Working Groups or Councils in the framework of National Actions Plan 	<p>Ongoing</p>	<p>Exchanges have been initiated with SPA/RAC to support the development of National Action Plans (NAP).</p>

CA 1 d	Functional stranding networks and responses to emergency situations
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Expected outcomes	<p>Official National Stranding networks are established and operating</p> <p>Information on stranding events is regularly exchanged among national networks</p>
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Proposed Action(s)	Means of implementation	<i>Status for the current triennium</i>	<i>Detailed developments</i>
Set up /Reinforce official national stranding networks (with all national institutions concerned and relevant international agreements)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Disseminating study on legal/institutional status of National stranding networks in order to assist experts in the establishment of official national stranding network when relevant Assistance in the preparation of a legislative framework to settle the national coordination network Organising trainings on necropsies, response to live strandings and emergency situation in the ACCOBAMS Area, and on the use of relevant databases 	Ongoing	<p>The Secretariat supported the participation of 5 experts from Morocco, Tunisia and Montenegro at the 16th marine mammal necropsy workshop, organised by the Department of Veterinary Pathology, University of Liege (Belgium). The workshop was held on 11-13 July 2023.</p> <p>The Secretariat supported the participation of 4 experts from France, Morocco and Türkiye, at the 17th marine mammal necropsy workshop, organised by the Department of Veterinary Pathology, University of Liege (Belgium). The workshop was held on 9-11 July 2024.</p> <p>The second day of the CSMC6 held in Monastir, Tunisia on 11-15 November 2023 was focused on strandings.</p>
<p>Encourage collaboration among national networks of Parties</p> <p>Perpetuate mutualisation of stranding protocols between Parties</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Disseminating the procedures on Best Practices on cetacean postmortem investigation and tissue sampling resulted from the harmonisation process in ACCOBAMS and ASCOBANS Creating Regional Task Force for stranding events (exchange photos/ advice / scientific explanations even in the field) including strandings of non-common species taking into account national legislations in 	Ongoing	<p>The main goal of the 16th and 17th marine mammal necropsy workshops, organised by the Department of Veterinary Pathology, University of Liege (Belgium) in 2023 and 2024 was to train expert biologists and veterinarians from different ACCOBAMS countries on “Best Practice Document on cetaceans’ postmortem investigations and tissue sampling, in order to gain information on possible threats for cetacean conservation”</p> <p>The ACCOBAMS emergency task force for stranding events (AETFS) has been formally launched early 2023. The AETFS is jointly chaired by Sandro Mazzariol, from Padova University, and Thierry Jauniaux, from Liege University.</p> <p>Since the note on the feasibility of tele-necropsy systems was approved by the Parties during MOP8 held in Malta from 29 November to 2 December 2022, the initiative has started in Morocco early 2023:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2 online workshops were held on 3 and 11 April 2023

	<p>order to support national network to deal with non-common events</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing tele-necropsy in the ACCOBAMS Area (workshops and trainings) • Entering relevant national data into relevant regional databases, such as MEDACES • Supporting and financing of MEDACES • Creating a network to exchange information on sampling through NETCCOBAMS Platform 		<p>- A joint ACCOBAMS/ INRH training on standardisation of stranding intervention methods was held in Tanger on 18-19 September 2023 and on 12-14 February 2024. The third day of the CSMC6 held in Monastir, Tunisia on 13-15 November 2023, was dedicated to a training workshop regarding the implementation of a scientific photography protocol adapted to cetacean strandings for developing teleneecropsy. A specific stand during the 2024 ECS Conference in April 2024 was dedicated to the ACCOBAMS initiative on teleneecropsy.</p>
<p>Communicate simply and efficiently on uncommon situations in the ACCOBAMS Area (Example of killer whales in 2019/2020)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creation of a task force for the management of uncommon situations, including monitoring of uncommon species in the ACCOBAMS Area, taking into account national legislations 		<p>The ACCOBAMS emergency task force for stranding events (AETFS) has been formally launched early 2023. The AETFS is jointly chaired by Sandro Mazzariol, from Padova University, and Thierry Jauniaux, from Liege University. The AETFS will be able to assist Parties for the management of uncommon situations</p>

CA 2 a	Interactions with fisheries / aquaculture
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Expected outcomes	Impacts of cetaceans' bycatch and depredation are assessed and reduced Ecotourism activities (whale watching and pescatourism) are proposed as an alternative income source to fishermen impacted by depredation
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Proposed Action(s)	Means of implementation	<i>Status for the current triennium</i>	<i>Detailed developments</i>
Support countries in monitoring and mitigating depredation and bycatch situations, with urgent focus on harbour porpoise bycatch in the Black Sea	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improving data collection on interactions with fisheries (implementation of on-board observers programs and port questionnaires...) and testing mitigation measures • Sharing experience and results, including from past projects on interactions with fisheries (workshops, field visits...) • Investigating the use of stranding data to assess bycatch mortality (using drifting models) • Collaborating with relevant entities, in particular with GFCM, EC (DG MARE and DG Environment), Barcelona Convention (EcAp-Med III project) and IWC BMI • Establishing an Emergency Task Force with EC, GFCM and BSC to address the porpoise bycatch critical issue in the Black Sea 	Ongoing	<p>A workshop of the ACCOBAMS-ASCOBANS Joint Bycatch Working Group (JBWG) was organised at the ECS annual conference in O Grove, Spain on 17 April 2023 entitled “<i>Current bycatch issues in European waters</i>” and was open to all conference participants.</p> <p>The second Meeting of the JBWG of ACCOBAMS and ASCOBANS was held online on 5-6 February 2025.</p> <p>To support the continuation of partner activities under MAVA MedBycatch and Depredation projects on bycatch and depredation monitoring and mitigation, ACCOBAMS Secretariat contributed to the development of 4 project proposals in September 2023 to different calls:</p> <p>ACCOBAMS participated as a Partner in three proposals submitted in the framework of FAO/GFCM requests for proposals. All the following three projects were successfully completed.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Monitoring activities and mitigation measures for the reduction of dolphin depredation in small-scale fisheries led by MareCamp in Italy, - 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 (GSA 24 –Northern Levant Sea)” led by Çukurova University in Türkiye, - Task 1) Monitoring activities, and mitigation measures for the reduction of the elasmobranchs incidentally captured by trawlers; and Task 2) monitoring activities, and mitigation measures for the reduction of dolphin depredation in purse seiners in the Mediterranean side of Morocco led by INRH in Morocco. <p>In these 3 proposals, the ACCOBAMS Secretariat facilitated the overall coordination and the mobilisation of the relevant expertise in relation with depredation. With the National Institute of Fisheries Research of Tanger (INRH) it is monitoring and mitigating dolphin depredation in purse seiners in the Southern Alboran Sea (GSA 3).</p>

			<p>With the Marecamp Association it is implementing devices that disturb dolphin echolocation on longlines, visual deterrents on trammel net, structural changes and an Acoustic Alert System on single-wall nets used by the small-scale fishing fleet in the Western Ionian Sea (GSA 19). Data collection and analysis are based on shared standardised research protocols, questionnaires, logbook entries, onboard observations on research vessels and fishing vessels, and acoustic monitoring using hydrophones and F-PODs.</p> <p>Finally, in this context, a Joint Workshop on Fisheries Interaction with Vulnerable Species has been held online on 28 January 2025, involving over 80 participants.</p> <p>Regarding Resolution 8.9 on drift nets, the Secretariat has been in contact with GFCM and DG MARE to draw their attention to this issue. In particular, the Secretariat participated in the Sixteenth meeting of the GFCM Compliance Committee held in Rhodes, Cyprus on 5 May 2023, which agreed "to address the issue of drift nets in close coordination with ACCOBAMS and ICCAT".</p> <p>During the Joint ACCOBAMS / Black Sea meeting on 6 -7 March 2024 (Istanbul), a proposed Network for harbour porpoise bycatch in the black sea between the European Commission (DG Mare), GFCM, ACCOBAMS and the Black Sea Commission was agreed.</p>
<p>Provide support to Parties to promote the development of ecotourism activities as an alternative income to fishers (pescatourism and whale watching)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting the development of sustainable ecotourism activities in pilot sites • Considering socio-economic aspects of alternative solutions 	<p>Not implemented</p>	<p>No voluntary contribution or opportunity for external funding were identified yet to support these activities.</p>

CA 2 b	Anthropogenic underwater noise
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Expected outcomes	<p>Main anthropogenic activities generating underwater noise are monitored in the ACCOBAMS Area</p> <p>Use of mitigation measures for anthropogenic activities generating underwater noise</p>
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Proposed Action(s)	Means of implementation	<i>Status for the current triennium</i>	<i>Detailed developments</i>
Encourage the monitoring of anthropogenic activities generating underwater noise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raising awareness amongst countries by organising an awareness & consultation workshop at national level with different stakeholders, especially at ministerial level, • Involving different national stakeholders (coordination by National Focal Points) and identify an entity that can centralize information at the national level, • Inviting Port authorities to develop incentive programmes to encourage the monitoring of and reduction in underwater noise emissions, and to report regularly all activities generating noise to improve the mapping for Noise Hotspots Report, • Organising trainings for national entities on noise monitoring (CB), including analyses of PAM collected data in some identified priority areas, • Taking into consideration work achieved and advices provided by the JNWG, • Managing the regional noise register, • Feeding data on impulsive noise 		<p>Two main initiatives regarding noise monitoring have been implemented by ACCOBAMS in 2023:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the QUIETSEAS project which started in February 2021, ending 31 May 2023. This project aims to support EU Member States and Competent Authorities providing methods and tools to facilitate Descriptor 11-Underwater noise management. - the assessment of underwater noise pollution in the Mediterranean Sea as part of the 2023 Quality Status Report of the Barcelona Convention. <p>The ACCOBAMS Secretariat is also partner in the SEASOUNDS project which has received funding from the European Union's Horizon Programme under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie. This project is designed to bridge existing knowledge gaps concerning the understanding, characterization and modelling of the entire underwater noise propagation chain, from the noise sources to the marine animal.</p> <p>The Secretariat has participated in the 1st SEASOUNDS Workshop held in Hyères, France on 9-14 February 2025 on "Underwater noise pollution, bridging the gaps between wave physics and life science" and gave a presentation titled "Management of underwater noise issue by ACCOBAMS at regional level (Mediterranean and Black Seas)". It has also participated in the second Workshop in Venice, Italy on 15-20 September 2025.</p> <p>NETCCOBAMS is currently being developed to assess anthropogenic noise emissions in the Agreement area. It is important for the assessment work in line with the MSFD threshold values and the EcAp process.</p> <p>The Secretariat participated to different meetings of the EU - Technical Group on Underwater Noise (TG-Noise): 19 June 2023, 16-17 October 2023, 29 May 2024, 5 November 2024 and 29 May 2025.</p>

	<p>generating sources from the entire ACCOBAMS Area into the existing International Noise Registry managed by ACCOBAMS,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing necessary data to update risk maps and generate maps for the Black Sea by considering relevant target species, • Reviewing the Noise Hotspots Report II, • Revising and updating the ACCOBAMS Guidelines on underwater noise taking into account outcomes from recent projects, • Producing a study on the effects of underwater noise generated by the foreseeable increase of wind farms in the ACCOBAMS Area, • Developing cooperation on underwater noise issue with other international Organisations, such as Barcelona Convention (ECAP) and EU (MSFD) and collaboration with other regional projects on noise issues 		<p>The Secretariat has also participated to the SERENADE Conference organised in Toulon, France in June 2024 to present the work done jointly with UNEP/MAP.</p> <p>The Secretariat has participated to the 12th Meeting of the Ecosystem Approach Coordination Group on 15 September 2025 in Athens Greece and presented the updated Guidance Factsheets on underwater noise.</p>
<p>Encourage the use of mitigation measures for anthropogenic activities generating underwater noise</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improving enhanced training of regulators on the appropriate application of the CMS Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) and ACCOBAMS Noise Guidelines • Producing common minimum requirements for appropriate national legislation and other regulations regarding underwater 		<p>The Secretariat promoted MMO/PAM Certificate Courses organised by accredited Partners</p>

	<p>noise impacts on cetacean</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promoting the ACCOBAMS Highly qualified MMO/PAM operators' certificate • Supporting the development and update of the ACCOBAMS HQMMO/PAM training tools • Granting the status of ACCOBAMS HQMMO Partners to entities for the implementation of the Highly qualified MMO/PAM operators' certificate • Revising and updating the ACCOBAMS "Guide for Parties to use mitigation measures " • Developing joint project/initiatives for simulating mitigation measures such as speed reduction and related benefits • Developing cooperation on underwater noise issues with other International Organisations 		
Exchange of relevant information with competent authorities before military activities / exercises	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular information letter from the Secretariat to NATO and to national Navy forces to raise attention of impacts on noise on cetaceans and to propose mitigation measures • Workshop/meeting with national Navy forces and NATO members 	Ongoing	A joint CMS/ACCOBAMS/ASCOBANS workshop with National Navies was organised on 26-27 November 2024, in Toulon, France, thanks to a voluntary contribution from Monaco.

CA 2 c	Ship strikes
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Expected outcomes	Reduction of ship strikes in high risk areas
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Proposed Action(s)	Means of implementation	Status for the current triennium	Detailed developments
Monitor / assess high-risk areas for ship strikes (CCH) in the Mediterranean Sea and adjacent Atlantic Area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encouraging the entry of ship strikes data in relevant databases such as the IWC central database on ship strikes • Improving protocols for the identification of ship strikes via necropsies in collaboration with the Pelagos Agreement • Identifying high risk areas for ship strikes (CCH) by encouraging studies that improve understanding of temporal and spatial distribution of shipping and of cetaceans (IMMAs), and supporting interactive map of areas with high risk of ship strikes for crews of relevant ships • Developing cooperation on ships strike issue with other International Organisations, such as IWC, EMSA (EU) / REMPEC / IMO/ Pelagos Agreement and contributing in any other relevant initiatives, projects and workshops in the ACCOBAMS Area • Follow and assist Parties in the PSSA project process in collaboration with the Permanent Secretariat of the Pelagos Agreement 	Ongoing	<p>A project proposal named “SHIPRINT” was approved in the framework of the “Pelagos Initiative” call. The SHIPRINT project aims to support the 4 ACCOBAMS countries (Spain, France, Italy and Monaco) which have submitted a PSSA proposal to IMO (accepted in July 2023) by offering them technical and awareness-raising solutions around 4 components:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The development of a new module in the NETCCOBAMS platform that will enable the 4 ACCOBAMS countries to track all AIS-equipped vessels in the area. This will enable countries to intervene quickly, but also to compare trends from one month to the next. 2. A series of four in-person workshops, preceded by online training courses, is being organised targeting different vessel categories. Two workshops have been already organised: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The first Workshop «Safeguarding whales in the northwestern Mediterranean Particularly Sensitive Sea Areas (PSSAs)” focused on the shipping sector was held in Marseille on 14 March 2025. - The second workshop “Collaborative Knowledge Sharing for Cetaceans’ protection in the NW PSSA” dedicated to the Passenger and Cruise shipping sector was held in Genoa on 2 October 2025. 3. A photo exhibition titled '<i>Méditerranée sauvage: cétacés en images, protection en action</i>' — aimed at raising public awareness about cetacean conservation, marine biodiversity in the Pelagos Sanctuary, and the importance of conservation efforts was organised in collaboration with the Association We Are Méditerranée and the Fédération des Groupements Français de Monaco. It was held from 2 to 13 June 2025, back-to-back with UNOC3 Conference at La Maison de France in Monaco. 4. Guidelines with advice for "Whale Safe" certification. <p>The Secretariat organised several events regarding the issue of ship strikes: including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -the organisation of a workshop during the 2023 Monaco Ocean Week, -awareness of stakeholders in the Monaco Yacht Club in October 2023 -an ACCOBAMS side event during the COP23 of the UNEP/MAP on 5 December 2023

<p>Promote the use of mitigation measures</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthening cooperation between countries that share marine areas with high risk of collision for cetaceans in order to develop a joint and coherent management for these areas • Fostering the development of incentive systems to shipping companies adopting suggested mitigation measures • Supporting national or regional projects in order to reduce the risk of collision (FLT network / REPCET system...) • Evaluation the efficiency of implemented or proposed new mitigation measures 	<p>- an ACCOBAMS side event “Speed up to slow down” during the Monaco Ocean Week on 21st March 2024.</p> <p>Furthermore, Secretariat approached shipping companies, especially through a participation at the World Shipping Council Conference on 7 November 2023 and at a round table “Noise, collisions & solutions” in July 2024).</p> <p>There is an ongoing collaboration between NETCCOBAMS and UNEP-MAP KMaP (INFO/RAC), showcasing tools and functionalities for data sharing and visualization, including an experiment displaying mean boat speed during the summer 2023 over the new PSSA area. The objective is to improve the current experiment by identifying zones where speed limits are frequently exceeded and enhancing technical/scientific cooperation to create a comprehensive database of boat speed data and meaningful risk maps</p> <p>The 2nd Coordination Meeting “The NW Mediterranean PSSA and its associated protective measures” has been held at the Italian Coast Guard Headquarters, Rome, on 9 September 2024 and ACCOBAMS was invited to present the NETCCOBAMS Platform</p> <p>The Secretariat is also involved in the EU-Life funded project SeaDetect “Marine automated DETECTION and anti-collision system with cetaceans “.</p>
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CA 2 d	Cetacean watching
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Expected outcomes	Cetacean watching activities are properly conducted in the ACCOBAMS Area
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Proposed Action(s)	Means of implementation	<i>Status for the current triennium</i>	<i>Detailed developments</i>
Monitoring status of whale watching activities in the ACCOBAMS Area and their potential adverse impacts on individual cetaceans and on populations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Revising the Guidelines for commercial cetacean-watching in the ACCOBAMS Area Analysis of existing national legislations related to whale watching regulation Implementing a pilot study to define the whale watching 'carrying capacity' in a targeted geographical area where commercial whale watching is intensively practiced Collaborating with relevant organisations, such as IWC and Pelagos Agreement 	Ongoing	<p>A meeting of the Whale Watching Working Group of the ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee was facilitated by the Secretariat in February 2023 to discuss the activities of the 2023-2025 Program of Work.</p> <p>ACCOBAMS launched a survey for ACCOBAMS National Focal Points to collect information on the regulatory framework for Whale-Watching activities in the ACCOBAMS Area.</p> <p>A workshop "Enhancing Whale-Watching Practices for Cetacean Conservation: an ACCOBAMS Workshop" was held during the 36th ECS Conference.</p>
Promote the use of whale watching vessels as platforms of opportunity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reviewing and updating the data collection form for commercial whale watching vessels and test the revised common procedure for whale watching activity in identified pilot areas (e.g. the Ligurian-Provençal Basin, including the Pelagos Sanctuary, Gibraltar Strait, and south Portugal) Organising photo-ID and data collection training for whale 	Ongoing	<p>The Whale Watching Working Group of the ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee has agreed to continue testing the common procedure and to assess what has been done so far and the lessons learnt from the different areas where the protocol is being tested before starting reviewing and updating the data collection protocol.</p> <p>The ACCOBAMS Secretariat participated in the workshop "Setting up an international network to reinforce the collaboration with Marine Mammal Tourism companies and enhance their sustainability" organised by CIMA Research Foundation, Museu da baleia and Miraceti on 17 April 2023 during the 2023 ECS conference.</p>

	watching operators, with the final goal of sharing the collected data		
Support the implementation of the HQWW certificate in the ACCOBAMS Area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promoting the implementation of the HQWW certificate by Parties and in areas -based management measures in collaboration with relevant projects/ organisations • Organising Trainings on HQWW (CB Parties) • Liaising with relevant tourism Organisations 	Ongoing	<p>In 2023 and 2024 the ACCOBAMS Secretariat provided MIRACETI with financial support for the animation of the HQWW label in France and particularly for the training sessions for operators held in March 2023 and May 2024.</p> <p>The ACCOBAMS Secretariat renewed the trademark HQWW® registration for Monaco and the European Union in May 2024. The renewal is valid for a period of ten years.</p> <p>ACCOBAMS participated in the celebratory event marking the 10th anniversary of the High Quality Whale Watching (HQWW®) label, organised by MIRACETI on 15 November 2025 in Sainte-Maxime, France. ACCOBAMS also supported the creation of a video recap of the event, aimed at contributing to the sustainable development of whale-watching activities, as well as enhancing knowledge and conservation of cetaceans on a broader scale through an integrated and coordinated approach.</p>

CA 2 e	Marine litter
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Expected outcomes	Improved monitoring of marine litter in relation with cetaceans.
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Proposed Action(s)	Means of implementation	Status for the current triennium	Detailed developments
Monitor the impacts of marine litter (ingested marine litter / microplastics / entanglements in ghost nets) on cetaceans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting pilot actions to implement the best practice guidelines for cetacean <i>post-mortem</i> investigation, including the assessment of ingested marine litter and entanglement in ghost nets • Promoting/ supporting/ liaising with projects, research activities in order to develop standardised methods to detect the occurrence and effects of marine litter, including micro-plastics, in cetacean species • Identifying hot-spot areas for marine litter accumulation and identifying threats to cetacean species occurring in those areas • Developing a proposal to use cetacean species as indicators of marine litter in the ACCOBAMS Area • Collaborating with relevant Organisations (ASCOBANS, IWC, MEDPOL, IMO, FAO) including through joint activities • Promoting campaigns on the ban of single-use plastics 	Ongoing	<p>The report “Study on the hotspots of interactions between cetaceans and marine litter in the ACCOBAMS area” presented as draft at MOP8 was finalised after SC15.</p> <p>The Secretariats of ASCOBANS and ACCOBAMS jointly organised a workshop on Marine Debris - New and Emerging Aspects, on 15 April 2023 in O Grove, Galicia, Spain. The overarching aim of the workshop was to achieve a better understanding of the effects of marine debris on cetaceans, including the relationship between ingested marine litter and associated toxic chemicals, pathogens and pharmaceuticals.</p> <p>The ACCOBAMS Secretariat has organised, in collaboration with Padova University, 2 workshops in 2024:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Second Workshop on ingested marine litter monitoring & entanglement evidences in the Adriatic Sea, in hybrid format, in Padova, Italy, on 21-22 February 2024 - A Workshop on ingested marine litter monitoring & entanglement evidences in the ACCOBAMS Area, on 6-7 April 2024, in Catania, Italy <p>Conclusions were presented and endorsed by the IWC SC in May 2024.</p>

CA 2 f	Chemical & biological pollution
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Expected outcomes	Improved monitoring of chemical & biological pollution on cetaceans.
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Proposed Action(s)	Means of implementation	<i>Status for the current triennium</i>	<i>Detailed developments</i>
Monitor the impact of chemical & biological pollution (such as pathogens, invasive species) on cetaceans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing an inventory of institutions or laboratories within the ACCOBAMS Area able to analyze samples for legacy and emerging pollutants • Establishing a common database on diseases and chemical burdens • Assessing cumulative effects and multiple stressors, including chemicals, marine litter, climate change, and emerging pathogens, on cetaceans in ACCOBAMS Area • Disseminating the best practices to assess the impact of chemical pollution on cetaceans with a focus on emerging contaminants • Organise training on the best practices to assess the impact of chemical pollution • Collaborating with relevant Organisations, initiatives and projects • Encouraging Parties to follow existing protocols to minimize the introduction of pollutants in the marine environment 	Ongoing	<p>The reports “Bibliographic review on the impact of chemical pollution on cetaceans, including the identification of ad hoc research projects aimed at assessing chemical pollution on cetaceans in the ACCOBAMS Area” and “Guidelines on the best practices to assess the impact of chemical pollution on cetaceans / to measure the chemical contamination on cetaceans” presented as draft at MOP8 were finalised after SC15.</p> <p>The Secretariats of ASCOBANS and ACCOBAMS jointly organised a workshop on Marine Debris - New and Emerging Aspects, on 15 April 2023 in O Grove, Galicia, Spain. The overarching aim of the workshop was to achieve a better understanding of the effects of marine debris on cetaceans, including the relationship between ingested marine litter and associated toxic chemicals, pathogens and pharmaceuticals.</p>

CA 2 g	Climate change
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Expected outcomes	ACCOBAMS cooperates with regional initiatives on climate change, taking into account cetacean conservation
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Proposed Action(s)	Means of implementation	<i>Status for the current triennium</i>	<i>Detailed developments</i>
Contribute to regional initiatives on climate change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Liaising with relevant CMS Working Group • Participating in Meetings and side events 	Not implemented	No voluntary contribution nor external fundings were identified to contribute to regional initiatives on climate change.

CA 2 i	Captivity related issues
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Expected outcomes	All specimens held in captivity in the ACCOBAMS Area are listed Advisory Committee on captivity issues and semi-enclosed facilities is operational
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Proposed Action(s)	Means of implementation	<i>Status for the current triennium</i>	<i>Detailed developments</i>
Identify specimens held in captivity in the ACCOBAMS Area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishing an ACCOBAMS Advisory Committee on semi-enclosed facilities that should provide guidance, based on best scientific evidence, to interested Parties on all the questions related to semi-enclosed facilities for cetaceans on the basis of the conclusion of the Follow-up Committee related to “interactions between humans and dolphins by resolution 3.13 (dolphin interaction programme) • Updating the overview of specimens held in captivity in the ACCOBAMS Area in collaboration with international organisations (such as CITES) • Reinforcing collaboration with NFP / NGO/ ACCOBAMS Partners / CITES authorities in each country • Developing a template of genetic passport for different cetacean species kept in captivity, in collaboration with the ACCOBAMS Advisory Committee on Captivity related issues 	Ongoing	<p>During SC15, the Scientific Committee endorsed the amended Terms of Reference of the ACCOBAMS Advisory Committee on semi-enclosed facilities and approved its composition.</p> <p>Experts have been recruited to develop draft guidelines for best practices during the installation and management of semi-enclosed facilities for cetacean species in the ACCOBAMS area and to develop a draft template for a genetic passport for cetacean species that are kept in captivity, in the ACCOBAMS area, in collaboration with the ACCOBAMS Advisory Committee on semi-enclosed facilities.</p> <p>SC16 adopted the Recommendation 16.13 “Semi-captivity (passport & guidelines)”.</p>

CA 3 a	Area-based measures for cetacean conservation
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Expected outcomes	<p>Cetacean Critical Habitats are updated</p> <p>IMMAs are updated and new ones are identified</p> <p>Implementation of relevant measures are initiated in some pilot Cetacean Critical Habitats</p>
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Proposed Action(s)	Means of implementation	<i>Status for the current triennium</i>	<i>Detailed developments</i>
Regularly update Cetacean Critical Habitats (CCH) and Important Marine mammal Areas (IMMAs), as appropriate, including by identifying priority areas for action to mitigate the known threats (bycatch...) / area-based management measures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gathering data, in particular through the organisation of regional workshops to update CCH, taking into account IMMAs and EBSAs process) Gathering data on human activities and cetaceans, in particular through the organisation of regional workshops with relevant regional organisation (GFCM, maritime organisation...), taking into account the IMMAs and EBSAs process and upcoming regional study from Duke Marine Lab. Launching a working group in order to review the best metrics to use considering the CCH aim 	Ongoing	<p>The Secretariat has assisted the Task Manager in the organisation of 2 workshops:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hybrid workshop on redefinition of the CCH process in Monaco on 18 March 2024 Workshop back-to-back with the 2024 ECS Conference on human activity data and mapping for the ACCOBAMS CCH process in Catania, Italy on 8 April 2024
Support implementation of relevant measures for adequate management in CCH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identifying and promoting relevant management measures in pilot CCH, in collaboration with all stakeholders, including network of MPAs managers Raising Parties' awareness on CCHs, on their added value during online workshops, on the use of existing IMMAs to identify and to declare new MPAs or MPAs network Collaborating with other Organisations, such as UNEP-MAP/ SPA-RAC, BSC, IMO, IWC, and GFCM, and in particular through the Strategical alliance 		<p>Relevant information was put in NETCCOBAMS</p> <p>The Secretariat was involved in some MSP projects and participated in some workshops (MSP4BIO workshop, 24 October 2024, Marseille, France).</p> <p>Informal discussions were carried out between UNEP/MAP, SPA/RAC, GFCM, IUCN Med, and ACCOBAMS on the 30 x 30 target and BBNJ treaty.</p>

CA 4 a	Information /Communication / Awareness about cetaceans
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Expected outcomes	All ACCOBAMS Bodies, national focal/contact points, Partners and other relevant national institutions, Organisations and experts are familiar with activities implemented by or relevant for ACCOBAMS and share accurately information General public and other relevant stakeholders are aware about cetaceans and need for their conservation through activities supported by or linked to ACCOBAMS
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Proposed Action(s)	Means of implementation	<i>Status for the current triennium</i>	<i>Detailed developments</i>
Maintain regular information/ communication about ongoing activities, cooperation and funding possibilities, cetacean conservation scientists and experts operating in the region and other relevant information; facilitate communication among cetacean conservation actors of the ACCOBAMS Area, in particular in Southern Mediterranean countries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementing the ACCOBAMS Communication Strategy, in particular: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - defining ACCOBAMS as brand - upgrading communication products - improving presence on social networks - <i>assessing</i> the effectiveness of the Communication Strategy • Development of NETCCOBAMS Platform (MA1a) • Promoting the use of the HQWW label (CA2d) • Linking conservation with culture (UNESCO/ Ocean decade) by initiating joint natural history exhibitions and offering expertise and knowledge 	Ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A guidance manual to manage social media, notably interactions with digital communities, and the process of content production and & publication has been created; • An ACCOBAMS LinkedIn page was created; • Prepared content is posted twice a week on existing ACCOBAMS accounts on social media platforms: Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter; • ACCOBAMS visual identity in social media posts has been implemented. • Quarterly assessment of implementation was delivered. • News on HQWW label, certification and certified operators at the end of the season • Updated templates reflecting ACCOBAMS' visual identity have been prepared for use in letterheads and other official documents. • A process is underway to register DOI codes for each official ACCOBAMS report in order to enhance their traceability and accessibility. <p>ACCOBAMS Secretariat attended several events to share information about its activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Colloque of the “Academie de la Mer” in Monaco (July 2024) - Exhibit of photographer Greg Lecoeur titled “Sanctuaire Pelagos” - Annual Meetings of Pelagos Agreement and National committee - Meetings of the “Cercle des Partenaires” of Monaco Explorations - opening of the “Mostra Mediterranea” Expo, (February 2025). <p>The ACCOBAMS Secretariat organised a workshop titled “Cetacean Culture: Navigating Change in the ACCOBAMS Region and Beyond – Joint workshop with CMS during the 36th Annual Conference of the European Cetacean Society held in Ponta Delgada, Azores, on 12-16, May 2025.</p>
Promote citizen sciences uses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overview of initiatives and tools already in place / in order to mutualise efforts in particular at the 	Not implemented	No voluntary contribution nor external fundings were identified to promote citizen sciences uses.

	<p>level of young people</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workshop on how to collect data and data exchanges through citizen apps (standardisation of the protocols and methodology for data collection) in the context of proposed analytical techniques 		
Introduce in a new Country / Disseminate the ACCOBAMS Teaching Module courses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introducing new teaching module in universities dealing with cetacean conservation • Translation of the Teaching Module on national languages of ACCOBAMS Parties 	Ongoing	An update of the 2012 teaching module courses is ongoing.
Promote and disseminate project results and tools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organising a Conference on cetacean conservation in South Mediterranean Countries - CSMC • Disseminating projects tools such as “whale risk” • Special ACCOBAMS issue in a scientific review • Encouraging publications of national experts in international journal with handbooks with simple and standardised methods and specific trainings and workshops 	Ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CSMC6 organised in Monastir, Tunisia, on 13-14 November 2023. • ACCOBAMS supported 6 Articles for publication at Frontiers Special Issue on ASI.

ANNEX 1**Main Meetings attended by the Secretariat in 2023-2025 (up to November 2025)**

Dates	Name of the Meeting	Location	Organised by
2023			
9-10 March	Meeting of the Ecosystem Approach Correspondence Groups on Monitoring (CORMON), Biodiversity and Fisheries	Athens, Greece	UNEP/MAP
16 - 20 April	34th ECS Annual Conference	Galicia, Spain	ECS
5 May	Sixteenth meeting of the GFCM Compliance Committee	Rhodes, Cyprus	GFCM
22 May	Final Meeting of QUIETSEAS	Brussels, Belgium	QUIETSEAS
22-24 May	Sixteenth Meeting of SPA/BD Focal Points	Malta	SPA/RAC
14-15 June	Working group on cetacean monitoring under MSFD	Rome, Italy	ABIOMMED
19 June	EU - Technical Group on Underwater Noise (TG-Noise)	Online	European Commission (DG ENV)
27-28 June	Integrated Meeting of the Ecosystem Approach Correspondence Groups (CORMONs)	Athens, Greece	UNEP/MAP
12-13 September	Workshop 'Together for the Med'	Malaga, Spain	Together for the Med'
10 October	National French Committee – Pelagos Sanctuary	Bastia, France	Pelagos France
7 November	World Shipping Council Conference	Brussels, Belgium	World Shipping Council
20-22 November	Pelagos Agreement 9 th Meeting of the Parties	Nice	Pelagos Agreement
12 December	ABIOMMED Final Scientific Conference	Athens, Greece	ABIOMMED
2024			
12-17 February	14th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS COP14)	Samarkand, Uzbekistan	CMS
8-12 April	35th ECS Annual Conference,	Catania, Sicily, Italy	ECS
16-18 April	6th edition of the IETA-led European Climate Summit	Firenze, Italy	IETA
9 July	Round table: Noise, collisions & solutions	Geneva, Switzerland	IFAW
12-13 July	Colloque Pêche ou Surpêche	Monaco	Académie de la Mer
10-12 September	10th Meeting of the Parties to the Agreement on the Conservation of Small Cetaceans in the Baltic, North East Atlantic, Irish and North Seas (ASCOBANS)	Odense, Denmark/ online	ASCOBANS
17-20 September	7th Meeting of the Sessional Committee of the CMS Scientific Council	Bonn, Germany	CMS
16 October	National French Committee – Pelagos Sanctuary	Menton, France	Pelagos France
2025			
9-14 February	First SEASOUNDS Workshop Underwater noise pollution, bridging the gaps between wave physics and life science	Hyères, France	SEASOUNDS
March	Workshop Together for the Med Network	Tunis, Tunisia	Blue Seeds

Dates	Name of the Meeting	Location	Organised by
7-8 April	Meeting of the Ecosystem Approach Correspondence Group on Monitoring (CORMON) Biodiversity and Fisheries held on 7 and 8 April 2025	Athens, Greece	UNEP/MAP
9-10 April	11th Meeting of the SAPBIO National Correspondents	Athens, Greece	UNEP/MAP
12-16 May	36th ECS Annual Conference	Azores, Portugal	ECS
20- 22 May	Seventeenth Meeting of SPA/BD Focal Points	Istanbul, Türkiye	SPA/RAC
29 May	EU - Technical Group on Underwater Noise (TG-Noise)	Online	European Commission (DG ENV)
3-6 June	One Ocean Science Congress	Nice, France	UN
7-8 June	Blue Economic Finance Forum	Monaco	
9-13 June	Third United Nations Ocean Conference (UNOC3)	Nice, France	UN
July	Academie de la Mer	Monaco	Academie de la Mer
15 September	12th Meeting of the Ecosystem Approach Coordination Group	Athens, Greece	UNEP/MAP
16-19 September	Meeting of the MAP Focal Points	Athens, Greece	UNEP/MAP

ANNEX X - REPORT OF THE SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE

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I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY (by the SC Chair & the SC Vice-Chair)

The SC deliberations on the priority work that the Scientific Committee have developed till the last meeting - SC16 meeting – held in early December 2024 in Barcelona, Spain. The priorities identified by the SC15 meeting have been implemented, based on the actions and activities identified in the Work Programme of ACCOBAMS for the 2023-2025 triennium, as established by the MOP8 through Resolution 8.2.

- Effort is ongoing to develop and streamline the next ACCOBAMS Survey Initiative (ASI 2) to progress with the ACCOBAMS Long Term Monitoring Strategy (LTMP). Different meetings have discussed this important topic, and we are now ready, together with the Secretariat, to propose a way forward.
- The ASI Special Issue on Frontiers in Marine Science, Marine Megafauna, titled ‘The ACCOBAMS Survey Initiative (ASI): Implementing Large Scale Surveys for Marine Megafauna in the Mediterranean and Black Seas’ has been published, with 13 manuscripts. There is a dedicated volume available open access, including contributions dealing with different aspects of the ASI effort and covering both the Mediterranean and the Black Seas. The Special Issue also includes an editorial with a short and concise summary of each paper.
- Conservation Management Plans (CMP) are being developed for several species, with a few more species from the Mediterranean and Black Seas currently in the drafting phases. We have been discussing about a Stakeholders’ workshop for fin whales and Risso’s dolphins, which should be organised within the next year. The draft plan has been presented and discussed during the IWC Scientific Committee in May 2024. The Terms of Reference for the CMP Stakeholders workshops were presented and discussed during the SC meeting in Barcelona.
- A full-day expert workshop on fin whales was held ahead of the 35th European Cetacean Society conference in Catania, Sicily, on 8 April 2024. The workshop focussed on reviewing recent studies (after 2019) on Mediterranean Sea fin whales with discussions on knowledge gaps and future directions. The objective of this new expert workshop was not to revise the draft CMP but rather to review the most recent research on Mediterranean fin whales to ensure that, if necessary, IWC/ACCOBAMS can update the scientific background to the draft CMP and any consequential amendments to proposed actions prior to the stakeholder workshop. The primary focus of the workshop was on population structure and movements, seasonal distribution and abundance, and identifying important remaining knowledge gaps (i.e., stock structure).
- Further to the 'Marine Debris Workshop - New and Emerging Aspects' that ACCOBAMS ran jointly with ASCOBANS in April 2023, ACCOBAMS ran a follow-up workshop on 'Ingested Marine Litter Monitoring and Entanglement Evidences' in the ACCOBAMS Area, 6-7 April 2024 in Catania Italy. The recommendations of this workshop were presented to the Scientific Committee of the International Whaling Committee at its latest meeting, which endorsed them.
- One hybrid workshop was organised in Monaco on Area-based measures for cetacean conservation. The C.C.H. process has been redefined as “Cetacean Cooccurrence with Human activities”. We are now liaising with Duke Marine Lab (USA), which lead a significant work on species density modelling of all cetacean’s species over the ACCOBAMS area, to strengthen collaboration and benefit of this work if it fits the CCH process requirements.
- Different workshops have been organised during the 36th European Cetacean Society conference, which was held in the Azores, Portugal, in May 2025. The workshops covered the following topics:
 - best practices and guidelines related to invasive research within the ACCOBAMS region, including *inter alia* satellite telemetry, in collaboration with the IWC.
 - Cetacean watching
 - Cetacean culture
- The ACCOBAMS Secretariat is currently involved in two main projects funded or in the process of being funded by the Pelagos Initiative, through support from the Prince Albert II Foundation:

- Shiprint project, which aims to support the implementation of Associated Protective Measures (APMs) within the Northwestern Mediterranean Sea Particularly Sensitive Sea Area (NW Med PSSA). This project includes tracking AIS-equipped vessels, organising workshops, raising awareness, and developing guidelines for a whale-safe certificate.
- Pelagos Consortium, which aims at establishing a group of different stakeholders within the Pelagos Sanctuary to apply an ecosystem approach to the area; this will consist of four different pillars, with the ACCOBAMS Secretariat participating to different actions on research, outreach, stakeholders' engagement.

II. REPORTS OF THE SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE REGIONAL REPRESENTATIVES

1. Report on the conservation status of cetaceans and relevant activities in Western Mediterranean and contiguous Atlantic area

- Countries of the region: Algeria, France, Italy (Western coast), Monaco, Morocco, Portugal, Spain.
- Overview of activities in the Region in 2023-2025

Algeria: a National Action Plan has been produced. Progress in the new regulatory framework for the protection of marine resources. The available data on stranding for a period since 1973 were reviewed and compiled in the CNRDPA's National geodatabase prior to the implementation of the project named: «Establishment of a new operational network for monitoring cetaceans stranding along the Algerian coastline». A protocol was developed to enhance the data collection during the stock assessment surveys and should be applied along the Algerian coast during the next Pelagic surveys (ALPELs).

Italy: Guidelines and standard protocols of the national stranding networks are being updated.

Completing the monitoring activities for the second cycle of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD). Data are considered for the IV reporting of the HD, too. Data have been considered also for the "Spatial analyses to assess cetacean distribution and abundance in the PELAGOS Sanctuary and surrounding areas" initiative A workshop on cetacean abundance estimation through distance sampling methods (WKCETAB) aimed to start a coordination among the experts from EU Regions on method to estimate cetacean abundance and distribution has been hosted by ISPRA. A Life Mare Natura Project has been started in the 2023: "*Conservation of priority species of marine megafauna in Italy and Greece and Italy*". Coordinated by the Hellenic Center for Marine Research (HCMR) and in collaboration with ISPRA. Progress of the Life Conceptu Maris Project (ISPRA).

Concerning the Anthropogenic underwater noise the project TG Noise in the framework of MSFD, is aimed to set threshold values for both continuous and impulsive noise at EU level and PIAQUO Project aimed at reducing the impact of maritime traffic noise on marine ecosystems.

For ship strikes the IWC global database have been updated with data from NW Mediterranean and collaboration between Italy, France, Monaco and Spain are currently in the process of implementing the associated protective measures and data collection and technical working groups about ship strikes have been created.

Morocco: The Stranding Monitoring Network (SMN) of the National Institute of Fisheries Research (INRH) oversees the tracking of marine mammal strandings along Morocco's Mediterranean and Atlantic coasts.

A Project aimed at the *Contribution to the understanding of the interaction phenomenon between the bottlenose dolphin (Tursiops truncatus) and purse seine fishing* has been implemented.

Portugal: National stranding network of INSF fully implemented and operational along the entire coastline (4 regional networks). A project on the bioacoustics repertoires of *Delphinus delphis* and *Tursiops truncatus* in the Algarve Region has been launched. The working group of the National stranding network elaborated a national plan to reduce Bycatch. Several projects are ongoing from the University of Porto / Interdisciplinary Centre of Marine and Environmental Research covering cetacean's scientific and conservation aspects.

Spain:

- Implementation of periodic aerial surveys to assess cetacean distribution and abundances in Spanish waters at a regional scale. The first of these surveys was carried out in summer 2023 and the second one in summer 2025. These surveys derived in abundance estimates for most cetacean species in the region for 2023 and will be used to assess cetacean distribution. Analyses of the 2025 surveys are still ongoing.
- Implementation of photo-identification surveys to assess abundance, determine population parameters and habitat use of several management units (MUs) within the Spanish Mediterranean waters and an in the contiguous Atlantic area. These included four management units of three different species in the Mediterranean Sea, namely two bottlenose dolphin MUs (one in the Balearic Island and another one in the Strait of Gibraltar), the Sperm whale MU in the Balearic Islands and the long-finned pilot whale MU in the Strait of Gibraltar. An additional two MUs from the contiguous Atlantic area were included: The bottlenose dolphin MU in continental shelf waters of the Gulf of Cadiz and the Killer whale MU of the Gulf of Cadiz and contiguous waters.
- MITECO, through the LIFE IP Intemares project, has put out to tender three contracts for cetacean collisions with large vessels. Two of them in Canary Islands waters and the third in the Balearic Islands. In addition, through a contract with the Centre for Studies and Experimentation of Public Works (CEDEX), it has been commissioned to prepare an analysis of maritime traffic and collision hazards for both areas.
- In the Balearic Islands, through Intemares, the design and execution of campaigns have been contracted to improve knowledge of the distribution of sperm whales in the waters of the Balearic archipelago. This will allow for the design and testing of a program of measures to minimize collisions between cetaceans and vessels. The actions planned under this contract were: a) Execution of 4 campaigns per year (one at each station) for 2 years (8 campaigns in total), lasting 7 days each (56 days in total), using hydrophone tracking, b) Collection of 20 samples for genetic study, c) Satellite tagging of 10 individuals, d) Passive acoustic monitoring campaigns using 3 hydrophones, e) Monitoring the sperm whale population from ferries with biweekly shipments on five routes between the Balearic Islands and the Iberian Peninsula, f) Data analysis, preparation of results reports, and a program of measures, g) Pilot project to test one of the program's measures to verify its effectiveness in reducing collision risks.
- CEDEX has already submitted the maritime traffic and hazard analysis for the two study areas of this project: the Ibiza Channel and the Mallorca Channel. This analysis will now be cross-referenced with species distribution models to identify the areas with the highest collision risk by season. The species' collision risks with maritime traffic in the area will be analysed, and as a pilot project, mathematical modelling and GIS will determine how reducing speeds on different sections of passenger vessels would impact risk minimization. A thermal camera will also be tested.
- Also, through Intemares, satellite tagging has been contracted for 10 sperm whales in the Strait, 12 common pilot whale, and 14 fin whales in the Mediterranean to determine their distribution and habitat use and to propose conservation measures. For the same purpose, MITECO has contracted the satellite tagging of 6 orcas and has expanded to 4 more tagging.
- MITECO, through Intemares projects contracted in 2021 a pilot project to try to minimize interactions between orcas and sailboats in the Strait of Gibraltar.
- In February 2024, MITECO held a workshop in Madrid with international experts on orca interactions. This workshop was attended by orca experts from around the world and representatives from the conservation and

maritime navigation authorities of Spain, Portugal, and Morocco. The purpose of the workshop was to exchange knowledge on interactions, identify future research needs, and propose recommendations on how to manage these interactions by the governments of Spain, Portugal, and Morocco. The workshop report, which includes conclusions and recommendations, was endorsed at the IWC Scientific Committee meeting held in spring 2024.

Tunisia: interaction with fisheries and aquaculture project include PAM, population monitoring, and mitigation measure throughout pinger. National stranding network is actively involved in fostering collaboration with all stakeholders to collect accurate data and to provide urgent response to alerts. A study on the Interaction of cetaceans with marine debris in Tunisia is conducted by INSTM researchers.

- Major issue(s) or main threats or “hot” topics that have emerged during the said period for the Region:
 - ✓ The lack of data and scientific works on cetacean (publications) and dedicated funds in some countries.
 - ✓ Collision of Sperm Whale in the Strait of Gibraltar and Balearic Islands.
 - ✓ Increase of the water temperature including marine heat waves.
 - ✓ Overlapping of fishing areas with cetacean’s habitats in some areas: destabilization of populations, chasing of preferred habitats, depletion of prey --> interaction with fishing gear (economic losses for fishermen and risk of bycatch).
- Recommendations / suggestions for conservation Improvement
 - ✓ Improve the maintenance and upkeep of the tissue bank of INRH and where it is needed.
 - ✓ Support capacity building action (necropsy, postmortem investigations, observation at sea, photographic documentation, passive acoustic and stable isotopes) where it is needed.
 - ✓ Further evaluate the functioning of the national stranding networks where it’s need.
 - ✓ Support cetacean observation surveys where it’s needed.
 - ✓ Identification of funding to conduct studies and boost scientific publications.
 - ✓ Encourage and make citizen science actions more profitable.
 - ✓ Strengthening cooperation between Mediterranean research centres.
 - ✓ Identification of IMMA & CCH areas.
 - ✓ A strong and effective synergy is required among the various research and monitoring programs conducted at a national level within the framework of European conventions such as the Habitats Directive and MSFD, both in the definition of methodologies and in the subsequent data analysis phase. to ensure that the next ASI will take advantage of the planned national activities in the framework of both the MSFD and HD directives, hence incorporate them to benefit from.

2. Report on the conservation status of cetaceans and relevant activities in Central Mediterranean

- Countries of the region: Albania, Croatia, Italy (Adriatic coast), Libya, Malta, Montenegro, Slovenia, Tunisia.
- Overview of activities in the Region in 2023-2025

During the 2023–2025 period, cetacean research and conservation activities in the Central Mediterranean have been unevenly distributed, with some countries maintaining strong, continuous monitoring programmes and others showing limited or no activity. Overall, progress has been made in long-term population studies, fishery interaction assessments, and the application of new technologies such as passive acoustic monitoring, aerial photogrammetry, environmental DNA, and UAVs. Citizen science has also become a valuable tool in some areas, helping to collect broad-scale data on sightings and strandings.

Despite these advances, significant gaps remain. In several countries, research efforts are still sporadic, and comprehensive monitoring frameworks are lacking. Stranding networks are either absent or underdeveloped in much of the region, resulting in incomplete understanding of causes of mortality and health status of populations. In other areas, however, structured programmes continue to provide valuable long-term data on population abundance, habitat use, and ecological interactions, particularly for bottlenose dolphins, deep-diving species, and, to a lesser extent, common dolphins.

Country-level highlights include:

- **Albania:** No dedicated cetacean studies; occasional bycatch reports.
- **Croatia:** Broad suite of activities including dolphin monitoring in Natura 2000 sites, deep-diver surveys, and fisheries interaction studies (e.g. LIFE Delfi), complemented by citizen science and stranding response.
- **Greece (western coast):** Multi-species research across Ionian Sea, Ambracia, Corinth, and Hellenic Trench using photo-ID, biopsy, acoustics, and aerial techniques. Ferry surveys remain important for cross-basin monitoring.
- **Italy:** Long-term studies on bottlenose and Risso's dolphins in the Adriatic and Ionian Seas, with strong focus on fishery interactions, abundance, and necropsy-based health assessments.
- **Libya:** No active programmes reported.
- **Malta:** Monitoring primarily through strandings and boat-based surveys.
- **Montenegro:** Limited but ongoing photo-ID and land-based monitoring, supplemented by opportunistic reports.
- **Slovenia:** One of the most comprehensive national efforts, combining photo-ID, acoustics, UAVs, eDNA, and pollutant studies to monitor bottlenose dolphins and other species.
- **Tunisia:** Recent efforts on dolphin–fishery interactions and passive acoustics, though data remain outdated and geographically limited.

- Major issue(s) or main threats or “hot” topics that have emerged during the said period for the Region:

Across the region, the most pressing threats include:

- Bycatch and fisheries interactions, including depredation and gear entanglement.
- Growing marine traffic and associated underwater noise, particularly during tourist seasons.
- Unregulated dolphin watching in certain areas.
- Marine litter, debris, and pollution, which affect multiple species.
- Climate change, recognised as a growing but insufficiently understood factor, especially in semi-enclosed areas like the Adriatic.
- Lack of updated or comprehensive data in some countries, limiting effective conservation planning.

- Recommendations / suggestions for conservation Improvement

Key regional recommendations include:

- Strengthening and expanding stranding response networks, including necropsy training and tissue banking.
- Increasing capacity building, particularly in passive acoustic monitoring and marine mammal observer training.
- Enhancing monitoring of fisheries interactions and developing mitigation strategies.
- Implementing regulation and licensing schemes for dolphin watching to reduce disturbance.
- Ensuring adequate and sustained funding for long-term monitoring and research.
- Applying stricter oversight for invasive research techniques (e.g., biopsies, telemetry, active acoustics), to ensure operator expertise and minimize disturbance.
- Expanding marine protected areas and identifying Important Marine Mammal Areas (IMMAs) and critical habitats.
- Conducting standardised and updated monitoring campaigns in regions with outdated or limited data.

3. Report on the conservation status of cetaceans and relevant activities in Eastern Mediterranean

- Countries of the region: Cyprus, Egypt, Greece, Lebanon, Syria, Türkiye (Mediterranean coast).

- Overview of activities in the Region in 2023-2025:

Cyprus, Greece, Lebanon, and Türkiye are advancing regional efforts for the conservation of marine mammals and biodiversity in the Eastern Mediterranean. Cyprus has submitted its Marine Action Plan roadmap, expanded monitoring of cetaceans through surveys, databases, and networks, and is addressing underwater noise, strandings, and bycatch, alongside public awareness campaigns. Greece established National Action Plans for key cetacean species, and is strengthening legal frameworks for stranding management, expanding Marine Protected Areas to meet EU biodiversity targets, and implementing large-scale projects such as LIFE MareNatura and SAve Whales to protect priority species and mitigate ship strikes. Research, citizen science, and training programs further support marine mammal conservation, while plans are underway for the establishment of a National Marine Mammal Rescue and Rehabilitation Centre. Lebanon is contributing through national monitoring surveys under EcAp MEDIII, and Türkiye has launched large-scale surveys combining visual and acoustic monitoring, recording rough-toothed dolphins for the first time in its eastern Mediterranean waters.

- Major issue(s) or main threats or “hot” topics that have emerged during the said period for the Region:

In the eastern Mediterranean, cetaceans face a range of human-induced threats across Cyprus, Greece, and Türkiye. In Cyprus, extensive underwater activities such as military exercises, sonar testing, and hydrocarbon exploration pose risks to marine mammals, compounded by the lack of trained personnel, permanent stranding networks, infrastructure to treat injured animals, baseline data on underwater noise, and certified MMO and PAM experts. In Greece, marine mammal populations are heavily impacted by fisheries, shipping, pollution, and inbreeding, with species such as the common dolphin showing unclear recovery trends. Current research underscores the necessity of assessing genomic diversity, health status, and disease dynamics in order to advance understanding and more effectively guide conservation strategies. By linking molecular data with ecological and health assessments, conservation planning can become more predictive, targeted, and effective. On Türkiye’s Mediterranean coast, continuous oil and gas operations and military activities generate significant underwater noise without sufficient mitigation measures or legislation, underscoring the urgent need for noise monitoring, impact assessment, and capacity building to safeguard cetacean populations in the region.

- Recommendations / suggestions for conservation Improvement:

Across the eastern Mediterranean, Cyprus, Greece, and Türkiye are identifying key priorities to strengthen marine mammal conservation. In Cyprus, the focus is on capacity building for a functional stranding network, developing proper infrastructure for treating injured animals, and advancing research on population monitoring and acoustic impacts. Greece highlights the need to systematically evaluate the impacts of environmental pressures and anthropogenic activities on marine mammal survival, to establish a genomic database of disease vulnerabilities, and to enhance both stranding network coordination and stranding response protocols through the integration of innovative methodologies, including environmental DNA (eDNA), to improve habitat diversity monitoring and strengthen the early detection of emerging disease and other threats to marine mammals. On Türkiye’s Mediterranean coast, priority actions include ensuring compliance with ACCOBAMS resolutions that restrict naval sonar and explosion activities near sensitive beaked whale areas, while promoting the use of Marine Mammal Observers (MMOs) and Passive Acoustic Monitoring (PAM) during seismic surveys and military activities to mitigate risks from industrial and military operations.

4. Report on the conservation status of cetaceans and relevant activities in Black Sea

- Countries of the region: Bulgaria, Georgia, Romania, Türkiye, Ukraine.

- Overview of activities in the Region in 2020-2022.

Major updates on cetacean density, abundance and distribution at the basin wide scale and also on the seasonal patterns of the harbour porpoise activity have been published. The results of the bycatch assessment were also published and widely discussed. Also, the efficiency of porpoise alerting devices (PALs) was tested to mitigate bycatch, and the PALs were considered as promising for use in the Black Sea. Threats posed by the war were identified. The activities have undertaken for continuous data acquisition in link with comprehensive cetacean population estimate and distribution, habitat use, passive acoustic monitoring, bycatch monitoring and mitigation trials, developing tissue banks, toxicology and microplastics contamination, stranding networks and events for the three subspecies inhabiting the Black Sea (*Delphinus delphis ponticus*, *Tursiops truncatus ponticus* and *Phocoena phocoena relicta*). A new IMMA (Important Marine Mammal Areas), in addition to 11 existing ones, was approved for the Eastern Anatolian waters. The assessment of the status of the three Black Sea subspecies in the IUCN Red List has been updated and submitted, now in the review process.

- Major issue(s) or main threats or “hot” topics that have emerged during the said period for the Region

The result of CeNoBS bycatch assessment showed that the bycatch of the harbour porpoise in the Black Sea exceeds the threshold for the sustainability of the population and poses a significant threat to this subspecies. The main tasks for the future activities remain from the previous period and include further updating fleet and effort assessments, enhancing the bycatch reporting and observation coverage, mortality analysis, and developing techniques for bycatch mitigation. Also, the efficiency of porpoise alerting devices (PALs) was tested to mitigate bycatch under the CetaByM project by the GFCM, and the PALs were considered as promising for use in the Black Sea.

The ongoing Russia's war against Ukraine escalated in February 2022 puts the entire Black Sea basin under a huge threat. Military activities in the marine and coastal areas may affect the marine biota in the region, including cetaceans, in multiple ways including but not limited to marine pollution, eutrophication, increased risk of infections, increased risk of bioinvasions of alien (non-indigenous) species, and other effects. Sea mines are especially threatening in short and long-term run. Also, war activities not directly related to combat are to be considered, such as construction works (especially those producing underwater noise or altering the seascape) or changes in shipping routes. The Scientific Committee specifically noted that the military operations may have adversely impacted all the riparian countries to some degree.

- Recommendations / suggestions for conservation Improvement.

The bycatch in turbot fishery and the high seasonal mortality of harbour porpoises, threatening the viability of the subspecies, it is of an urgent matter to refine and monitor estimates of porpoise abundance, population dynamics, causes of mortality and bycatch level, as well as to develop and test multiple measures to reduce bycatch. Among them, testing of porpoise alerting devices (PALs) for bycatch mitigation should be continued with their potential improvements. Also, bycatch monitoring of fisheries should be enhanced.

Comprehensive monitoring of underwater noise, marine pollution and biological indicators of stress in animals, as well as response to stranding events and studies of pathology, are necessary for understanding and managing the war impact and other human impacts (construction, seismic surveys). Cooperative regional effort is necessary for obtaining adequate material and data about the causes of mortality.

Demining measures and activities are necessary both in short and long-term run for reducing multiple threats for cetaceans, and other marine biota and research efforts. By prioritizing the removal of explosives, both historical and contemporary, using Best Available Technology and Best Environmental Practices, we can minimize the impact of explosions on the environment and support ongoing research efforts. This may include building on existing demining

initiatives in the North and Baltic Seas to develop comprehensive guidance for identifying and safely removing all types of underwater explosives, both floating and sunk.

Establishing new marine protected areas planned on the basis of earlier defined IMMAs, including transboundary and international reserves, will be important for cetacean conservation. Biosphere reserves may be suggested for areas of high cultural importance and human impact.

Improvement of effort and application of new techniques would be important for monitoring the animals in captivity to prevent illegal takes from the wild and illegal trade. No excuse or exemption can be made for takes of animals from the wild to captivity under the umbrella of stranding response effort.

The Scientific Committee recommended to organise dedicated regional workshops including the experts on the relevant topics to elaborate the road map for the Post-war Plan for the Black Sea region towards the mitigation of warfare consequences on cetaceans, their habitat and their preys; to consider specific areas, topics and activities/measures during the work on the Conservation Management Plan for the Black Sea cetaceans and the Post-war Plan for the Black Sea; and to promote implementation of applicable activities/measures under the Post-war Plan for the Black Sea as soon as it is adopted, regardless of the military situation, as some of the activities/measures are relevant at that moment.

III. REPORTS OF SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE TASK MANAGERS

In accordance with the core priorities of the 2023-2025 Working Programme, the Scientific Committee decided to designate the following Task Managers:

1. CA1a- Cetacean population estimates and distribution

- Composition

Task Manager: Tilen GENOV

Vice Task Manager: Simone PANIGADA

Support Group: Aylin AKKAYA, Antonella ARCANGELI, Marta AZZOLIN, Ibrahim BEN AMER, Greg DONOVAN, Caterina FORTUNA, Silvia FREY, Pauline GAUFFIER, Draško HOLCER, Souad LAMOUTI, Giancarlo LAURIANO, Aurelie MOULINS, Marian PAIU, Guido PIETROLUONGO, Dimitar POPOV, Yianna SAMUEL, Aviad SCHEININ, Antonio VASQUEZ, Ayaka AMAHA ÖZTÜRK

- Overview of relevant activities on this topic during the 2023/2025 triennium

The Scientific Committee adopted a number of conclusions:

- Conclusion 6. The Scientific Committee appreciated the efforts done in disseminating the ASI results through a special issue on *Frontiers in Marine Sciences* and recommended that the Secretariat makes available in the ACCOBAMS website the list of all published papers that used ASI datasets.
- Conclusion 7. The Scientific Committee welcomed the proposal of the INFO/RAC representative to amend the ASI data policy (ACCOBAMS-MOP7/2019/Inf 13) by adding a new paragraph on data license as follows: "Recalling the license definition, the ASI data policy is based on the concept of open sharing, and considers relevant policies and guidelines used by geospatial communities to ensure use and re-use of data and products. The licenses, taken into consideration, were those provided by the Creative Commons Licenses (CCL –<http://creativecommons.org>) which are the most common and used licenses available for digital material. In this framework the main license for ASI data is the CC-BY 4.0."
- Conclusion 8. The Scientific Committee adopted the Recommendation 16.3 "ASI2 and LTMP" as shown in Annex III to the SC16 report.

- Conclusion 9. The Scientific Committee recommended that the Chair submits the ASI estimates to the IWC SC for review as part of the ongoing efforts to develop internationally recognised and consistent list of approved abundance estimates.
- Conclusion 10. The Scientific Committee commended the work undertaken by the ECAP/MSFD working group, welcomed the offer of Joan GIMENEZ to be a new co-chair of the working group, and appreciated the offer by SPA/RAC to invite the co-chairs to the next Biodiversity CORMON Meeting in 2025.
- Conclusion 11. The meeting appreciated the report of the ICES Workshop on cetacean abundance estimation through distance sampling methods and recommended to pursue the collaboration with ICES on this topic.
- Conclusion 12. The Scientific Committee adopted the Recommendation 16.4 “Species list for monitoring purposes” as shown in Annex III to the SC16 report.

2. CA1d – Functional stranding networks and responses to emergency situations

- Composition

Task Manager: Pavel GOL'DIN

Vice Task Manager: Anastasia KOMNENOU

Support Group: Marta AZZOLIN, Rimel BENMESSAOUD, Olfa CHAEIB, Erdem DANYER, Aytemiz DANYER Işıl, Aimilia DROUGAS, Carolina FERNANDEZ MALDONADO, Draško HOLCER, Thierry JAUNIAUX, Celine MAHFOUZ, Sandro MAZZARIOL, Danny MORICK, Marian PAIU, Guido PIETROLUONGO, Dimitar POPOV, Yianna SAMUEL, Marina SEQUEIRA, Mark SIMMONDS, Arda TONAY

Overview of relevant activities on this topic during the 2023/2025 triennium

During the Eight Meeting of Parties to ACCOBAMS, Parties requested the creation of a regional Task Force for stranding events: The ACCOBAMS Emergency Task Force for Stranding events (AETFS). The conceptual framework for the ACCOBAMS Emergency Task Force for Stranding events (AETFS) was presented at the Joint meeting ACCOBAMS - Black Sea Commission, 6-7 March 2024. The AETFS aims at assisting emergency and unusual cetacean mortality events and more specifically to monitor and report strandings and bycatch data in the area in a common and real time repository; collect information on ongoing underwater noise sources (including military sources, seismic surveys, use of sonar for oil and gas exploration research, or other work) that effect cetaceans to be monitored, and to enhance passive acoustic monitoring; routinely carry out complete postmortem investigations, including acoustic trauma, with remote advice and support from ACCOBAMS Experts (teleneopsy), when needed; collect and preserve tissue samples and store as a back-up; support the forensic examination of samples when necessary; support live strandings and unusual mortality events responses. The Task Force is jointly chaired by Sandro Mazzariol from Padova University and Thierry Jauniaux from Liege University.

The co-chairs of the ACCOBAMS Emergency Task Force for Strandings (AETFS), reported on the activities of the Task Force to the ACCOBAMS SC. They explained that since the creation of the AETFS, several unusual mortality events occurred in the ACCOBAMS area, reported about the recent method developments and suggested the following Conclusions and recommendations:

The understanding of unusual stranding event requires rapid post-mortem examinations with complete sampling, performed by local and/or remote experts, is confirming the interest of the ACCOBAMS Emergency Task Force for Stranding events. For that, it would be relevant to:

- Be informed: information to local, regional authorities in charge of cetaceans' protection and conservation politics concerning the existence of the task force;
- Be connected: information about the AETFS on a dedicated page of NETCCOBAMS including contact persons, necropsy protocol (Best practice on cetacean post-mortem investigation and tissue sampling);
- Be ready: locally, it is necessary to identify official stranding networks, official authorities, veterinary institutions and facilities (heavy equipment...);

- Be prepared/trained: maintain participation at necropsy and teleneecropsy training sessions to develop and improve remote advice for dissection and samplings (see the ACCOBAMS/MOROCCO PROJECT: “Training in teleneecropsy and standardisation of cetacean stranding response methods”); new technologies for training as virtual reality and metaverse should be also put in place
- Be standardised: to allow comparison in post-mortem investigations the use of the: “Best practice on cetacean post-mortem investigation and tissue sampling” and Resolution 7.14 for harmonising diagnosis is essential.

The 17th annual marine mammal necropsy workshop was organised by 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), Institute for Terrestrial and Aquatic Wildlife Research, University of Veterinary Medicine Hannover (Germany) and the department of Comparative Biomedicine and Food Science, (University of Padova, Italy). The main goal of this workshop was to train experts biologists and veterinarians on the European Best Practice Document on cetaceans’ postmortem investigations and tissue sampling in order to gain information on possible threats for marine mammals’ conservation. The special focus was on postmortem, teleneecropsy & inner ear investigations. The workshop was two-step, May 13: on-line webinar, and July 9-11: on-site necropsy workshop (University of Liege, Belgium).

A teleneecropsy training workshop on a scientific photography protocol was organised by ACCOBAMS in collaboration with SPA/RAC and INSTM, at INSTM Monastir Tunisia, in November 2023. The second ACCOBAMS workshop on ingested marine litter monitoring and entanglement evidence in marine mammals of the Adriatic Sea was held in February 2024 at the University of Padova, Italy. The workshop on ingested marine litter monitoring and entanglement evidence in the ACCOBAMS area was convened on the 6 & 7 April 2024 in Catania, Italy. The main objective was to improve the collection of relevant data, especially from stranded cetaceans, with a specific focus on identifying best practice related to monitoring ingested marine litter and entanglement evidence in the ACCOBAMS Area. Series of internal online trainings on live strandings, necropsy and sample collection as well as zoonotic diseases under one health aspects for the provincial personnel of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry of Turkish Republic have been conducted since 2021 by the Turkish veterinary experts. Under the project LIFE DELFI, online and in presence training were organised in Italy and Croatia in order to harmonise diagnostic interpretation of post-mortem findings applying specific frameworks to the post-mortem investigations. First results regarding pathogens prevalence have been recently published, as well as some preliminary results on human interactions. Videos and virtual reality experiences were developed for continuous and standardised capacity building events. Local rescue teams were trained for a first response in case of alive strandings and for disentanglement procedures. Additionally, some tools for continuous and standardised training on post-mortem investigations were developed by the AEFTS members for virtual and on-distance training as videos and virtual reality experience.

Teleneecropsy initiative was developed, and the progress report on the ongoing tele-necropsy initiative was also presented to the ACCOBAMS SC. This initiative is based on ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee's recommendation to use new technologies for remote training, support, and advice in cetacean strandings. Morocco is leading this pilot project, which involves training in scientific imaging to standardise stranding intervention methods and developing a regional photography protocol. The initiative includes both theoretical and practical training phases, with workshops held in various locations and the use of advanced tools like Discord and NAS for communication and data storage. Future strategy and suggestions were provided based on the progress report.

National Stranding Networks and stranding research teams have been active in most Party countries, including but not limited to Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, France, Greece, Italy, Malta, Romania, Spain, Slovenia, Tunisia, Türkiye, Ukraine, and now many of them are listed as members of the Global Stranding Network (GSN) (<https://globalstrandingnetwork.com/>). Among them, the National Stranding Network for Cetaceans in Tunisia has been actively involved in reporting cetacean strandings along the Tunisian coast. Since May 2023 until today, over 45

carcasses were documented from five different species, with a notable dominance of *Tursiops truncatus*. Necropsy was undertaken when possible and tissue samples were actively collected. Greece has implemented on May 2023 the Joint Ministerial Decision (Official Gazette no. 3376/B/19-5-2023) of the National Stranding and Monitoring Network of marine wild species (cetaceans, monk seals, marine turtles and Chondrichthyes [sharks, rays]) management stranded alive or dead in Greek territorial waters. A georeferenced National Marine Species Strandings Databank and a National Tissue Bank is also forced to be created to collect and evaluate all the past and present related information. For helping towards the effective management of marine wild species local Stranding network hubs are created in Cyclades islands, following the coastal area and islands of Ionian and Aegean Sea. ARION's Vet Network offers their knowhow and help in stranding events in other Mediterranean countries when asked (e.g. Albania, Cyprus, etc).

In Romania the national network included more than 1000 students and teachers as part of it. In Bulgaria, the Ministry of Environment and Water continues its effort to improve the stranding network by assigning collection and necropsies of fresh carcasses of stranded cetaceans to Green Balkans' Wildlife Rescue Centre. Yet, coordination with Regional Environmental authorities and municipalities is not perfect and such cases when that is achieved are very scarce. The first draft Action Plan for Functional stranding networks and responses to emergency situations based on the ACCOBAMS Resolutions and information documents has been discussed with the input from Task Force members. The OceanCare representative stressed that National Focal Points shall provide the appropriate support to allow in-depth identification of causes of death, especially when it comes to strandings resulting from acoustic trauma and/or noise-generating activities. Information about all activities correlating in space and time in context to the stranding would be helpful to consider all potential causes.

Several unusual mortality events were recorded in the ACCOBAMS area. An atypical multiple stranding of beaked whales *Ziphius cavirostris* was recorded at the coast of Cyprus in February 2023, likely linked to navy exercises. The presence of undigested fresh squid in the stomach, which is an indicator of sudden death, and the intravascular gas bubbles seen in macroscopic examination are consistent with the general findings obtained in previous studies on beaked whales stranded due to military activities. According to the report provided by the government of Cyprus, it was "likely to have been caused by an acoustic related disturbance, probably associated to mid-frequency sonar activities". An UME of harbour porpoises was recorded in the Ukrainian north-western Black Sea in summer 2023, following the freshwater discharge after the Kakhovka dam was blown up, and another event was suggested in Georgia in March 2024. In January 2024, five unusual whale strandings were reported in Morocco, with partial necropsies revealing signs of gastritis and severe kidney congestion. In May 2024, a mass stranding of Cuvier's beaked whales was reported in Corsica, potentially caused by human noise from military exercises. In May 2024, three disoriented *Ziphius* were stranded alive on the eastern coast of Corsica, and two days later another whale was found dead on the island of Elba. In October 2024, three disorientated adult *Grampus griseus* were stranded alive on the Northern coast of Corfu Island in Greece. Death was probably related to fishing activities in the area. Also, an adult Cuvier's beaked whale stranded alive and died on the coast of Almeria, Spain, in November 2024.

Among the most needed activities the members of the Task Force listed the creation and maintaining a living updated list of stranding networks, involved research institutions, other relevant contacts in the ACCOBAMS countries and other networking mechanisms. Also, a role of national focal points and ACCOBAMS Sub Regional Coordination Units in developing stranding networks and responses to emergency situations was suggested as crucial.

3. CA2a – Interactions with fisheries/aquaculture

- Composition

Task Manager: Dimitar POPOV

Vice Task Manager: Caterina FORTUNA

Support Group: Marta AZZOLIN, Ibrahim 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 TONAY

- Overview of relevant activities on this topic during the 2023/2025 triennium

Mediterranean Sea

1. ACCOBAMS Secretariat is a partner in three FAO projects:
 - The Monitoring Activities and Mitigation Measures for the Reduction of Dolphin Depredation in Small-Scale Fisheries - Western Ionian Sea (GSA 19)" project, also referred to as the "Depredation-3" is done in consortium with Marecamp Association;
 - Reduction and mitigation of the catch of elasmobranchs, sea turtles, and any other vulnerable species incidentally captured by trawlers along Turkish coast (GSA 24 – Northern Levant Sea) in consortium with the Cukurova University (Adana, Türkiye);
 - Monitoring activities and mitigation measures for the reduction of the elasmobranchs incidentally captured by trawlers and for the reduction of dolphin depredation in purse seiners (GSA 3– Southern Alboran Sea), with the National Institute of Fisheries Research (Morocco). **Joan Gimenez and Pauline Gauffier** are acting as experts in this 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 three projects.

2. 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.
3. 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 harmonised necropsy protocols and frameworks for the assessment of fishery interaction on cetacean carcasses.

Black Sea

4. 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.

5. 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.).
6. 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).
7. 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 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.
8. 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.
9. 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.
10. 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.
11. 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. The number of bycaught cetaceans was 112 porpoises and 9 bottlenose dolphins.
12. ACCOBAMS/ASCOBANS Joint Bycatch Working Group (JBWG) second official meeting, originally planned in October 2024, was re-scheduled for February 2025. The main issues to be addressed were development in mitigation measures, updates on projects related with bycatch, review of some other fisheries, which have not been evaluated before (e.g., recreational fishing), and, most importantly, revision of the program of work (POW) and appointment of relevant experts who can take tasks in the POW.

Adjacent Atlantic area - (Portugal)

13. 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 Action 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.

4. CA3a – Area-based measures for cetacean conservation

- Composition

Task Manager: Léa DAVID

Vice Task Manager: Souad LAMOUTI

Support Group: Aylin AKKAYA, Antonella ARCANGELI, Marta AZZOLIN, Ibrahim BEN AMER, Rimel BENMESSAOUD, Greg DONOVAN, Nicolas ENTRUP, Caterina FORTUNA, Silvia FREY, Susan GALLON, Pauline GAUFFIER, Tilen GENOV, Joan GIMENEZ, Pavel GOL'DIN, Joan GONZALVO, Draško HOLCER, Giancarlo LAURIANO, Aurelie MOULINS, Ayaka AMAHA ÖZTÜRK, Marian PAIU, Simone PANIGADA, Guido PIETROLUONGO, Dimitar POPOV, Yianna SAMUEL, Mark SIMMONDS, Naoufal TAMSOURI Mohamed

- Overview of relevant activities on this topic during the triennium 2023/2025

An internal **workshop** has been organised the 18th of March 2024, in Monaco, within members of the Task Group on area-based measures for cetacean conservation entitled “REDEFINITION OF THE C.C.H. PROCESS”. The objectives of the workshop were to update the originally proposed ‘CCH’ process used to identify important cetacean habitats, hot spots of human activities that may threaten cetaceans and thus identify important high-risk areas. First an overview has been provided of how and when existing area-based mechanisms and tools can support the Parties to achieve the objectives stated in Annex 2 of the Agreement, including MPAs, OECMs, IMO-related tools, EBSAs and IMMAs, etc. A table has been completed with relevant information considering those existing mechanisms and tools. As the term “Cetacean Critical Habitat” did not exactly reflect the process, the following terms have been chosen explaining better the process and, moreover, keeping the acronym CCH for visibility and traceability reasons: Cetacean Co-occurrence with Human activities. The workshop confirmed the interest in achieving the overall idea of overlapping cetacean layers and human pressures and wrote some practical recommendations for the process to follow. One of them was to strengthen links with Duke University which was leading a global analysis about mapping cetacean densities through Surface Density Modelling over the entire ACCOBAMS area.

During the Monaco Ocean Week, ACCOBAMS organised a side-event “Why do we care about whales and dolphins” Oceanographic Museum of Monaco, Room “Tortue”, the Wednesday 20th March 2024, 14h00 – 16h00. The CCH process has been presented among other initiatives.

A **workshop** was organised and held during the 35th annual conference of the ECS, in Catania, Sicilia, the 8th April 2024, intitled “Mapping human activity data in the ACCOBAMS area”.

According to the ACCOBAMS Conservation Plan, Parties shall establish and manage specially protected areas corresponding to the areas which serve as habitat of cetaceans. In parallel, data on human pressures at an appropriate geographical and temporal scale are needed, with spatial mapping being an important tool to identify hot-/cold-spots of anthropogenic pressures. The obtained maps on human pressures will be overlaid with those on cetacean’s density and will feed the Cetacean Co-occurrence with Human activity (CCH) initiative. The objectives of the workshop

were: 1) Review the relevant sources of data, access and availability; 2) Identify spatial analysis methods for each of the above to obtain quantitative maps (with associated measures of uncertainty and precision) and agree on terminology; 3) Review and identify metrics to use for the aim of mapping pressures in the context of cetaceans. As conclusion it has been recognised that presentations of reference on how to map human pressure were presented, including good methodological synthesis for this type of work for 5 human activities, synthesised by experts (SHOM, Globalfishingwatch, CIMA foundation, University of Brest, SINAY), including some work in link with existing ACCOBAMS initiatives (noise, whale-watching). Those presentations were followed by discussions about the identification of limits and relevant methods for each, and some recommendations were agreed on by the 37 participants from all Europe.

At the SC 16 meeting, held in Barcelona (nov 2024), the Duke University was invited and presented the results of its work.

The task manager attended two workshops about Marine Spatial Planning (MSP data Tools and Guidance, 13th March 2024 and MSP4Bio, 9th April 2025) and is also part of the Ad hoc Group of Experts for Marine Protected Areas in the Mediterranean (AGEM) from the SPA/RAC and therefore participated at several meetings and workshops.

IV. REPORTS BY THE CHAIRS OF THE WORKING GROUPS

1. Joint By-Catch Working Group

The **Joint Bycatch Working Group (JBWG)** was established in January 2019 as a collaborative mechanism between **ACCOBAMS** and **ASCOBANS** to advance coordinated efforts on cetacean bycatch. It is co-chaired by **Dr. Ayaka Amaha Oztürk** (Turkish Marine Research Foundation/Istanbul University, Türkiye) and **Dr. Peter Evans** (Sea Watch Foundation/Bangor University, UK), who have maintained close contact with each other and their Secretariats.

JBWG Meetings and Workshops

- **JBWG1** (10–12 February 2021, online): Attended by more than 150 participants from 31 countries. The meeting produced a **Programme of Work (PoW) for 2021–2023** and 24 recommendations.
- **Catch-up Meeting** (18 August 2022, online): Focused on reviewing progress on the PoW.
- **Workshop on Current Bycatch Issues in European Waters** (17 April 2023, O Grove, Spain): Organised prior to the European Cetacean Society conference, with 43 participants, including representatives from fishing communities.
- **JBWG2** was originally scheduled for October 2024 but rescheduled to **February 2025** due to low registrations. Its aims are to:
 - Revise the PoW and establish priorities;
 - Secure task leads;
 - Consider updates to the Terms of Reference;
 - Elect new Co-Chairs.

In parallel, two **ASCOBANS Conservation Objectives workshops** (April–May 2023) evaluated bycatch thresholds. The long-term goal is to minimize (ultimately eliminate) anthropogenic removals. In the short term, the objective is to restore or maintain populations at $\geq 80\%$ of carrying capacity. For harbour porpoises, bycatch should remain $< 1\%$ of the best population estimate, with $> 1.7\%$ removals considered unacceptable. For species with reduced populations or high uncertainty, thresholds may be set lower.

Other Bycatch-Related Activities

Beyond the JBWG, several initiatives have been undertaken across the ACCOBAMS and ASCOBANS areas:

Workshops and Conferences

- **FAO-GFCM Fish Forum 2024** (Antalya, Türkiye): Workshop on “*Mitigating multitaxa fisheries interactions in the Mediterranean*”, co-organised by ACCOBAMS, GFCM, UNEP-MAP-SPA/RAC, IUCN-Med, MEDASSET, BirdLife ECA, WWF, and the Turkish Marine Research Foundation.
- **The Future of Marine Biodiversity Monitoring in Europe** workshop (5–7 November 2024, Sitges, Spain): Organised by JRC and CINE, with ACCOBAMS Co-Chair participation. Challenges and solutions in monitoring, including fisheries, were addressed.

Bycatch Projects

Recent projects such as **OBSCAMe**, **CetAMBicion**, **CIBBRiNA**, **Marine Beacon**, **MedBycatch**, and **Bycatch4Fish** have advanced knowledge and produced results now being shared within the JBWG framework.

Coordination with International Bodies

JBWG collaborates closely with international organisations addressing bycatch, including **ICES WGBYC**, **FAO**, **GFCM**, **IWC**, **OSPAR**, and **HELCOM**. To avoid duplication, the WG integrates external efforts while focusing on filling knowledge and action gaps. Representatives from these bodies regularly attend JBWG meetings.

ASCOBANS Co-Chair Dr. Evans maintains liaison with **NEAFC**, **NAMMCO**, **OSPAR**, **HELCOM**, and the **Marine Stewardship Council**, and actively contributes to **ICES WGBYC** (bycatch of protected species) and **ICES WGMME** (marine mammal ecology), leading a Term of Reference on bycatch risk estimation. He also engages with the European Commission’s Joint Research Centre (JRC).

Conclusion

Since its establishment, the JBWG has served as a key platform for harmonising actions to reduce cetacean bycatch across the ACCOBAMS and ASCOBANS regions. Through its formal meetings, thematic workshops, regional projects, and coordination with international bodies, the Group is advancing common objectives to reduce anthropogenic removals, strengthen scientific collaboration, and ensure the effective integration of conservation targets into fisheries management.

2. Joint Noise Working Group

A progress report was provided by the co-chair of the Joint Noise Working Group (JNWG) on activities carried out during the last triennium, which included:

- the ACCOBAMS Mediterranean technical assessment on anthropogenic underwater noise as part of the 2023 Quality Status Report of the Barcelona Convention (IG.26 taken at COP23 of UNEP/MAP);
- collaboration with the TG-Noise for the development of new EU guidelines on underwater noise monitoring and assessment;
- the participation to the SeaSounds project;
- engagement in the Joint ACCOBAMS-ASCOBANS Workshop with Navies on Underwater Noise and Cetaceans held on 26-27 November 2024 which focused on mitigating the impact of underwater noise—particularly from sonar and unexploded ordnance (UXO) blasts—on cetaceans.

Discussion focused on the need for ACCOBAMS Parties to provide comprehensive information on impulsive noise-generating activities to allow a proper assessment of noise emissions in the Agreement area and their potential impact on cetaceans. National responsible institutions should provide data on impulsive noise generating sources and

activities from anywhere in the ACCOBAMS Area into the existing Regional Noise Registry, managed by ACCOBAMS for publicly available data.

3. Working Group on Ship Strikes

Vessel strikes are a significant threat to large cetaceans, particularly fin and sperm whales, in the Mediterranean. Recognising this, **ACCOBAMS** and the **International Whaling Commission (IWC)** have collaborated to understand the issue and develop mitigation measures. Workshops have identified **high-risk areas** where dense shipping overlaps with whale habitats:

1. Strait of Gibraltar
2. Wider Pelagos Sanctuary
3. Hellenic Trench
4. Balearic Islands
5. Almería–Nador (eastern Alborán Sea)
6. Strait of Sicily

To address this, a **Working Group (WG)** was established under the ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee to follow up on workshop recommendations and coordinate actions with the IWC, Pelagos Sanctuary, Range States, and experts.

Objectives and Methods

The WG focuses on identifying risk areas for vessel strikes and developing mitigation strategies through:

- Analysis of **vessel traffic data** (AIS, routes, density, speeds).
- Mapping **cetacean distribution and abundance** in relation to shipping.
- Collecting strike data from strandings, necropsies, photo-ID, and the IWC vessel strike database.
- Modelling collision risks and potential population-level impacts.

The ultimate goal is to conduct a **robust assessment of vessel strikes** in the Agreement Area and identify effective mitigation measures, prioritizing areas where population-level effects are likely.

Terms of Reference

- Members contribute voluntarily and communicate mainly by email.
- Meetings may occur alongside existing events (e.g., ECS, IWC).
- The WG prioritizes and implements research and management recommendations in collaboration with Parties, Range States, IWC, and the Pelagos Sanctuary.
- Strong links are maintained with the IWC's **Ship Strike Working Group (SSWG)**, using the same global vessel strike database.

Key Work Areas

- **Improved reporting and awareness:** promoting vessel strike reporting, involving shipping companies, and engaging marine press.
- **Evaluation of mitigation tools:** WhaleAlert app, REPCET, routing measures, and speed restrictions.
- **Collaboration with IMO and CMS:** ensuring uptake of measures at international level.
- **Enhanced data collection:** necropsy protocols, photo-ID evidence, telemetry to track whale movements, and AIS analysis of vessel activity.
- **Integration of IMMAs:** using Important Marine Mammal Areas to identify high-risk zones requiring management attention.

Mitigation Measures

Workshops emphasise that **separating whales and vessels** spatially/temporally (e.g., routing schemes) is most effective. The **only proven measure** to reduce lethal collisions is to lower vessel speed to **10–13 knots**. Comprehensive data collection and reporting to the IWC database remain essential for evaluating risk and developing tailored measures.

The Shiprint Project

Launched in 2023 and funded by *Initiative Pelagos*, the **Shiprint project** supports the implementation of the **Northwestern Mediterranean Sea Particularly Sensitive Sea Area (NW Med PSSA)**, established by IMO (Resolution MEPC.380(80)).

Activities include:

- Expanding **NETCCOBAMS** with a new AIS tracking module, incorporating speed recommendations, GHG emissions, and underwater noise.
- Organising **four in-person workshops** (plus online training) for shipping companies, vessel operators, and port authorities to promote mitigation.
- Raising awareness through a **photo exhibition** and the development of **whale-safe certification guidelines**.

Future Work (2026–2028)

Planned priorities include:

1. Continue collaboration with IWC on vessel strike data.
2. Liaise with the Pelagos Agreement and related working groups.
3. Participate in ongoing mitigation projects (e.g., LIFE SeaDetect, LIFE Conceptu Maris).
4. Develop a **whale-safe certificate** (drawing on U.S. and European initiatives such as Stellwagen Bank and Green Marine Europe).
5. Assess compliance with NW Med PSSA measures via NETCCOBAMS.
6. Use **IMMAs** to identify high-risk areas.
7. Collect **telemetry data** to integrate whale movements with AIS traffic for Close Point of Approach (CPA) analysis and mitigation design.

4. Working Group on MMO

In 2023-2025, 7 trainings have been realized, leading to the certification of around 80 new ACCOBAMS MMO/PAM of different nationalities, mainly from the ACCOBAMS area and Atlantic bordering countries. There is a need to update the course content in order to reflect the evolution of this topic and scientific knowledge, and adapt the training tools. The creation of a LinkedIn profile for the ACCOBAMS certification to strengthen its visibility and promote links among stakeholders, as ACCOBAMS MMO/PAM, trainers and industrials has been proposed.

5. Working Group on NETCCOBAMS

The NETCCOBAMS platform aims at tackling specific management needs and objectives of ACCOBAMS by aggregating data in one place, scientific validation, and supporting decision-making based on insightful data. So far, there are 120 registered users on the platform; however, not many active users add data/information to the network. Feedback so far has mainly been related to technical issues with registration. There are still six members of the ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee who have not registered on the platform and have been kindly invited to do so. There are now 44 projects in the “Activities” section of the platform. Most have explicit descriptors (logo, tags, description), however, many still lack data/files in the *Documents* section.

NETCCOBAMS was a subject in two workshops of the European Cetacean Society conference in April 2024:

- Mapping human activities data in the ACCOBAMS area

- Advancing knowledge on fin whales in the Mediterranean Sea. Effort was undertaken to address one of the workshop resolutions: importance of regular contact amongst Fin whale experts in the region in addition to more intensive workshops (say every 5 years). Options suggested include establishing a more formal fin whale community, use of an email list, use of NETCCOBAMS. It was suggested that the organisers of the present workshop investigate this and develop a proposal for consideration by the participants.

NETCCOBAMS and KMaP

During the second coordination meeting of the NW Mediterranean PSSA (Particularly Sensitive Sea Area) collaboration between UNEP-MAP KMaP (<https://kmap.info-rac.org/>) and ACCOBAMS NETCCOBAMS platform (<https://accobams.org/>) was presented showing available tools and functionalities. An experiment of cooperation already carried out was shown and concretized in an experiment of mean boat speed display during the 2023 summer over the new PSSA area, by extrapolating AIS data from NETCCOBAMS over 1km square cells grid and representing them in the KMaP as an animation.

Further collaboration regarding ship strikes and underwater noise is being discussed between ACCOBAMS and the Information and Communication Regional Activity Centre (InfoRAC).

NETCCOBAMS from ACCOBAMS and KMap from UNEP-MAP are fully complimentary and compatible since both the platforms share geographical data, allow for multiple levels of access, with different rights and permissions, and support metadata sharing together with data, acknowledging the importance to document data.

For this reason, a general collaboration plan was signed in the form of a Memorandum of Understanding where the roles are basically summarized as follows:

- ACCOBAMS, to respond to specific needs and management purposes through its NETCCOBAMS platform:
 - Data Production for the PSSA, including through AIS data which are already available and used for different purposes such as ship-noise monitoring
 - Data production for D11/EO11 monitoring and assessment through Acoustic Map module;
 - Data production for D1/EO1 monitoring and assessment through ASI programme
- InfoRAC to capitalize the data and information shared from NETCCOBAMS
 - To harmonise data and information on ship strikes with other topics addressed in the KMaP platform
 - To contribute achieving UNEP/MAP objectives, including IMAP Ecological Objectives
 - To raise awareness on the specific matter

In particular, for the needs of the NW PSSA establishment, NETCCOBAMS offers a tool (Visi Zone) to evidence, in near-real time, the speed of boats navigating over a selected geographical region from AIS data and KMaP offers tools for data dissemination such as animated maps and dashboards. From the PSSA definition document, a speed comprised between 10 and 13 Nautical Knots could diminish considerably the risk of ship strikes with cetaceans.

In this frame, a first pilot study and cooperation experiment is introduced where a time series of maps of ships mean speed in the PSSA area are produced from Visi Zone. Subsequently, the dataset is represented in KMaP using an animation map and a dashboard to visually explore traffic loads and characterize speed.

For the future, it would be interesting to improve the current experiment by spatially evidence zones where the limit of 13 kn is more frequently overpassed or cross these zones with eventual cetacean routes to understand the effective risk of collision.

It would also be interesting to improve technical/scientific cooperation (i) extending the experiment in time to create a proper database of boats' speed weekly aggregated data, (ii) study the evolution over time of mean speed to better characterize boat traffic in the PSSA (e.g. spatial variation from one season to the other, identification of most frequented zones etc.), (iii) better understand how to cross quasi-real time data offered by NETCCOBAMS with cetaceans observation survey data to create meaningful and effective risk maps.

6. Working Group on semi-captivity “centers” in the ACCOBAMS Area

Semi-captivity of cetaceans has been an issue considered for several years by ACCOBAMS, which was addressed in particular in 2 reports: “Taking of cetaceans, dolphinaria and quasi-dolphinaria: a legal analysis relating to ACCOBAMS Parties” (ACCOBAMS-MOP7/2019/Inf 09); and “Scientific perspective on “potential marine semi-enclosed facilities” in the ACCOBAMS Area” (ACCOBAMS-MOP8/2022/Inf52).

Based on the recommendations of the latter, the Eighth Meeting of the Parties to ACCOBAMS (MOP8) agreed that the Scientific Committee should establish an Advisory Committee on semi-enclosed facilities to provide guidance to interested Parties in relation to all questions related to semi-enclosed facilities. At its Fifteenth meeting held on 10-11 May 2023 in Tunis, the ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee adopted Terms of Reference for an ACCOBAMS Advisory Committee on semi-enclosed facilities (ACCOBAMS-SC15/2023/Doc17). A detailed document, drafted by the members of this Advisory Committee, has been largely adapted from the document *Standards for Cetacean Sanctuaries* adopted by The Global Federation of Animal Sanctuaries (GFAS) and released in June 2023, taking into account the ACCOBAMS framework.

A few initiatives have been made public, which aim at providing increasingly necessary facilities posing an alternative to dolphinaria and marine parks, by creating the so-called cetacean sanctuaries or refuges. In an ACCOBAMS’ context it is suggested to use the latter term **refuge**, to avoid confusion with concepts of marine protected areas. For example, the “Pelagos Sanctuary for Mediterranean whales and dolphins”, a well-known protected area in the Mediterranean, has a completely different nature and goal than dolphin refuges. Hence, tentatively, hereafter Semi-enclosed Facilities for Cetacean Species will be referred as refuge/s.

It must be emphasised that a true refuge intends to approximate a natural cetacean habitat to the fullest extent possible while promoting diverse, natural behaviours and relationships amongst the cetaceans. The welfare of cetaceans takes priority over all other considerations, including visitors, caregivers, scientists and donors. Cetacean refuges, as do traditional dolphinaria and marine parks, must provide human care essential for animal health and safety.

Finally, the recent application should be noted of the EU Directive 2016/429 on transmissible animal diseases and amending and repealing certain acts in the area of animal health, also named ‘Animal Health Law’ (AHL) and the Regulation 2035/2019 supplementing Regulation (EU) 2016/429 of the European Parliament and of the Council as regards rules for establishments keeping terrestrial animals and hatcheries, and the traceability of certain kept terrestrial animals and hatching apply to potential cetacean refuges.

These legal frameworks dealing with diseases transmission in all the animals kept under human care, including terrestrial and aquatic wild animals, should be applied by EU members and candidate Countries. This legal framework provides a well-defined legal classification for all the facilities keeping animals, including those maintaining wild animals in a confined establishment. All the member states will adopt differently the classification of the different establishments and, in case of proposal of a dolphin refuge, this national classification should be considered as a legal reference. As an example, Italy has adopted the above-mentioned EU legal framework with the Law Decree 135/2022 and the following decrees from the Ministry for Health and Ministry for the Environment:

Dolphin refuges are included among the collections of wild species different from zoos and aquaria.

All these establishments have to identify proper management measures considering biosafety, animal welfare and workers safety and respond to national and international recommendations.

7. Whale Watching Working Group (WWWG)

The following activities were developed:

- The results of the study carried out in the Sado estuary (Portugal) to define a carrying capacity for commercial dolphin watching are ready to be implemented and a new system of licensing will be developed in the future.
- An App named ILogWhales incorporating the common procedure for data collection by the whale watching companies, was developed by CIMA Research Foundation (CIMA) in the framework of the Interreg Fr-It project EcoSTRIM. Since 2023 CIMA and the Whale Museum (Madeira) collaborate to update the App and test it with whale-watching operators in the Mediterranean and in Atlantic. The results (to be presented at SC17) are promising but a few updates and improvements are still needed. It is expected that a new version could also be tested in south Portugal in 2025.
- In the framework of the project “*NextGenerationEU – Piano Nazionale Resistenza e Resilienza (PNRR)*” funded by the EU thanks to the Award of the MUR “*National Biodiversity Future Center – NBFC - Activity 4 Biodiversity mainstreaming in Maritime Spatial Planning*”, CIMA is mapping the whale-watching effort and quantifying the socio-economic value of the whale-watching with the High Quality Whale-Watching® in the Ligurian waters. Results will be available at the end of 2025.
- MIRACETI implemented a pilot study (MARKER 2021-2023) aiming at providing concrete and standardised assessment tools (ecological and socioeconomic indicators) to monitor the evolution of pressure on cetacean populations from whale-watching activity in the French Mediterranean Sea and evaluate the effectiveness of the High Quality Whale-Watching® (HQWW) certification. Following the preliminary results, MIRACETI will look for funding to develop an in-depth study to further analyse this issue.
- The HQWW collective certification mark has been renewed with Cabinet Hautier by ACCOBAMS. However, the Regulations governing the use of this label still need to be updated and can be registered with the Monegasque and EU trademark offices in the next months.
- MIRACETI initiated the co-construction of a consolidated project to promote the contribution of whale-watching operators to cetacean conservation in MPAs by:
 - Strengthening collaboration with MPA managers;
 - Testing tools for collecting and promoting cetacean data and knowledge;
 - Developing tools for exchanging and sharing knowledge.
- ACCOBAMS is an associated partner of the Interreg Euro-MED “*BlueWatch*” project proposal, led by CIMA Research Foundation. If accepted, it will involve Italy, Portugal, Croatia, Spain, and Montenegro, with the goal of reinforcing and promoting sustainability in the marine tourism sector, focusing on marine life watching.

Summary of MSFD/EcAP Correspondence Working Group and Related Initiatives

The **MSFD/EcAP Correspondence Working Group (WG)** was established at MOP6 (2016) to foster transnational collaboration and ensure consistency in defining Good Environmental Status (GES) for marine mammals. Its Terms of Reference (SC11, 2017) include: collecting information on national monitoring programmes, identifying representative species for GES assessments, harmonising criteria and threshold values across frameworks, and ensuring alignment with the EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD) and the Ecological Approach (EcAP) under the Barcelona Convention.

In 2021, the WG contributed to the UNEP/MED report on **IMAP Common Indicators (CI3: distribution, CI4: abundance, CI5: demographics)**. The report highlighted the need for refined sub-regional monitoring units (e.g., fin whale feeding grounds, sperm whale breeding areas) using ASI data and IUCN Red List assessments to strengthen the next evaluation cycle.

A significant milestone was the **Workshop on Cetacean Abundance Estimation through Distance Sampling Methods (WKCETAB)**, held in April 2024 at ISPRA (Rome). Experts from Spain, France, Italy, and other Mediterranean states reviewed design-based vs. model-based analytical approaches using datasets from SCANS, ASI, CETAMBICION, ABIOMED, and ICCAT. The workshop emphasised the need for methodological coherence and proposed a roadmap, with the 2025 meeting set to tackle: (1) agreement on Assessment Units, (2) long-term monitoring strategies, (3) harmonised abundance reporting methods, (4) improved data flow and management systems, and (5) synchronisation of large-scale surveys. The ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee Chair's participation was considered crucial for ensuring regional consistency.

Within the **Pelagos Action Plan (2022–2027)**, spatial analyses of cetacean abundance and distribution are underway using datasets from French (SAMM, MOOSE, Pelmed), Italian, and Spanish (MEDIAS, ICCAT, DMESAL, DMLEBA) surveys covering 2009–2023. These analyses target fin whales, sperm whales, Cuvier's beaked whales, and bottlenose dolphins, applying spatial density models with environmental covariates. Results will deliver updated abundance estimates and density maps for the Pelagos Sanctuary and the wider western Mediterranean, aligned with MSFD reporting.

The **ABIOMMED project** (2020–2023) further supported Mediterranean Member States in MSFD implementation through a regional questionnaire. While general consensus emerged on monitoring methods, no agreement was reached on common assessment methodologies, underscoring the importance of continued coordination through ACCOBAMS and related fora.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS ISSUED BY SC16

- [RECOMMENDATION 16.1](#) - **POST-WAR PLAN FOR THE BLACK SEA CETACEANS**
- [RECOMMENDATION 16.2](#) - **ABUNDANCE AND DISTRIBUTIONS**
- [RECOMMENDATION 16.3](#) - **ASIZ AND THE ACCOBAMS LTMP**
- [RECOMMENDATION 16.4](#) - **SPECIES LIST FOR MONITORING PURPOSES**
- [RECOMMENDATION 16.5](#) - **POPULATION STRUCTURE**
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- [RECOMMENDATION 16.7](#) - **BYCATCH AND BOTTOM TRAWLING**
- [RECOMMENDATION 16.8](#) - **REVISION OF THE FAO GFCM GUIDELINES ON MONITORING INCIDENTAL CATCH OF VULNERABLE SPECIES IN THE MEDITERRANEAN AND BLACK SEAS (FAO 2019)**
- [RECOMMENDATION 16.9](#) - **ANTHROPOGENIC UNDERWATER NOISE**
- [RECOMMENDATION 16.10](#) - **SHIP STRIKES**
- [RECOMMENDATION 16.11](#) - **COMMERCIAL WHALE WATCHING IN THE ACCOBAMS AREA**
- [RECOMMENDATION 16.12](#) - **MARINE DEBRIS**
- [RECOMMENDATION 16.13](#) - **SEMI-CAPTIVITY (PASSPORT & GUIDELINES)**
- [RECOMMENDATION 16.14](#) - **AREA-BASED MEASURES FOR CETACEAN CONSERVATION**
- [RECOMMENDATION 16.15](#) - **NETCCOBAMS**

RECOMMENDATION 16.1 – POST-WAR PLAN FOR THE BLACK SEA CETACEANS

Recalling Resolution 8.12 on “IUCN Red List Status of Cetacean Species in the ACCOBAMS Area” which:

5. Calls on Parties to take into account the military and anthropogenic impacts of military operations during the implementation of Conservation Management Plan in the Black Sea;

Recalling Resolution 8.17 on “Anthropogenic Noise” which:

7. asks the Scientific Committee to develop a post-war Plan for the Black Sea region towards the mitigation of warfare consequences on cetaceans, their habitat and their preys;

Taking into consideration its operative paragraph is clearly not restricted to looking into noise generating activities and impacts, but with a generic approach addressing all consequences resulting from warfare activities including marine pollution, eutrophication, increased risk of infections, increased risk of bioinvasions of alien (non-indigenous) species, and other effects. Also, war activities not directly related to combat are to be considered, such as construction works (especially those producing underwater noise or altering the seascape) or changes in shipping routes.

Taking into consideration the results of the Joint ACCOBAMS – Black Sea Commission Meeting, where it was stated that: “In the framework of the AETFS [Emergency Task Force for Stranding events], a specific “Black Sea” Sub-Task, composed by experts from Black Sea Countries is to be created and shall provide annual summary information to the AETFS, and to the “Network for harbour porpoise bycatch in the Black Sea between the European Commission, DG Mare, GFCM, ACCOBAMS and the Black Sea Commission”.”

The Scientific Committee **specifically notes** that the military operations may have adversely impacted all the riparian countries to some degree.

Therefore, the Scientific Committee **recommends**:

- to organise dedicated regional workshops including the experts on the relevant topics to elaborate the road map for the Post-war Plan for the Black Sea region towards the mitigation of warfare consequences on cetaceans, their habitat and their preys (hereinafter, Post-war Plan for the Black Sea);
- to consider, *inter alia*, the areas, topics and activities/measures listed in the **Annex I** during the work on the Conservation Management Plan for the Black Sea cetaceans and the Post-war Plan for the Black Sea;
- to promote implementation of applicable activities/measures under the Post-war Plan for the Black Sea as soon as it is adopted, regardless of the military situation, as some of the activities/measures are relevant at that moment.

Annex I

Areas, topics and activities/measures relevant for the Post-war Plan for the Black Sea region towards the mitigation of warfare consequences on cetaceans, their habitat and their preys

Assessment

1. Comprehensive monitoring of underwater noise, chemical pollution, marine debris and biological indicators of stress in animals, as well as *postmortem* studies, studies of pathology, lifespan and population structure, are necessary for understanding and managing the war impact and other anthropogenic impacts (construction, seismic surveys), until it is secured that the post-war impacts have been decreased to pre-war levels.

2. Collecting and long-term archiving of organ and tissue samples for the purposes of multiple screening and identification of causes of death, including but not limited to identification of contaminants, pathogens, ingestion of or entanglement in marine debris, evidence of acoustic trauma or blast injury, brain damage and indicators of individual stress. ***Building and enhancing the capacity of the Parties, including national stranding networks and tissue banks, will contribute to this effort.***

3. Assessment of the losses, damage and potential possibility or need for restoration of species, populations and habitats. Development and application of existing remote sensing methods for assessing marine and coastal environments (including detection of sea mines and ammunition, other objects which can threaten the cetaceans and their prey at the sea floor). Enhancing new technology, including screening techniques for identification of contaminants, pathogens and alien (non-indigenous) species introduced by war related activities.

4. Assessing the impacts on distribution and abundance of prey for cetaceans is necessary.

Assess potential shift in distribution of species and populations, their feeding and breeding grounds and migration routes due to warfare activities. This may include cooperation with the GFCM and other dedicated national and international bodies related to fisheries.

5. Assessing increase of bycatch risk and related bycatch mitigation measures in light of shifts in prey distribution and other stress factors affecting animal health.

Action

6. Demining is crucial for the short and long-term health of cetaceans and the entire marine ecosystem. By prioritizing the removal of explosives, both historical and contemporary, using Best Available Technology and Best Environmental Practices, we can minimize the impact of explosions on the environment and support ongoing research efforts. This may include building on existing demining initiatives in the North and Baltic Seas to develop comprehensive guidance for identifying and safely removing all types of underwater explosives, both floating and sunk.

7. Establishing new marine protected areas by Parties planned on the basis of previously identified Important Marine Mammal Areas (IMMAs), including transboundary and international reserves, will be important for cetacean conservation. Biosphere reserves may be suggested for areas of high cultural importance and exceptionally high anthropogenic impact, including those damaged by war.

8. Response to stranding events is recommended to be enhanced by Parties, aligned with strengthening the national stranding networks and cooperation with the relevant task force for a better response and capacity to carry out *postmortem* investigation, collect, preserve and analyse samples.

9. Development and implementation of bycatch mitigation measures including those responding post war effects are recommended to be further elaborated by Parties, along with monitoring of the bycatch.

10. Education and public awareness campaigns for the Black Sea marine ecosystem under pressure, particularly from military activities, are recommended to be provided and created by Parties for a broad audience and professionals in relevant fields.

11. A post-war basin-wide synoptic survey of cetaceans in the form of aerial survey will be necessary for updating the status of cetacean populations in the Black Sea.

12. Cooperative regional effort is necessary for achieving the aforementioned objectives. This also may involve international and transboundary projects and agreements, as well as the Sub-Regional Coordination Unit.

RECOMMENDATION 16.2 – ABUNDANCE AND DISTRIBUTIONS

MODELLING ANALYSES BY DUKE UNIVERSITY

Cañadas presented a summary of her work on analysis of more than two decades of survey data (including ASI data) in the Black Sea and the Mediterranean Sea. This was the result of an enormous collaborative effort, where 12 organisations from the Black Sea shared their data totalling more than 42,000 km of survey effort yielding more than 8,000 observations of cetaceans, and 43 organisations from the Mediterranean Sea shared their data totalling more than 1,600,000 km of survey effort yielding more than 40,000 observations of cetaceans. All these data were analysed by Cañadas to produce abundance estimates and distribution maps through density surface modelling and applying correction factors for availability and perception biases to all surveys, as well as other methods like winsorizing to avoid unrealistic extrapolations and a statistical approach to assign unidentified species to particular species. Challenges encountered during the analysis were discussed, as well as cautions in the interpretation of results, and opportunities that these approaches present for the future.

The Committee welcomed the presentation by Cañadas that reflected an enormous and comprehensive effort to try to integrate a vast amount of data from a wide variety of data sources over some two decades to examine cetacean abundance and distribution. This vast dataset provides an excellent opportunity to examine the implications of many assumptions involved in such an integration process and, especially, in terms of examining the costs and benefits of such an approach in terms of the effects on uncertainty on abundance estimates and distribution in terms of their use in a conservation and management context.

The Committee **recommends** that:

- (1) the abundance estimates provided by this modelling exercise are **not** considered approved estimates in a conservation and management context, at least until the uncertainties behind the assumptions of the analysis and the robustness of the results (in terms of precision and bias) have been examined and the question as to what time period they may be considered to apply;
- (2) the great potential to use the extensive work undertaken so far to examine the implications of assumptions made is not lost e.g., with respect to: inclusion/exclusion of different datasets, e.g., types of survey; treatment of uncertain identifications; approaches to estimate $g(0)$ and effective strip widths; use of ‘climatologies’, ‘winsorising’ etc. This is of wider implication than simply for the region presented and has important implications for distribution modelling, as well as abundance; and
- (3) the results from the design-based analyses from the ASI surveys represent the best recent abundance estimates for the region (recognising, as did the ASI programme itself that for some species, e.g., deep divers and those with limited distribution such as coastal populations, broad-scale surveys may not represent the most appropriate way to obtain abundance estimates) – this is consistent with the approach agreed in the report of the ICES group (ICES. 2024. Workshop on Cetacean Abundance Estimation Through Distance Sampling Methods (WKCE-TAB));
- (4) the published ASI estimates (recognising the limitation for some species identified above) will be submitted to the IWC Scientific Committee for review as part of ongoing efforts to develop internationally recognised and consistent lists of approved abundance estimates;
- (5) once the work on assumptions and uncertainty with respect *inter alia* to datasets referred to under (2) are dealt with, efforts are made to integrate such time series of appropriate data within modelling exercises to improve analyses of distribution.

RECOMMENDATION 16.3 – ASI2 AND THE ACCOBAMS LTMP

The Scientific Committee **welcomes** the commitment in principle shown by the Parties to ASI2 as part of the ACCOBAMS LTMP (recommendation 14.1) expressed in Resolution 8.10 where, *inter alia*, ACCOBAMS Parties stated that :

... the LTMP is not only fundamental to the ability of the Parties to meet the stated objectives of ACCOBAMS, but will also assist individual Parties to meet relevant national and international commitments, which include the objectives of the Barcelona Convention Ecosystem Approach/Integrated Monitoring and Assessment Programme (EcAp/IMAP) and the Action Plan for the Conservation of cetaceans in the Mediterranean Sea (IG25/13), the European Union relevant legal frameworks, *inter alia* the Habitats and Marine Strategy Framework Directives, the Black Sea integrated monitoring and assessment programme.

It **notes** that despite the exhortations of Resolution 8.10 and the efforts of the Secretariat, the Scientific Committee and some Parties, the necessary funds to implement the work required to start the LTMP programme/ASI2 were not obtained. In summary, the Scientific Committee **stresses the urgency** of the Parties meeting their commitments to ASI2 soon as possible and:

- (1) **reiterates** the fundamental importance of a synoptic ASI2 survey and the LTMP to the ability of ACCOBAMS to meet its stated objectives;
- (2) **agrees** that new technologies do not, certainly at present time, provide a scientifically (or economically) viable alternative to the existing agreed protocols for ASI2;
- (3) **confirms** that ASI2 thus needs to follow the approved survey design principles and methods adopted during ASI, modified in the light of (a) consideration of the geopolitical situation; (b) final evaluation of the density maps from ASI; and (c) the available funding, noting that an initial re-examination of the costs for similar coverage to ASI will be close to the breakdown and estimate shown in SC16-Doc08 (1,100,000 EUR) and that finessing this is dealt with under (5) below;
- (4) **endorses** the Bureau's decision to postpone the implementation of ASI2 for the Mediterranean and the contiguous Atlantic area to at least summer 2026;
- (5) **stresses** that the ASI experience has shown that the scientific and logistical work involved in organising and coordinating such a large-scale, multi-national survey is immense and cannot be achieved in a timely fashion (even for summer 2026) without immediate minimal support, especially in the form of the appointment of a scientific coordinator and a project officer as soon as possible;
- (6) **recommends** that the Executive Secretary, in collaboration with the Chair of the Scientific Committee, and the support of the Bureau, reignites urgent contacts with the Parties to:
 - reiterate in a practical manner their commitment to Resolution 8.10 on the ACCOBAMS Long-Term Monitoring Programme and especially ASI2;
 - secure the necessary financial contributions or at least formal commitments by or soon after the extended Bureau meeting to allow the necessary planning time for a summer 2026 survey.

With respect to the financial aspects, the Scientific Committee notes the significant contribution of funds by bodies that are non-ACCOBAMS parties such as the MAVA Foundation and recognises that this will likely need to be the case for ASI2. The Scientific Committee was informed that the US Navy expects an update of the spatial distribution models developed by the Marine Geospatial Ecology Lab, discussed under Item 3.2.1. The voluntary submission of data at the basin scale were crucial for this exercise and the ASI data were a major contribution. ASI2 data will be essential for the success of any future exercise. Given this, the Scientific Committee **recommends** that in its approaches to potential donors, the Secretariat emphasises this to the US Navy, and those who attended the November 2024 Joint ACCOBAMS-ASCOBANS Workshop with Navies on Underwater Noise and Cetaceans and invites them to consider contributing to the implementation of ASI2.

Finally, the Scientific Committee **notes** with appreciation Italy's confirmation of its in-kind contribution to the activities planned under the MSFD and acknowledges the proposal to postpone these activities to 2026 to align them with ASI2. Although recognising the practical difficulties, the Scientific Committee furthermore respectfully requests Spain to carefully investigate the possibility to defer its planned 2025 survey activities to 2026.

RECOMMENDATION 16.4 – SPECIES LIST FOR MONITORING PURPOSES

Article I of the Agreement text states that the “*Agreement applies to **all cetaceans** that have a range which lies **entirely or partly within the Agreement area** or that **accidentally or occasionally** frequent the Agreement area” and directs to “*an **indicative list**” of species [emphasis added] which is provided in Annex 1 of the Agreement.**

However, in the context of the implementation of the EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD) and the Ecosystem Approach (EcAp)/IMAP processes, ACCOBAMS Resolution 6.12 (2012) instructed the Scientific Committee to:

assist ACCOBAMS Parties, both European Union Member States and non-European Union Member States, in integrating conservation action reflecting objectives, decisions, recommendations and information by ACCOBAMS within their national programme of measures, with a view to achieving a good environmental status under the MSFD and relevant EcAp Processes.

Accordingly, an MSFD/EcAp Working Group was established in 2017 at SC11 (ACCOBAMS-SC11/2017/Doc25/Annex9). One of the ACCOBAMS SC MSFD/ECAP Working Group ToR is to:

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).

All sightings are recorded in national and international monitoring programmes; however, sub-regional lists of regularly occurring species are necessary to assist ACCOBAMS Contracting Parties to design the best monitoring plan tailored to the resident species in each sub-region of the Agreement Area. The need for agreed sub-regional list of species was also highlighted by the ABIOMMED project.

Therefore, the Scientific Committee **recommends** to the Parties the adoption of the list in Appendix I. The Scientific Committee will periodically reconsider it in view of a potential need for updating linked, for example, to climate change or other factors.

Appendix I – Sub-regional list of cetacean species for monitoring purposes

Species / Sub-region	Adjacent Atlantic area	Western Mediterranean	Central Mediterranean and Ionian Sea	Adriatic Sea	Aegean & Levantine Sea	Black Sea
<i>Phocoena phocoena</i>	REG	VAG	NP	NP	NP	NP
<i>Phocoena phocoena ssp. relicta</i>	NP	NP	NP	NP	REG / Turkish Straits System pop	REG
<i>Steno bredanensis</i>	NP	NP	REG	NP	REG	NP
<i>Grampus griseus</i>	REG	REG	REG	REG	REG	NP
<i>Tursiops truncatus</i>	REG	REG	REG	REG	REG	REG(?)
<i>Tursiops truncatus ssp. ponticus</i>	NP	NP	NP	NP	REG(?)	REG
<i>Stenella coeruleoalba</i>	REG	REG	REG	REG	REG	NP
<i>Delphinus delphis</i>	REG	REG	REG	VAG	REG	REG(?)
<i>Delphinus delphis ssp. ponticus</i>	NP	NP	NP	NP	REG(?)	REG
<i>Pseudorca crassidens</i>	REG	VAG	VAG	NP	VAG	NP
<i>Orcinus orca</i>	REG / Iberian pop	REG / Iberian pop	NP	NP	NP	NP
<i>Globicephala melas</i>	REG	REG	NP	NP	NP	NP
<i>Mesoplodon densirostris</i>	REG	NP	NP	NP	NP	NP
<i>Ziphius cavirostris</i>	REG	REG	REG	REG	REG	NP
<i>Physeter macrocephalus</i>	REG	REG	REG	REG	REG	NP
<i>Kogia sima</i>	REG	VAG	VAG	NP	NP	NP
<i>Eubalaena glacialis</i>	VAG	NP	NP	NP	NP	NP
<i>Balaenoptera acutorostrata</i>	REG	VAG	VAG	NP	VAG	NP
<i>Balaenoptera physalus</i>	REG	REG	REG	REG	REG	NP
<i>Megaptera novaeangliae</i>	REG	VAG	NP	NP	NP	NP

Key: **REG** = regular; **VAG** = vagrant; **NP** = not present (this category to “surely not “regular”).

RECOMMENDATION 16.5 – POPULATION STRUCTURE

Recalling ACCOBAMS Resolution 3.9 “Guidelines for the establishment of a system of tissue banks within the ACCOBAMS area and ethical code”,

Recalling also that the ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee has recognised the need for Institutions dedicated to the preservation of body samples/parts from marine mammals of the Mediterranean and Black Seas. Such Institutions should: a) promote non-invasive or post-mortal collection of samples from cetaceans living in the Mediterranean and Black Seas and adjacent waters; b) prepare such samples for long term storage; and c) distribute them to the community of marine mammal researchers,

Recalling Recommendations from the ACCOBAMS Workshop on Data Collection on Cetacean Population Genetics, *Recalling* Resolution 8.11 “Cetacean population genetics”,

1) The Scientific Committee **reiterates** the need:

- a. for Partners conducting sample collection and research on population genetics to apply the ACCOBAMS Best Practices on Cetacean Population Genetics in their work and to regularly provide the Secretariat with relevant information to update the online cetacean sample database, as well as the list of suitable genetics laboratories and new scientific publications;
- b. for Parties to collect updated information regarding research results on population genetics and to include it in their National Report.

2) The Scientific Committee **recommends** Parties to provide the Secretariat with relevant national legislation and standard procedures for the exchange of samples (for example, under the Nagoya Protocol, or CITES permits).

3) The Scientific Committee **encourages** the harmonisation of the procedures for samples exchanges among CITES scientific and forensic institutions in the ACCOBAMS area.

RECOMMENDATION 16.6 – STRANDINGS ISSUES (AETF, FUNCTIONING STRANDING NETWORKS)

Recalling the Eighth Meeting of Parties to ACCOBAMS (November 2022, Malta), when Parties agreed to encourage the creation of a regional Task Force and collaborations among national network of parties for stranding events (Resolution 8.2) and provisioned this work as the CA1d Conservation Action for 2022/2025;

Recalling the Resolution 8.15 reiterating the urgent need of implementing effective and functioning stranding networks enforcing cooperation, also using novel technologies, and encouraging exchange of information and samples at regional level using the existing tissue banks for joint analyses;

Noting that during the meeting jointly organised by the Secretariats of ACCOBAMS and of the Black Sea Commission that took stock of common subjects in relation to the Black Sea on 6-7 March 2024, in Istanbul, participants agreed that in the framework of the ACCOBAMS Emergency Task Force for Stranding events (AETFs), a specific “Black Sea” Sub-Task, composed by experts from the Black Sea Countries has to be created;

Noting that standardised post-mortem investigations and harmonised interpretation of findings were considered relevant for the implementation of different ACCOBAMS strategies like those related to by-catch, ship strikes, marine litter and underwater noise;

the Scientific Committee **recommends**:

- to update the ToR for ACCOBAMS Emergency Task Force for Stranding events (AETFs) by taking into consideration other existing initiatives, in terms of objectives and a prioritization system to provide support in case of capacity building request and emergency response;
- to consider an emergency situation as a cetacean stranding event which can overwhelm local resources and/or representing a transboundary emergency situation (e.g., mass strandings, large whales, unusual mortality events, epidemic outbreaks), or even single events involving threatened/endangered/data deficient species in the ACCOBAMS area (e.g., Cuvier’s beaked whales, sperm whales, Iberian killer whales);
- to keep a continuously updated list of existing stranding experts and stranding networks contact points/coordinators to be included in the ACCOBAMS website to facilitate reporting and communication. Additionally, keep updated lists of tissue banks (Resolution 3.9), responsible institutions designed by the parties and laboratories registered as CITES scientific and/or forensic institutions including the WOAH collaboration centers, for facilitating transboundary exchange of samples and investigations;
- to update existing ACCOBAMS adopted documents related to strandings management and investigations (best practices, guidelines and protocols) when needed through regular meetings among experts to include novel findings and analyses and to promote harmonisation in interpreting post-mortem findings;
- to promote a systematic adoption of technologies for remote assistance during investigations, supporting the acquisition of suitable hardware and software to routinely apply this approach in the ACCOBAMS area;
- to implement capacity building through the training modules targeting veterinarians and biologists involved in post-mortem investigations using novel technologies (i.e., virtual/augmented reality, metaverse, 3D printing) and including principles of forensic photographs and tele-necropsy. National Focal Points shall provide the appropriate support to collect information on any human related activity that could be related to

the event. Stranding network coordinators and relevant authorities shall help in bringing carcasses to competent laboratories in order to allow in-depth identification of causes of death;

- to create an emergency fund through voluntary contribution by Parties, international organisations, and public and private donors. The emergency fund should be managed by the ACCOBAMS Secretariat with the advice of the AETFS, creating simple and effective procedures to support expensive analyses (e.g., toxicology, genomics, research on hearing), samples exchange and any expert travel for investigations on emergencies in Countries asking for support. The procedures for requests and funding should be discussed with the AETF and the ACCOBAMS Secretariat and proposed to the ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee for approval.

RECOMMENDATION 16.7 – BYCATCH AND BOTTOM TRAWLING

The ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee (SC) strongly reiterates that bycatch in fishing gear is a widespread and significant threat to cetaceans across the Agreement Area. Particularly, in the Black Sea, bycatch was identified as the main source of human-induced mortality for the threatened Black Sea harbour porpoise (*Phocoena phocoena relicta*).

The ACCOBAMS Survey Initiative - the first synoptic survey conducted in 2018 and 2019 - provided baseline cetacean abundance estimates for the whole Agreement Area. During the same period in the Black Sea, intensive work on the assessment of bycatch levels and testing of mitigation measures, such as acoustic deterrent devices (pingers), has been carried out in the framework of CeNoBS and ACCOBAMS SCF projects. These were followed by the GFCM's CetaByM project which confirmed the effectiveness of Wideband PAL (Porpoise Alert Devices) pingers in the mitigation of porpoise bycatch in the Black Sea. New data from the Black Sea and the Mediterranean Sea have indicated that interactions of bottlenose dolphins (*Tursiops truncatus*) and common dolphins (*Delphinus delphis*) with mid-water trawls and purse seiners may have lethal effects on these cetaceans (Tonay, pers. comm.; Kezvine et al., 2024).

Fisheries management tools prohibit bottom trawling in the Mediterranean Sea in narrow coastal areas and deeper than 1,000 meters⁵. The ACCOBAMS SC **welcomes** the EU Action Plan "Protecting and restoring marine ecosystems for sustainable and resilient fisheries" adopted in 2023, which urges EU Member States to adopt national measures or, where appropriate, propose joint recommendations to prohibit bottom trawling in the Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) that are Natura 2000 sites designated under the Habitats Directive that protect the seabed and marine species, and to ensure that bottom trawling is phased out in all MPAs by 2030.

Taking into account that certain points of ACCOBAMS Recommendation 14.5 on bycatch have been implemented, **in terms of monitoring** the ACCOBAMS SC **strongly recommends** that:

1. parties ensure that monitoring schemes by independent observers are made obligatory for the fishing methods that have been proven to pose a threat to cetaceans (e.g., bottom-set gillnets targeting turbot in the Black Sea, purse seine fishery and mid-water trawls in the Mediterranean and the Black Seas);
2. the FAO-GFCM Guidelines for bycatch monitoring (FAO, 2019) be revised as 0.5% coverage for onboard observation is far from being satisfactory to understand the complete situation of cetacean bycatch (see Recommendation 16.8);
3. whenever possible, the relevant authorities (environmental and fisheries) should encourage the retrieval of dead bycaught animals from vessels to perform necropsies by relevant institutions involved in the national strandings network. As a minimum, onboard observers should collect tissue samples for a wide range of analyses (minimum samples for age (teeth), genetics (skin), and physiological status (blubber)) to understand the status and demographic characteristics of the affected populations (e.g., ICES 2024);
4. Parties implement active awareness-raising programmes among fishermen to encourage reporting of bycatch events in order to improve data collection and assess more precisely the extent of this threat.

In terms of mitigation, the ACCOBAMS SC:

5. **strongly recommends** the use of PAL pingers in turbot fishery in the Black Sea as an effective measure to mitigate harbour porpoise bycatch in bottom set gillnets according to the best available practices (FAO, 2019; Hamilton and Baker, 2019);
6. **encourages** further testing and development of bycatch/depredation mitigation measures in the ACCOBAMS area;

⁵ Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2022/1614 of 15 September 2022 determining the existing deep-sea fishing areas and establishing a list of areas where vulnerable marine ecosystems are known to occur or are likely to occur, OJ L 242, 19.9.2022, p. 1-141.

7. **encourages** the ACCOBAMS Secretariat to strengthen the collaboration with GFCM in addressing the impacts of several fisheries on cetaceans, their prey, and habitats;
8. **requests** that the ACCOBAMS Secretariat engages with GFCM and ICCAT to address illegal driftnets' continued use in the Western Mediterranean Sea;
9. **encourages** ACCOBAMS Parties to phase out bottom trawling within MPAs, including Natura 2000 Sites of Community Importance, by 2030;
10. **encourages** fishery national authorities to strengthen control to prevent IUU (illegal, unreported, unregulated) fisheries.

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RECOMMENDATION 16.8 – REVISION OF THE FAO GFCM GUIDELINES ON MONITORING INCIDENTAL CATCH OF VULNERABLE SPECIES IN THE MEDITERRANEAN AND BLACK SEAS (FAO 2019)

The ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee (SC) was informed that, following a special request from the European Union’s Directorate-General for Environment (DG-ENV), ICES convened a series of workshops on appropriate sampling schemes for protected, endangered and threatened cetacean species bycatch (WKPETSAMPs). In particular, WKPETSAMP3 (2024) that was tasked with providing concrete inputs for appropriate bycatch monitoring and assessment and for the promotion of regional cooperation. This workshop ran new simulations on multiple, ground-truthed scenarios, in addition to considering the ‘0.5% scenario’, which is indicated as the minimum appropriate level by the FAO/GFCM guidelines on monitoring incidental catch in the Mediterranean and Black Seas (FAO 2019). These guidelines were adopted by the relevant Data Collection Framework Regional Coordination Groups (DCF RCGs) within the Agreement Area and used to build national monitoring programmes.

The FAO/GFCM (FAO 2019) refers to 0.5% as “often accepted (MARE/2014/19, 2016)”. MARE/2014/19 (2016) used 0.5% as target for bycatch monitoring, stating that 0.5% is “what is commonly achieved by the by-catch monitoring programmes carried out under the Regulation (EC) No. 812/2004 (see Northridge et al. 2015)”. However, both documents fail to clarify that (1) those were commonly achieved targets under the Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC), not Regulation 812/2004 and (2) Northridge et al. (2015) clearly state that those coverages are mostly related to *métiers* for which they “do not consider [to] have representative coverage” (ICES WGBYC 2021).

Simulation scenarios (via downsampling at the haul level datasets from on board monitoring), WKPETSAMP3 concluded that:

- (i) above a certain level of monitoring effort (circa >10%) and for more frequently bycaught species, the bias and CV (Coefficient of Variation) on BPUE (Bycatch Per Unit Effort) are low and increasing observation effort does not improve estimate and precision;
- (ii) the bias and CV on BPUE increase rapidly at low levels of monitoring effort and, in some case, (e.g. **0.5% effort**) they are **unacceptable**;
- (iii) the **detection probability of a species** as a bycaught event, increases rapidly with increasing coverage, and less so for the rarer species. Hence, to “be able to certainly detect a bycatch event when happens for species with “very high” or “high/moderate” or “very low” bycatch frequency, the coverage needs to be higher than about 1% or 5% or 50%, respectively”. In addition, “to exit the field of detection causality/random detection” for “species with very low bycatch frequency”, a coverage of 7-10% is necessary.

The ACCOBAMS SC **recognises** the extensive simulation work incorporating realistic scenarios. Supporting these results and conclusions, the SC **recommends** that FAO/GFCM guidelines (FAO, 2019) are updated to incorporate the best available advice on appropriate onboard observer coverage as soon as possible.

References

FAO. 2019. Monitoring the incidental catch of vulnerable species in Mediterranean and Black Sea fisheries: Methodology for data collection. FAO Fisheries and Aquaculture Technical Paper No. 640. Rome, FAO.

ICES. 2024. Third Workshop on appropriate sampling schemes for Protected, Endangered and Threatened Species bycatch (WKPETSAMP3). ICES Scientific Reports. 6:1. 96 pp. <https://doi.org/10.17895/ices.pub.25061522>

Northridge S, Kingston A, Thomas L. 2015. Annual report on the implementation of Council Regulation (EC) No 812/2004 during 2014.

RECOMMENDATION 16.9 - ANTHROPOGENIC UNDERWATER NOISE

A progress report was provided by the co-chair of the Joint Noise Working Group (JNWG) on activities, based on the [JNWG WP 202302 final.pdf](#), which included:

- the ACCOBAMS Mediterranean technical assessment on anthropogenic underwater noise as part of the 2023 Quality Status Report of the Barcelona Convention (IG.26 taken at COP23 of UNEP/MAP);
- the collaboration with TG-Noise for the development of new EU guidelines on underwater noise monitoring and assessment;
- the participation to the SeaSounds project;
- engagement in the Joint ACCOBAMS-ASCOBANS Workshop with Navies on Underwater Noise and Cetaceans held on 26-27 November 2024 which focused on mitigating the impact of underwater noise—particularly from sonar and unexploded ordnance (UXO) blasts—on cetaceans.

A discussion addressed numerous issues relating to the results of the activities reported, as well as on other matters and developments related to the impacts of anthropogenic noise on cetaceans in the ACCOBAMS area.

The ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee (SC) **recommends** that:

- 1) an in-person meeting of the JNWG is organised and requests the ACCOBAMS Secretariat to explore with the Secretariats of the other two IGOs how this can best be progressed, recognising that the meeting will require Terms of Reference, a steering group and funding;
- 2) the ACCOBAMS Secretariat responds positively to an invitation to join the Intersessional Working Group (IWG) on noise, created in the framework of the Mediterranean Strategy for the Prevention of, Preparedness, and Response to Marine Pollution from Ships (2022-2031) of the Regional Marine Pollution Emergency Response Centre for the Mediterranean Sea (REMPEC). ACCOBAMS participation in this group shall also promote the use of NETCCOBAMS and encourage ACCOBAMS Parties to provide data for the work of this group, which is vital for the further development of the NETCCOBAMS software accordingly;
- 3) the Threshold Values for Impulsive and Continuous Noise emissions recently adopted by EU Member States shall become applied and used by all ACCOBAMS Parties;
- 4) ACCOBAMS Parties support the adoption of “ocean noise pollution” as a Common Indicator at the Barcelona Convention, which is currently a Candidate Common Indicator; and that cetacean species are used as indicator species for its application;
- 5) ACCOBAMS Parties apply the “IMO Guidelines for the reduction of underwater radiated noise from shipping to address adverse impacts on marine life” [IMO/MEPC 1/Circ.906] and participate in the experience building phase submitting respective information to the IMO’s Marine Environment Protection Committee (MEPC);
- 6) ACCOBAMS Parties participate and contribute to the global review of marine seismic airgun surveys currently being undertaken by the International Whaling Commission (IWC) <https://forms.gle/vmrnHSWrWR3ywwz3FA> and that regional representatives are asked to bring this initiative to the attention to the respective national focal points;
- 7) the promotion of the ACCOBAMS HQ MMO/PAM training and certification to all stakeholders;
- 8) ACCOBAMS Parties request the employment of ACCOAMS HQMMO/PAM certified people, if respective activities take place, as complementary mitigation measure;
- 9) the ACCOBAMS Parties, SC and Secretariat contribute to the development and implementation of the “Post-War Plan for Black Sea Cetaceans” [Recommendation 16.1] and respective activities, with particular focus given to the removal of all types of underwater explosives, both floating and sunk, including mines.

The ACCOBAMS SC refers ACCOBAMS Parties to Resolution 8.17 and **reiterates** the need for Parties to provide comprehensive information on impulsive noise-generating activities to allow a proper assessment of noise emissions in the Agreement area and their potential impact on cetaceans. National responsible institutions are requested to provide data on impulsive noise generating sources and activities from anywhere in the ACCOBAMS Area into the existing Regional Noise Registry, managed by ACCOBAMS for publicly available data.

The ACCOBAMS SC **encourages** the JNWG to continue its work as proposed within its update Report, including:

- 1) further development of the concept of “quiet zones” as outlined in Recommendation 10.5 of the ACCOBAMS SC;
 - 2) updating the noise models available in NETCCOBAMS and securing their compliance with evolving guidance from EU-TG Noise under the European Union Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD-2008/56/EC);
 - 3) comparison of the results of noise modelling with appropriate in situ anthropogenic noise recordings made throughout the ACCOBAMS Area, taking account of the diverse sensitivities of the different cetacean species;
 - 4) continued efforts to monitor anthropogenic activities generating underwater noise;
 - 5) further encouragement of the use of mitigation measures for anthropogenic activities generating underwater noise;
 - 6) further efforts to develop and assess the effectiveness of new mitigation measures; and
- improved facilitation of the exchange of relevant information with competent authorities related to military activities and exercises, from planning to assessment of impacts.

RECOMMENDATION 16.10 – SHIP STRIKES

ACCOBAMS and the International Whaling Commission (IWC) have long recognised the problem of ship strikes, particularly of large whales. This spans the issues of conservation, animal welfare and human safety. They have been working together to develop a better understanding of the problem and to develop effective mitigation measures, *inter alia*, within the ACCOBAMS area, particularly for fin and sperm whales. The Pelagos “Collisions and Shipping” Focus Group (PCSFSG) is working on improvements of the precision surrounding the identification of collisions and the Committee welcomes further co-operation (see below).

The Scientific Committee **welcomes** the adoption in July 2023 of IMO Resolution MEPC.380(80) establishing the Northwestern Mediterranean Sea as a Particular Sensitive Sea Area (NW Med PSSA) at the initiative of the four ACCOBAMS countries (Spain, France, Italy and Monaco).

The Scientific Committee **recommends** that Panigada, as convenor, liaises with the Pelagos Agreement to create a Joint Ship Strikes Working Group with agreed Terms of Reference, part of which will include:

- (a) liaison with riparian nations, the IWC and other stakeholders to continue (and improve) the collection of information on cetaceans and vessel traffic, to enable better identification of actual or potential high-risk areas for cetaceans (especially fin and sperm whales) by incorporating information on whale and vessel distribution into risk models (more details on how to achieve this can be found under Item 3.3.3 of the SC report);
- (b) incorporating the results of the IWC-IUCN-ACCOBAMS workshop (Messinia, 2019) and work on IMMAs;
- (c) investigation of ways to support the integration of and updating of cetacean risk information (e.g. IMMAs) into Electronic Charts Systems (ECDIS) used for maritime navigation;
- (d) improving efforts and approaches to quantifying ship strike occurrence (e.g. via necropsies and evaluation of signs in photos obtained in the context of photo-identification studies);
- (e) promotion and use of the IWC ship strikes database and appropriate modules within NETCCOBAMS;
- (f) elaboration of improved methods to evaluate the effectiveness of mitigation measures and especially recent or new PSSAs (and associated protective measures), building for example on work within NETCCOBAMS and OceanCare and studies of ‘near miss events’ and ‘close point of approach (CPA)’;
- (g) review of the results of relevant studies being undertaken in the region e.g., Life SeaDetect, Life *conceptu maris*, SEASteMAR;
- (h) review of the results of existing efforts and encouragement of the development of new real time cetacean localization projects, which are designed to be complementary tools in avoiding ship strikes; and
- (i) review of the progress on the development of a whale-safe certificate (e.g., within the Shipprint project or the Green Marine Europe programme, related to keeping speeds below 13 knots).

The Scientific Committee also **recommends** that ACCOBAMS Parties and the Secretariat:

- (a) promote communication with stakeholders (e.g., shipping companies, navies, port authorities, whale watching organisations, etc.) on the issue of vessel strikes, including mitigation approaches and reporting to the IWC ship strikes database;
- (b) encourage and support regional data collection and mitigation initiatives and foster the development of incentive systems to shipping companies that adopt appropriate mitigation methods;
- (c) continue to work within IMO (and its MEPC) on relevant initiatives including mitigation approaches such as shipping lanes, including through initiatives with member states (the most appropriate mechanism for IMO action);
- (d) foster and improve collaborative efforts with other bodies working on this issue including, IWC, the Pelagos Agreement, IMO, CMS;

- (e) support efforts to improve access to the temporal and spatial distribution of shipping, particularly vessels that do not transmit AIS information;
- (f) support, when appropriate, activities within the framework of SEASteMAR in particular for the activity 1.4 - Definition of criteria for the identification of high-risk areas;
- (g) offer support to the Greek Authorities for reducing the risk of ship strikes the Hellenic Trench, including strengthening collaboration with the International Hydrographic Organisation (IHO) and the Hellenic Hydrographic Office to develop standards and accelerate the process for nautical charts to be updated and reflect the area crucial for the protection of marine life;
- (h) inform stakeholders of the willingness of the ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee to provide advice on ship strikes and mitigation approaches.

RECOMMENDATION 16.11 - COMMERCIAL WHALE WATCHING IN THE ACCOBAMS AREA

Recalling Article II of the Agreement, according to which the Parties shall prohibit and take all necessary measures to eliminate any deliberate taking of cetaceans, including harassing or attempting to engage in such conduct,

Recalling Section 2 of Annex 2 to the Agreement, according to which Parties shall develop guidelines and/or codes of conduct to regulate or manage activities that create direct and indirect interactions between humans and cetaceans, such as tourist activities,

Aware that ACCOBAMS Resolution 4.7 sets forth Guidelines for Commercial Cetacean Watching Activities in the ACCOBAMS Area and Annex 2 to Resolution 6.20 provides regulations governing use of the collective certification mark "High Quality Whale-Watching®" and the Guidelines for acquiring a label for whale-watching operators in the Pelagos/ACCOBAMS Area,

The ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee:

- in line with previous ACCOBAMS resolutions (Res. 4.7, Res. 6.20 and Res. 7.16) **reiterates** the need for legally enforceable whale watching regulations to be in place and fully implemented by all of the ACCOBAMS Parties;
- **reiterates** the importance of carrying an analysis of existing national legislations related to whale watching regulations that could support the work of the expert who will be tasked to analyse existing national legislations related to whale watching. This analysis should be done in coordination with the work done by the Pelagos WG Leggi in particular with item: "Action I-29b Study of governance procedures and legislative measures and namely to the whale watching activities";
- **encourages** the continuation of the testing and updating the IlogWhales App that incorporates the common procedure for data collection by whale watching operators, making sure that there is compatibility with other similar programmes running on collaborative platforms (eg.: OBSenMER);
- **encourages** the collaboration with relevant organisations such as IWC, CMS and Pelagos Agreement on issues related to whale watching activities;
- **approves** the implementation of pilot studies to define the whale watching carrying capacity in a targeted geographical area where commercial whale watching is intensively practised;
- **recommends** that the regulations governing the use of the collective certification mark "High Quality Whale Watching®" (HQWW) be revised with the objective of simplifying the implementation at the national level and **facilitates** replication in other geographical areas;
- **urges** the Greek government to implement specific legislation, in accordance with the 'Guidelines for Commercial Cetacean Watching Activities in the ACCOBAMS Area', to mitigate current and potential pressure put on the Critically Endangered Gulf of Ambracia bottlenose dolphin subpopulation due to the development of unregulated dolphin-watching activities in the Gulf in recent years by operators, as well as locals offering opportunistic dolphin-watching trips.

RECOMMENDATION 16.12 – MARINE DEBRIS

Recalling recent workstream on marine debris, noting that this was underpinned by ACCOBAMS Resolution 8.20 on Marine Litter & Chemical Pollution, adopted by ACCOBAMS Parties in 2022,

Recalling the ACCOBAMS workshop convened on 6-7 April 2024 (Catania, Sicily), in collaboration with the University of Padova with the objective to improve collection of relevant data, especially from stranded cetaceans, with a specific focus on identifying best practice related to monitoring ingested marine litter and entanglement evidences in the ACCOBAMS Area,

Taking into consideration that all the recommendations from this workshop were presented to the IWC Scientific Committee (22 April - 3 May 2024, Bled, Slovenia) which endorsed them,

The SC particularly encourages:

- a more coordinated effort to better understand the toxicological effect of macro and micro-litter ingestion in cetaceans (considering both chemical, ecotoxicological and physical effects);
- harmonisation of a diagnostic methodology that includes: a) evaluation of the presence of marine litter in marine mammals gastro-intestinal tract (GIT) (at least) (ACCOBAMS/ASCOBANS, 2019; Corazzola et al. 2021); b) categorization and quantification of identified marine litter through the determination of polymers by spectroscopy technique (FT-IR); c) detection of plastic additives and absorbed contaminants to plastics in organism tissues; and d) develop risk, impact and mortality indexes;
- Parties to further collaborate at a regional level between tissue banks, to facilitate the exchange of tissue samples for joint analyses and retrospective studies;
- continued joint efforts in the Adriatic Sea to merge data on bottlenose dolphin-human interactions (including set net interactions, marine debris ingestion) and mitigation efforts, as well as creating a multi-level multidisciplinary model to identify hotspot risks;
- the defining and development of new methods to evaluate the exposure to plastics and plastic additives in free-ranging organisms, including new approaches such as -omics, which could reveal the exposure to a plethora of stressors (microplastics, emerging chemicals, legacy chemicals etc.) and drive the identification of new end-points (via e.g., metabolomics, transcriptomics, epigenetics);
- multiple stressors investigation: development of new diagnostic techniques to understand the effects of cumulative stressors on cetaceans both on:
 - stranded organisms, investigating the potential ecotoxicological effects caused by the ingestion of marine litter and emerging and legacy chemicals, both through biomarker identification and analysis of tissues;
 - *in vitro* experiments, assessing the effects of micro- and nano-plastics (combined by the presence of emerging and legacy chemicals) through new technologies applied on cetacean cell lines, organoids and 'organ-on-chip' technology.

Recommendations on Indicator Species

The SC **recommended** that cetacean species should be promoted as indicators for microplastics (*i.e.*, fin whale, *Balaenoptera physalus*) and macro-litter pollution (*i.e.*, *Physeter macrocephalus* and, *Ziphius cavirostris*) at the ACCOBAMS scale. *Tursiops spp.* could be used as indicators at sub-basin levels.

The SC also **encourages** the Barcelona Convention and the European Commission to include cetaceans as indicator species within the IMAP candidate indicator 24 and MSFD descriptor 10.

RECOMMENDATION 16.13 – SEMI-CAPTIVITY (PASSPORT & GUIDELINES)

Recalling Resolution 5.14 on live removals of bottlenose dolphins (*Tursiops truncatus*) in the Black Sea in which the Black Sea Parties were asked, in coordination with the Black Sea Permanent Secretariat, to carry out an assessment and an inventory of all specimens of bottlenose dolphins kept in captivity by means of genetic, morphological and photographic identification methods;

Recalling Resolution 3.20 providing Guidelines for the Release of Cetaceans into the Wild: all this document stresses a particular attention that should be paid in relocating captive animals in a wild or semi-wild condition with one of the main concerns of possible genetically contamination of the local population(s) in case of escape from the pen expressed by several documents (MOP7.Inf09 and MOP8/2022/Inf52);

Considering the existing international legal frameworks asking for a proper identification and internationally recognised system for identifying cetaceans kept by human in officially accredited facilities;

Recalling the Resolution 8.11 on Cetacean Population Genetic giving proper details on cetaceans' samples for genetic analyses, their preservations and technical approaches;

The SC recommends to the Parties that they adopt the process toward cetacean genetic passport and adapt the form and the template proposed in [Annex I](#), which includes genetic and other relevant individually distinct biological data, to the current national procedures for the identification of cetaceans kept in aquaria and dolphinarium, including CITES permits, information and laboratory results from genetic analyses which should be performed for all the animals to confirm their origins. The form should be then transmitted to the ACCOBAMS Secretariat and kept in a centralized repository.

Moreover, **Parties are advised** to refer to the Guidelines for *Best Practices During the Installation and Management of Semi-enclosed Facilities for Cetacean Species in the ACCOBAMS Area* ([Annex II](#)), as well as to the *Procedural Steps for Requesting Advice from the ACCOBAMS Advisory Committee on Semi-Enclosed Facilities* ([Annex III](#)), when these kinds of initiatives are prospected within their jurisdiction.

ANNEX I - Genetic Passport Template

Individual information			
1. Name		5. ID Type	
2. Species	<i>Latin name</i>	6. ID number	
	<i>Common name</i>		
3. Sex	<i>M/F</i>	7. Place of birth	<i>Specify complete address</i>
4. Origin	<i>wild/zoo/other</i>	8. Date of birth	
9. Previous facilities	1.	2.	3.
CITES information			
10. Type of document		12. Date of Issue	
11. No. of the certificate		13. Country of origin	
14. Permit*		16. Date of Issue	
15. No. of permit		17. Country of import	
Parents information			
Father ID details**		Mother ID details**	
18. Name		23. Name	
19. Species		24. Species	
20. ID Type		25. ID Type	
21. ID number		26. ID number	
22. Origin		27. Origin	
Physical marks and features			
28. Total length (cm)		29. Total weight (kg)	
30. General picture from the left***			
31. General picture from the right***			

32. General picture from the top***			
33. Picture of the dorsal fin (from the right and from the left)***			
34. Picture of the caudal fin (from the top)***			
35. Description and pictures of morphological peculiarities, abnormalities, scars and injures (left)****			
a.	b.	c.	d.
e.	f.	g.	h.
36. Description and pictures of morphological peculiarities, abnormalities, scars and injures (right)****			
a.	b.	c.	d.
e.	f.	g.	h.
X-ray for age determination	Y/N		
<i>* If imported</i>		<i>*** include pictures in the form and attached originals</i>	
<i>** Include all documentation for parents</i>		<i>**** Refer with letter different marks on the drawings</i>	
Genotype			
37. Laboratory			
38. ID of the sample in the laboratory		39. Date of the analysis	
40. Description of the sample (blood/swab/tissue)		41. Date of sampling, methods or preservation and name of the sampler	
42. Species confirmation		43. Targeted genes	

44. Locus	Fragment Size	Primer Sequence	
1. D08			
2. EV37			
3. KWM2			
4. KWM9			
5. KWM12			
6. MK6			
7. MK8			
8. MK9			
9. Ttr04			
10. Ttr11			
11. Ttr19			
12. Ttr58			
13. Ttr63			
14. TexVet05			
15. TexVet07			
16.			
17.			
18.			

**ANNEX II - *Draft* Guidelines for Best Practices During the Installation and Management of Semi-enclosed Facilities
for Cetacean Species in the ACCOBAMS Area**

Joan Gonzalvo, Frances Gulland, Lori Marino, Giuseppe Notarbartolo di Sciara and Sandro Mazzariol (ACCOBAMS Advisory
Committee on semi-enclosed facilities)

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1. BACKGROUND

Semi-captivity of cetaceans has been an issue considered for several years by ACCOBAMS, which was addressed in particular in 2 reports: “Taking of cetaceans, dolphinaria and quasi-dolphinaria: a legal analysis relating to ACCOBAMS Parties” ([ACCOBAMS-MOP7/2019/Inf 09](#)); and “Scientific perspective on “potential marine semi-enclosed facilities” in the ACCOBAMS Area” ([ACCOBAMS-MOP8/2022/Inf52](#)).

Based on the recommendations of the latter, the Eighth Meeting of the Parties to ACCOBAMS (MOP8) agreed that the Scientific Committee should establish an Advisory Committee on semi-enclosed facilities to provide guidance to interested Parties in relation to all questions related to semi-enclosed facilities. At its Fifteenth meeting held on 10-11 May 2023 in Tunis, the ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee adopted Terms of Reference for an ACCOBAMS Advisory Committee on semi-enclosed facilities ([ACCOBAMS-SC15/2023/Doc17](#)). The present document, drafted by the members of this Advisory Committee, has been largely adapted from the document *Standards for Cetacean Sanctuaries* adopted by The Global Federation of Animal Sanctuaries (GFAS) and released in June 2023, taking into account the ACCOBAMS framework.

A few initiatives have been made public, which aim at providing increasingly necessary facilities posing an alternative to dolphinaria and marine parks, by creating the so-called cetacean sanctuaries or refuges. In an ACCOBAMS’ context it is suggested to use the latter term **refuge**, to avoid confusion with concepts of marine protected areas. For example, the “Pelagos Sanctuary for Mediterranean whales and dolphins”, a well-known protected area in the Mediterranean, has a completely different nature and goal than dolphin refuges. Hence, tentatively, hereafter Semi-enclosed Facilities for Cetacean Species will be referred as refuge/s.

It must be emphasised that a true refuge intends to approximate a natural cetacean habitat to the fullest extent possible while promoting diverse, natural behaviours and relationships amongst the cetaceans. The welfare of cetaceans takes priority over all other considerations, including visitors, caregivers, scientists and donors. Cetacean refuges, as do traditional dolphinaria and marine parks, must provide human care essential for animal health and safety.

Finally, the recent application should be noted of the [EU Directive 2016/429 on transmissible animal diseases and amending and repealing certain acts in the area of animal health](#), also named ‘Animal Health Law’ (AHL) and the [Regulation 2035/2019 supplementing Regulation \(EU\) 2016/429 of the European Parliament and of the Council as regards rules for establishments keeping terrestrial animals and hatcheries, and the traceability of certain kept terrestrial animals and hatching](#) apply to potential cetacean refuges.

These legal frameworks dealing with diseases transmission in all the animals kept under human care, including terrestrial and aquatic wild animals, should be applied by EU members and candidate Countries. This legal framework provides a well-defined legal classification for all the facilities keeping animals, including those maintaining wild animals in a confined establishment. All the member states will adopt differently the classification of the different establishments and, in case of proposal of a dolphin refuge, this national classification should be considered as a legal reference. As an example, Italy has adopted the above-mentioned EU legal framework with the Law Decree 135/2022 and the following decrees from the Ministry for Health and Ministry for the Environment:

- Dolphin refuges are included among the collections of wild species different from zoos and aquaria.
- All these establishments have to identify proper management measures considering biosafety, animal welfare and workers safety and respond to national and international recommendations.

2. CETACEAN HOUSING

2.1. General considerations

The habitat and living conditions consider hygiene and the species' physiological, psychological, and social needs. This includes consideration of outdoor and temporary/short-term indoor space, vertical and horizontal space, and diversity and complexity of space.

Policies and procedures are in place such that personnel can enter and exit enclosures without risk of the animals escaping, and can shift animals as appropriate between and out of enclosures prior to entering the enclosure. Facility design takes into account caregiver-animal safety and ease of maintaining a positive relationship.

Animals are provided access to as many areas of the enclosures as possible at all times, except during facility maintenance activities, unless security or welfare concerns dictate otherwise. All enclosures are constructed without creating 'dead ends' to allow for freedom of movement of subordinate individuals.

Animals are provided with regular access to outdoor space with sufficient room to engage in natural behaviours and designed to promote species-specific wellbeing. Access is ideally given daily, with consideration to weather and animals' individual needs (e.g., animals in quarantine or isolation, or being observed for medical reasons, may be kept indoors), and species-specific risks.

The habitats include an acoustic monitoring system and provide appropriate visual and acoustic barriers and physical distance from the public/human activity, where necessary. Exposure to high-intensity sounds or noises are avoided. Appliances or machines in the vicinity of the enclosure that produce such noise in the animals' hearing range are insulated as much as possible.

The habitat provides security from predators and unauthorized human access. 24-hour systems are in place to minimize the risks of theft, malicious damage or harm to animals. This may include staff on site, security guards, security cameras, alarm systems, etc. Moreover, in addition to the primary permeable perimeter on the ocean side, a secondary permeable barrier should be considered to prevent direct human access and to serve as secondary containment should an animal escape.

Enclosures have enough area (see Housing section below) per animal to accommodate natural individual and group behaviours/activities. Enclosures provide enough area for individuals to be spatially dispersed from one another according to the individual preference or in the event of social conflict.

Quarantine facilities have appropriate housing and design features for treatment of injured or ill animals. Healthy animals admitted to quarantine have as large an enclosure as possible to help maintain natural locomotion and behaviours. Features of the quarantine facilities should comply with EU Zoo Directive 1999/22/CE and EAZA guidelines for marine mammals kept under human care.

Enclosures are designed to allow for safe cleaning. Any products used for cleaning the enclosure and other features (e.g., foot baths, cleaning products for food buckets and enrichment items) should be reviewed by attending veterinarian for use with the species housed.

A regular program of refuge maintenance is in place. Any enclosure in need of repair, or any defect that may cause harm to animals, is immediately repaired or replaced. If that is not an option, the animals are relocated to an alternative secure enclosure.

All gates and walkways are constructed of materials which minimize any injury to the animals due to shape, sharp or rough surfaces and/or those which would create additional noise in the environment.

If enclosures use netting for walls or floors, the netting is appropriate for the species. If enclosures use netting or another form of barrier for "walls" the distance between the top of the wall and any walkway above or adjacent to it is only a few centimetres wide to minimize the possibility that an animal gets entangled or trapped.

2.2. Housing

Many factors influence the minimum space required for animals, including natural species-specific behaviours, health needs, and social groupings.

For cases where mixed-species housing is foreseen, enclosure dimensions can be adjusted accordingly so that the space reflects that required for multiple species if housed separately.

The refuge's area should be at least equivalent to the average daily swim performed in the wild for the species being housed. Moreover, enclosures should provide enough space to allow the animals to move horizontally in a straight line for at least 10+ tail strokes. The determination of average daily swim distance should be based on the best available science as determined by consultation with experts on conspecifics in the wild and current available scientific literature, at the time the refuge is designed. The process used to determine the average daily swim distance should be documented and verifiable. The latest [*Standards and Guidelines for the management of aquatic mammals under human care by European Association for Aquatic Mammals \(EAAM\)*](#), for bottlenose dolphins, propose a minimum pool surface area of 550 m² and a pool volume of 2,000m³, for 1-6 animals (adding 75 m² and a 300m³ per additional animal). These values should be considered as an absolute minimum. In the context of a modern and newly created dolphin refuge, we should expect facilities considerably larger.

The refuge's depth should be equal to or greater than the typical dive depth in a near-shore environment for the species being housed, for at least one-third of the overall space. If the typical dive depth is not known for the species being housed, then, at a minimum, a depth equal to or greater than 3 times the body length of the resident species should be used. The determination of typical dive depth in a near-shore environment should be based on the best available science. The process of expert consultation and literature review used to determine the typical dive depth of conspecifics in the wild in a near-shore environment should be documented and verifiable.

The refuge should contain variable depths and range in natural topography.

The water volume provided should allow for the animal(s) to dive and spend the majority of their time below the water surface.

Animals requiring treatment for illness or injury are housed in enclosures that allow for appropriate treatment and ease of care.

Cetacean Refuge sites must possess the requirements to ensure the well-being of the animals on the basis of their ecology, behaviour and physiology. For example, a potentially feasible site may be either in a sheltered, shallow and semi-enclosed body of marine water such as a small bay or fjord, or in a coastal lagoon, where appropriate enclosures can be fenced.

Enclosed areas need to be as protected as possible from severe weather, and have easy access for personnel to care for the animals in all weathers.

To ensure that the refuge animals can experience acoustic connectivity to their environment, the refuge should have at least a portion of its perimeter defined by an acoustically permeable barrier (e.g., an enclosed bay may be defined by land on three sides but defined by net at the opening of the bay, thus allowing acoustic connectivity).

The shape of the refuge perimeter does not disrupt the swimming pattern of the animals in a harmful way or allow any animals to be cornered.

Experts in captive cetacean behaviour should be consulted to ensure that netting or other containment material is designed to minimize risk to the refuge residents. The permeable barrier should include design features that prevent cetaceans from getting trapped under any floating walkways or entangled due to 'bagging' (i.e., slack in a net caused by water movement), in any cables, floats, edges or anchoring systems. The mesh size and gauge for the permeable barrier is appropriate for containing the animals without risk of entanglement, and suitable for excluding wild species or allowing them to pass through without risk of entanglement).

A comprehensive list of local species known to be present in the area of the refuge should be compiled and used to inform the decision on mesh size and gauge.

Netting should be constructed to maintain its integrity (i.e., mesh size and gauge) throughout the required duration of the enclosure, be able to be effectively cleaned and maintained while in place, and to minimize abrasion or other potential risks to the refuge cetaceans or wild species in the area. Double netting should be considered as a basic measure to prevent dolphin escapes.

The anchoring system for the perimeter and any associated structures should be robust enough to withstand normal weather patterns for the region (as determined by marine engineers).

The barriers should be inspected and maintained at regular intervals to avoid the accumulation of biological fouling, which could compromise the integrity of the barrier over time by creating significant drag. Maintenance may be preventative and include components such as algae and/or marine debris control booms.

Barriers and enclosures are inspected routinely for signs of breach.

The refuge staff should have the capacity to repair permeable barriers on-site in an emergency situation and replace them when necessary.

The structure that the permeable barrier hangs from should not pose a risk to the animals being housed or wild species and be well marked.

A marine vessel 'no-go' zone should be established and clearly marked around the perimeter of the refuge to ensure that the animals cannot be accessed by the public via water.

- ✓ The refuge design should allow for continuous monitoring of the animals throughout the entire refuge, both visually and acoustically to minimize blind spots. This may include a network of underwater and above-water cameras and hydrophones.
- ✓ Maintenance of operational data archives (e.g., video recordings, acoustic recordings) will be necessary.

2.3. Gates

- ✓ Animal holding areas (i.e., separation areas and larger refuge areas) should be equipped with gates to allow for the movement of animals between areas when needed.
- ✓ Gates should be appropriately sized to the species held in the refuge and designed to allow for animals' normal swimming while traveling through. Moreover, caregivers must be able to have a clear view of enclosures and animals while operating the doors.
- ✓ Gates and doors are constructed of appropriate materials and designed to ensure safety of animals and humans and to remain functional under all circumstances.
- ✓ The refuge should have tools available on-site to guide animals to a specific location (e.g., herding and crowding nets).

2.4. Shelter and Shade

Ideally, refuges are located where water depth is sufficient to filter the majority of light, to protect residents from overexposure to UV light simply by spending more time at or near the bottom of the enclosure(s). Non-reflective enclosure substrate is encouraged to protect animals from overexposure to UV light.

Areas of shelter from the sun should be provided for the animals where water depth may not be sufficient to filter the majority of light, such as with medical or quarantine pools.

2.5. Sanitation

The refuge must be designed based on a carefully planned 'carrying capacity', which should be documented in a plan created prior to moving any animals into it. This means that, based on site-specific hydrology and physical features, as well as anticipated waste production per animal (calculated for each individual based on species, surrounding water

temperature and daily food intake), there is a limit to how many animals can be housed at the refuge without negatively impacting (nutrient and bacterial loading) the surrounding environment.

Once animals are residing in the refuge, impact should be monitored with regular (annual at a minimum, in addition to every time a new animal is introduced) sediment and water column sampling. All sampling records should be archived.

Monitoring protocols should be in place for animal feedings so that food waste within the refuge itself is kept to a minimum and not concentrated in a single area (e.g., underwater cameras at the location of remote food deployment devices).

Protocols should be in place to remove food not consumed by refuge animals.

Each enclosure/separation area has dedicated equipment and tools to prevent cross contamination. When resources restrict the ability to have dedicated tools, tools are disinfected between enclosures to prevent the spread of parasites and disease.

Adequate protocols must be in place to dispose of waste, including food waste and human waste/trash so that it does not accumulate on-site in a way that negatively impacts the local environment or area in which the animals are residing.

Quarantine facilities must be designed in order to be properly sanitized: surfaces should be easily cleanable and disinfected with round corners, smooth edges and proper water filtration systems.

2.6. Environment

The refuge should be located in a climate appropriate to the animals being housed (i.e., seasonal fluctuations, maximum storm cycles, and days of sunshine per year should all be within the normal range for the species in the wild) The temperature should be within an acceptable range for the species housed. Allowance is made to accommodate individual animals unable to tolerate temperatures above or below the usual range of comfort for the species. Housing of geriatric, juvenile, and/or ill animals may not be appropriate for some refuges and will require case- by-case review. In case, proper facilities for these categories should be projected with the capability of controlling temperatures.

Water temperature should be within the thermoneutral range for the species. Records of daily water temperature should be maintained along with water quality data.

A hydrological study of the area should be obtained prior to construction of the refuge and should be kept on record. The refuge area should have adequate flushing, ensuring that there is not harmful (to the refuge animals or surrounding ecosystem) nutrient accumulation from waste material in the vicinity of the refuge. If natural tidal flushing is not adequate pumps, paddles or sprayers can be used to increase flushing.

The water current and dynamics of the site should not be strong enough to threaten the integrity of the netted perimeter, anchoring system, or associated structures.

Water quality in the area should have adequate dissolved oxygen, minimum turbidity appropriate for the ecosystem and resident species, minimal contaminant and pollution levels, as well as locally appropriate and resident species appropriate nutrient, pH and salinity levels. Water quality should be monitored for temperature, salinity, pH, pathogens daily, weekly for pollutants, and records of results should be archived. Parameters should comply with any governmental or permitting agency mandates and consistent with bathing water quality regulations.

The refuge should be located in an area protected from large sources of acoustic pollution (e.g., not directly next to a shipping lane, not near a military testing site). Low level acoustic pollution (e.g., recreational boaters) should be limited, either by selecting a site that is more remote and thus not exposed to heavy activity, or by creating and enforcing a no-go zone around the refuge that limits acoustic pollution to a level that does not interfere with the animal's daily activity. The impacts of acoustic stimuli should be monitored using passive acoustic monitoring coupled with behavioural observations of the animals.

If the refuge overlaps with habitat for sensitive or protected flora or fauna, protocols should be in place to ensure that normal refuge activities do not negatively impact those sensitive species. As stated above, a double fence should

prevent any escape or intrusion. Additionally, a contingency plan for any incidental exit or entrance should be prepared.

Supplemental lighting is provided as needed to ensure adequate light for caregivers to observe animals, clean enclosures and perform related animal care tasks. Light pollution from artificial lights should be minimized along the shoreline of the refuge.

3. NUTRITION REQUIREMENTS

3.1. Hydration

Fresh clean water must be available in sufficient quantity at all times to all individuals via high quality food and supplemental hydration when required.

Fish quality and water content are kept at the highest possible level to maintain appropriate water absorption during feeds.

If hydration supplementation is deemed necessary, hydration should be achieved via established methods, utilizing the least invasive methods whenever possible, under the supervision and direction of the attending veterinarian.

Hydration should be monitored utilizing regular voluntary blood sampling, examination of eyes, mucous membranes and skin.

Water used for hydration should be at room temperature (temperature of the food prep area or comfortable indoor temperature) when administered (unless providing ice cubes is the method utilized).

Potable water sources should be tested for quality and contaminants annually at a minimum (more frequently in location with annual variations in water quality) and whenever there is a change to the water system or reason for concern (such as an animal exhibiting a medical concern for an unknown reason).

3.2. Diet

A balanced and healthy diet is provided appropriately based on the needs of each animal, following veterinary instructions for special needs.

A veterinarian or qualified veterinary nutritionist periodically reviews all aspects of the animals' diets at the refuge and makes adjustments to individual diets with consideration of species, age, life stage, size and condition. The calories in foods used as enrichment are considered when planning the overall diet.

Diets of individual animals (including vitamin supplementation) are of a quality, quantity and variety to match the physiological and psychological state of the individual as it changes over time, with consideration for the age, life stage, species, condition, size and health of the individual.

The refuge utilizes a feeding procedure that ensures each individual receives adequate nutrition regardless of status in social groups, such as routine observation of feeding activity. Each animal's daily dietary needs are available to animal care staff.

Daily food consumption and other behaviours are monitored and, if any changes are detected, immediately reported. Feed types should remain varied as appropriate for each species to ensure that the animals are able to easily adapt to changes in food availability.

Protocol should be implemented for testing the quality of each lot of food. Food quality is continually monitored. Food safety and quality should meet criteria for human consumption included in current national regulations. If not already adopted by the food suppliers, who should provide detailed information, protocols should include analysis of calories, nutritional components, lipid oxidation, histamines and peroxides, contamination, and microbiology sampling such as enterobacteria, salmonella, and mesophilic aerobes.

Social status must not negatively impact food quantity for any individual animal (e.g., dominant animals taking more food than subordinate animals and thus certain animals not receiving their required daily intake).

If animals are believed to be consuming live food items from the habitat, similar food items should be collected and sampled to assess nutritional content, as well as screened for contaminants and toxicity.

Prior to offering vitamins or other supplements, the individual animal's health and condition, as well as the diet, are reviewed by the veterinarian or a nutritionist experienced in the species' care.

Species-appropriate supplements should be utilized to support each animal's nutritional needs and compensate for the nutrient loss due to the feed freezing and thawing process.

To the extent possible, food should be sourced from local fisheries using environmentally friendly and sustainable methods (but this effort should not compromise the nutritional needs of the animals by dictating type or quantity of feed). A dedicated program involving local fishermen could be implemented considering local fish species, in order to adapt the dolphins to more natural conditions.

Any diet changes, based on weight and condition of the animal, food consumption, activity level and other medical or behavioural considerations, should be made or approved by the veterinarian or other qualified personnel, with any adjustments made to the entire diet to ensure continued nutritional balance.

3.3. Food Presentation and Feeding Techniques

The feeding schedule should make every effort possible to mimic the frequency and timing of feeding patterns in the wild for each species.

Records for each feed, including the type of food, amount consumed, supplements and medications given, and behaviours during feeding should be kept.

Feeding in multiple locations can encourage wider utilization of the refuge area and helps to ensure that low-ranking individuals have adequate access to food.

Feeding stations are able to be monitored effectively both above and below the water, so that food intake can be monitored and uneaten food does not accumulate in any location

A variety of feeding techniques and locations should be offered to encourage more diverse feeding behaviours (e.g., remote feeders, enrichment devices, and, when appropriate, live food)

All methods used to encourage engagement with enriching feeding methods should be based on positive reinforcement.

3.4. Food Storage and Handling

Food processing and storage should be done in dedicated kitchen and rooms build according the national regulation for human consumptions: walls and floors should be easily cleanable with round edges and corners; the surface materials have to be easily cleaned with water and routine disinfectants at the working surface; the room should have enough light to ensure proper evaluation of the food and dirty areas; the working areas should have proper drinkable water supply and drainage for cleaning; windows and doors should be equipped with mosquito nets to avoid entrance of flies and other insects; a pest control and cleaning programs should be adopted and routinely implemented.

Food is stored, handled and prepared in an appropriate manner to retain nutritional value, freshness, and prevent its deterioration, invasive species or other forms of contamination.

Frozen fish or other frozen food should be stored in freezers that are maintained at a maximum temperature of -18°C. A recording system for temperature control should be adopted.

Items frozen for use are dated and labelled, and no frozen items are thawed and refrozen. A freezer register should be adopted.

Frozen food items should be stored in a sanitary freezer, away from the walls, elevated off the floors and away from the condenser/fans of the freezer to allow for proper air circulation within the freezer.

Thawed fish/food should be stored in a refrigerator or kept on ice to maintain a temperature no greater than 4°C, used within 12 hours of thawing to minimize bacterial overgrowth, and clearly labelled with the time of thawing.

Food items requiring refrigeration are stored in a clean, dry refrigerator, and/or ordered at regular intervals in amounts that can be used prior to spoilage.

Products are dated and expired food as well as bags damaged by pests are discarded.

Two to three months' worth of food availability should be ensured at all times.

During its handling, food is protected against deterioration, mold, and/or contamination by insects, birds, rodents or other animals.

Food preparation surfaces are thoroughly cleaned and disinfected between uses and personnel wash hands thoroughly prior to handling food. Wearing gloves during food preparation is recommended.

Staff should avoid handling food while sick.

Thawing should take place in a refrigerator. If this is not possible or food is still frozen, clean, cold, running salt water can be used. If salt water is not available, thawing with potable, running fresh water may be considered, assuming the area/water is clean and post-thaw refrigeration remains prompt.

Food handling protocols should be plainly visible in the food preparation and storage areas.

4. VETERINARY CARE

4.1. Veterinary Program Personnel

The refuge's veterinary medical program is developed and carried out under the supervision of a licensed and experienced cetacean veterinarian and with adequate support personnel.

Refuges unable to maintain a full-time veterinarian have access to a part-time veterinarian with suitable training and experience for the animals housed.

The refuge has properly trained and qualified professional and supporting personnel as necessary to implement: (1) husbandry (caregivers) and (2) technical support (veterinary technicians, or individuals trained at the refuge).

One or more personnel is trained and designated to deal with emergencies until a veterinarian arrives or is reached. According to national legislation and under the direction of the veterinarian, he or she should be able to, perform basic first aid, assess animals, administer prescribed medications and treatments, be responsible for administration of post-surgical care, and be skilled in maintaining appropriate medical records.

Refuges have the appropriate number of personnel, including veterinarians and veterinary technicians or assistants, to meet these standards for all animals in their care 24/7, with consideration given to the number of animals, number of enclosures and/or social groups, and individual medical conditions or needs (e.g., a large number of geriatric or elderly animals, known disabilities or conditions, etc.).

The attending veterinarian(s) must be comfortable conferring with other marine mammal veterinarians/specialists as needed for complex cases.

4.2. Veterinary on-site Capabilities (laboratory & diagnostics)

The refuge has on-site and/or off-site capabilities for pathology, surgery, and other veterinary procedures and treatments, and any on-site facilities are appropriately maintained. If it does not have an on-site veterinary facility, or only a partially outfitted facility, it has an arrangement with a nearby veterinary practice for off-site treatment as needed.

On-site and/or off-site facilities and services include the following:

Diagnostic capabilities including cytology, microbiology, parasitology, complete blood count, blood chemistry, urinalysis, serology, radiology, ultrasound, endoscopy and other appropriate laboratory procedures.

Necropsy capabilities include capacity for collection of tissues for histopathology.

Medical treatment facilities that are clean, have adequate lighting and ventilation, can be easily cleaned and disinfected, and with access to appropriate anaesthetic and emergency equipment.

Drugs should be acquired, managed and stored according to existing legal framework.

Medical treatment equipment is maintained in good working order and is on a program of routine preventive maintenance.

Only a licensed veterinarian or veterinary nurse can perform all medical procedures using best practices and protocols for the species.

Protocols, guidelines and best practices should be recognised as international standard and they should be approved by a scientific and ethical committee.

Veterinarians and support personnel are compassionate and knowledgeable about the humane aspects of animal treatment, including the proper use of anaesthetics, analgesics, and tranquilizers.

Basic physical capture and restraint equipment to facilitate medical treatment is available at the refuge and there is the possibility to rapidly isolate an animal in a way that allows veterinary or care staff to access an animal in the event it is medically or otherwise necessary (slide outs are acceptable in most situations, but the refuge should be equipped with a medical lift or medical pool area with hydraulic lift floor that can facilitate safe access to an animal unable to or unwilling to slide out).

Medical lifts should be appropriately sized to the species held, designed to remain functional under all circumstances (e.g., be easily connected to a back-up power sources in the event of a power outage), and maintained in good working order.

The ability to weigh each animal should be incorporated into the design of the refuge so that every cetacean resident can be effectively weighed (including those in quarantine).

Necropsies on any deceased animals, will be done at a separate facility. If on-site, this area should be physically separated from live animal holding areas and daily care facilities such as food storage, as well as from other medical areas used to treat live animals.

Removal of cetacean remains from the refuge should follow all applicable levels of regulations.

A detailed report of necropsy results must be archived at the facility. Cause of death and contributing factors for each animal that dies at the facility should be reviewed. Any appropriate changes to husbandry protocols, facilities, and/or medical care should be diligently incorporated based on the findings.

4.3. Preventative Medicine Program

The veterinary medical program includes long term preventative medical protocols and disease surveillance and containment procedures, and is developed and carried out under the supervision of a licensed veterinarian with training or experience in providing medical care for the species housed at the refuge, and who is aware of any specific health issues of the individual animals.

Preventive medicine protocol will address the following:

regularly scheduled physical examinations/health assessments and blood analysis

behavioural assessments

quarantine procedures

parasite surveillance and control

immunization

contraception if not regulated with social group management

infectious disease screening

dental prophylaxis

periodic reviews of diets and monitoring of feed intake

applicable species-specific husbandry needs

routine water quality screening

Daily health checks of each animal should include (but are not limited to):

Observing physical appearance

Assessing activity level

Monitoring behaviour and eating habits

Nature and frequency of respirations

Animals are immunized as recommended by the attending veterinarian, using currently recommended procedures and products as appropriate for the country, species and individual. When animals are immunized on-site by refuge personnel, the type, serial number, and source of the product are recorded in the individual animal's medical record. Each animal should receive at least one comprehensive medical exam annually. This is a minimum standard for preventative medicine and should be exceeded when conditions warrant.

A comprehensive medical exam should include:

Morphometrics (including body build index and/or weight)

Body condition exam consistent with any applicable scoring system (including skin, eyes, teeth, genital opening, anus, blowhole, mentation and responsiveness, buoyancy, overall symmetry, etc.)

Dental examination

Blood sampling (routine haematology and serum chemistry, hormone and additional analysis as indicated)

Blowhole cytology and microbiology, including antibiotic resistance, and evaluation of respiratory system health

Endoscopy or gastric wash and collection of gut microbiome data

Faecal sampling (cytology, parasitology, and bacterial culture, possibly including microbiomics, proteomics and metabolomics)

Pathogen screening (tailored to the specific pathogens of concern for the region, species, and individual history)

Diagnostic sonography

Each animal is weighed annually at a minimum, either during a routine physical or through the use of a built-in scale integrated into slide-outs, to monitor for signs of illness and to determine dosages for pharmaceuticals and chemical anaesthetics.

4.4. Quarantine and Isolation Care and Facilities

The refuge should have separation areas for separation of animals not in need of full medical quarantine (e.g., animals in need of separation due to behavioural considerations, separating females from males during fertile periods, or animals being isolated prior to introduction to the larger refuge area). A separation area may have shared water with the larger refuge area (simple netted separation).

The refuge should have a medical quarantine facility with adequate capacity to prevent pathogen transmission between hosted cetaceans, and between refuge cetaceans and wild populations (e.g., double netting).

Quarantine areas may be shaded or indoors if deemed necessary for animal care or necessary to meet applicable regulation requirements.

A medical quarantine facility must have the ability to do full examination and treatment of the animals under care: the quarantine pool should have the physical features as suggested by EAZA and EU Directive 1999/22/CE including easily cleanable surface with round edges and corners; controlled water supply and management with a disinfectant dosage system; a pump system able to change rapidly the entire water body; the ability to manage rapidly water depth through a lifting floor or by a rapid draining system which allow a rapid intervention on the animal

All utensils, equipment, supplies, and outer clothing used in quarantine are restricted to that area. Where this is not possible, items that the refuge does not have duplicates of and which cannot be restricted to quarantine areas must be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected prior to being moved to or from quarantine areas, and movement between areas should be minimized.

Protective clothing, boots and footbaths are used by all staff entering the quarantine area or areas containing quarantined animals. Quarantine clothing is not removed from the quarantine area, except in a sealed container for cleaning. Footbaths are changed regularly.

Caregivers are equipped with appropriate personal protective equipment such as masks, face shields, disposable examination gloves, boots, Tyvek-type suits or sleeves, when cleaning or handling anything with which the quarantine animals come into contact.

Water from the medical quarantine area should be filtered or treated and disposed of in a safe area away from the habitats of the other refuge animals.

Waste or biological material from medically quarantined animals should be treated as biologically hazardous material and disposed of accordingly.

Clearly visible signs indicating areas of quarantine are displayed as needed, with particular consideration for placement at entry/access points.

A detailed risk assessment must be completed for each new animal introduced to the refuge. The risk assessment should identify any potential threats to the health of the current refuge animals, new animals, and the local ecosystem, as well as outline planned steps to mitigate those threats. The likelihood and consequences for each identified threat should be considered.

All new arrivals to the refuge from captive facilities should undergo a health evaluation and be pre-screened for transmissible pathogens, including serological examinations, prior to transport and kept isolated after pre-screening from those that are not being transferred to the refuge.

Prolonged isolation of an animal either in a medical quarantine area or a separation area should be avoided (see Well-being and Handling of Cetaceans section);

During quarantine of incoming animals, the following procedures should be performed as applicable: examination, vaccination as appropriate, clinical and laboratory tests, treatment for external and internal parasites as needed, evaluation of psychological well-being, verification of identification.

An enrichment program is in place for quarantined animals.

Animals that die in quarantine receive a complete post-mortem examination including histopathology.

4.5. Breeding Policy and Contraception (no intentional breeding of animals in lifetime care)

Group management rather than medical contraception should be preferred to prevent breeding and avoid reproduction.

In case it is not possible, contraception programs are appropriate for the species and, as determined by the veterinarian, prioritise the most effective and minimally invasive methods.

Moving pregnant females should be avoided. In the event that a pregnant individual is brought to the refuge, appropriate habitat for birthing and caring for an unweaned calf should be provided to the mother-calf pair.

If animals arrive at the facility pregnant, the refuge provides necessary care as determined by the veterinarian. Neonates are only removed from the mother for hand-rearing if there is a threat to the life of the new-born or mother. Males should not be housed with pregnant females, prepartum or postpartum females.

4.6. Zoonotic Disease Control Program

The personnel and refuge veterinarian are knowledgeable about zoonotic diseases that may affect animals at the refuge, and implement appropriate policies and procedures as needed to mitigate risk and deal with any exposures that occur.

The refuge has emergency procedures and a defined process to avoid transmission of all potential or emerging diseases through bites, scratches, body fluids, direct contact with animals and other means.

Personnel have adequate training to understand the potential risk of disease transmission, including potential sources of disease, modes of disease transmission, and clinical signs associated with disease, and are encouraged to contact their own health care provider if they experience any unusual symptoms after working with cetaceans. All personnel

are informed when a zoonotic disease occurs at the refuge and relevant personnel are trained in how to safely care for animals with disease.

Personnel should periodically be checked according to the national worker safety legislation. They should declare any contact with domestic, wild or livestock animals in order to prevent any contact and implement proper screenings.

When a reportable disease is identified, all local, state/province, and national regulatory officials are contacted, as required.

A complete necropsy, including histopathology and microbiology, has to be performed on deceased animals known or suspected to carry zoonotic disease within 24 hours of death.

All areas in which personnel have direct contact with animals have hand-washing facilities available in the immediate vicinity (or an equivalent; e.g., bactericidal hand wipes).

Food consumption by personnel does not occur in the immediate area of animal contact.

4.7. Euthanasia (IF performed, in compliance with any national or local law, under the strict supervision of a licensed veterinarian)

The veterinarian is the only person responsible for recommending and performing humane euthanasia, according to the national existing laws. Euthanasia is in the best interest of the individual animal and is only used as a final option, and is not used as a management tool (such as a means to create space for more animals).

Acceptable reasons for euthanasia include:

- incurable medical/behavioural health status that is likely to cause unmanageable pain or suffering;
- medical/behavioural health status where available treatment will cause unmanageable pain/suffering, or it will not be effective in restoring the animal to an acceptable quality of life;
- medical/behavioural health where treatment is beyond the normal community standards of monetary expenditure and would cause an excessive burden on the refuge resources, and no other facility/placement provides a reasonable alternative option;
- the process of aging has resulted in an unacceptable quality of life;
- in the event of presenting an infectious disease risk to some or all of the residents;
- in the event of presenting a high risk of harming themselves, other animals and/or humans.

Euthanasia should be adopted after the evaluation of an ethical committee.

The decision whether or not to separate (both visually and acoustically) the animal being euthanized from the other animals should be made by the attending veterinarian and the animal care staff.

A complete post-mortem examination including histopathology should be performed to confirm the underlying medical reason for euthanasia.

4.8. Biosafety and biosecurity

A refuge may be also dedicated to wild animal rehabilitation. If that is the case, any rehabilitation area should be physically separated and different personnel and equipment should be used.

Any wild animals entering the refuge deemed to be non-releasable, should undergo a strict quarantine and health check including all the known diseases listed for cetaceans (virological, microbiological, parasitological and mycological) including serological evaluation. Exams should include investigations of blood, serum, blow, mouth scrubs, faeces and should be performed using both cultural and the more advanced techniques as virome and microbiome approach. Antimicrobial resistance should be tested.

A complete and throughout plan considering biosafety should be implemented. The plan should include the hazard analysis, critical control point management and a contingency plan in order to identify possible risks, the severity of risks and possible mitigations to prevent or solution to be adopted.

The plan should include the evaluation of pathogens entrance considering water and food supplies, pests' control, personnel and equipment contamination, wild or domestic animals' entrance, animals' admittance and medical controls, quarantine procedures. Additionally, the plan should consider the data coming from the epidemiological situation in the area for all relevant and reportable diseases.

The plan should also consider waste and food remains management; water output monitoring including viruses, bacteria and protozoa; procedures for water output treatment.

The plan should include all the programs implemented for monitoring animals' and personnel health, water quality and food safety, disinfection and cleaning process for different areas and facilities, water output management and treatment; integrity of fences, gates and separation. The plan should also state all technologies implemented and frequency of the procedures to ensure its regular and consistent implementation.

Biosafety measures include also the contingency plans to avoid any incidental entrance of wild animals, incidental exit of the kept animals and entrance of external person or monitor of volunteer damages.

The plans should include checklists forms, reporting systems and traceability of all the processes.

5. WELFARE AND HANDLING OF ANIMALS

5.1. Physical Welfare

Animals should be routinely monitored by qualified personnel to ensure their physical well-being (i.e., nutritional, physical and social conditions) and any unusual activity should be reported and recorded, with appropriate timely response.

The physical environment of the refuge should allow for a wide range of behaviours, including those related to the majority of cetacean species daily activity in the wild (see Cetacean Housing section). The refuge should allow for the animals to spend the majority of their time oriented to the underwater environment, while allowing for the animals to rest (stationary or swimming), interact with a stimulating natural environment, and to interact with any objects provisioned for enrichment. If possible, with consideration for provisioned food, animals should be allowed to forage for prey.

Animals should be able to visually and physically distance themselves from one another, as well as humans such as care staff outside of interactions necessary to provide for the health and well-being of the animals.

Physical abuse, deprivation of food, and other forms of negative reinforcement or punishment-based training are never used to train, shift or otherwise care for animals and will be considered as animal abuse according to the national legislation.

5.2. Social Housing and Group Management

Animals are grouped so that they are compatible, with consideration to their natural social groupings and individual history, and with the safety of animals and refuge personnel in mind.

Animals are housed so that:

those in the same enclosure are compatible;

they are not housed near animals that interfere with their health or cause them physical or psychological discomfort;

there is appropriate space between individuals within and between social groupings and to allow for temporary voluntary isolation from others;

no individual endures constant harassment or suffers physical injury, nor do social behaviour prevent any individual from maintaining proper nutrition and hydration.

Solitary housing is generally reserved for situations including, but not limited to: quarantine; medical assessment and/or care; lack of appropriate social partners or social tension resulting in disruption to the social group, physical aggression leading to injuries, and anticipated birth. Ideally and when appropriate, individuals in solitary housing should have access to visual and auditory access to conspecifics as well as regular caregiver interaction.

Staff have an understanding of the natural history and normal behaviour of the species in the wild and are regularly assessing compatibility among individuals through ongoing behavioural and health monitoring and assessments.

If multiple species (not recommended) are present at the refuge, species are integrated or separated based on the well-being of the animals (e.g., no direct mixing of predator and prey species).

If applicable and appropriate for the species, every effort should be made to keep mother- calf pairs in the same groupings.

Introduction of any new animal to a social group is done safely and according to techniques appropriate for each species, under the direction of designated personnel.

5.3. Behavioural/Psychological Well-Being

Schedules should be structured around the needs of the animals and, accordingly, individualized welfare plans prepared and approved jointly by veterinarian and animal care staff, are in place to enhance well-being. Their implementation is documented and archived.

The behavioural choices of the animals should be monitored through non-invasive methods, documented and archived to ensure that the monitoring and review of long-term data of each individual is informing decisions impacting their well-being.

The animal care staff should be trained to identify, address and minimize stereotypic or harmful behaviours (including the ability to interpret data).

Individualized protocols to reduce/eliminate stereotypic or harmful behaviours should be developed and approved jointly by the veterinarian and animal care staff, and results documented and archived.

There should be a positive reinforcement training program in place to maintain voluntary participation in animal care and veterinary procedures that support health and welfare goals. The animal care staff should be provided the tools and resources needed to safely and successfully implement the positive reinforcement training protocols.

The refuge should provide staff with training on animal welfare and assessment methods. This training should be regularly updated to incorporate currently available information.

Animal welfare should be assessed at a regularly established interval, and additionally as needed, including when significant changes occur, such as the addition (or removal) of animals, major environmental changes (e.g., weather events), and location changes. Results from welfare assessments should be documented, archived, available for review and should directly inform action plans created by animal care staff.

Although the refuge environment should provide the appropriate physical and mental stimulation for the animals, there may be situations that necessitate additional opportunities, which are to be provided by staff. Whenever possible, engagement with the natural environment as a source of enrichment should be encouraged over artificial enrichment techniques.

All enrichment opportunities should be evaluated and adjusted as necessary for each animal's well-being and should be safe for both the resident animals and any wild flora or fauna that may be exposed.

If enrichment sources include human interaction with trained staff, the interaction should be limited by the interest level of the animals and should be non-disruptive to other animals in the vicinity.

Emphasis should be placed on underwater enrichment sources rather than surface-level enrichment sources to encourage behavioural patterns normally seen in the wild.

The refuge has an enrichment program that promotes species-appropriate behavioural opportunities at all times (including periods of quarantine and isolation) and ensures the animals' psychological well-being. An appropriate program may include the following:

Structural enrichment - Enclosure design and furniture that add complexity to the environment and promote species-specific behaviour.

Object enrichment - Objects that encourage inspection and manipulation and promote species-specific behaviour.

Food enrichment - Varying food choices and food presentation, including the use of puzzles that increase food procurement time.

Social enrichment - Affiliative interactions between caregivers and animals may be appropriate in some instances.

All animal care personnel are trained to recognise species-specific behaviour, abnormal behaviour and clinical signs of illness, and a plan to address the concerns is developed.

5.4. Animal-Caregiver Relationships

Positive relationships between animals and caregivers must be maintained. However, to the extent possible, the most important relationships for each cetacean should be relationships with other cetaceans. Relationships between cetaceans and staff should be encouraged to be secondary and exist in support of meeting the animal's social and health needs in more species appropriate ways (i.e., cetacean to cetacean).

Where possible, new caregivers accompany a trusted caregiver until the animal becomes comfortable with the new individual.

Where possible and appropriate, animals become familiar with the veterinary staff, allowing close observation.

Relationships between staff and the animals are evaluated at a pre-established regular interval and additionally when needed. Accordingly, changes are made to staff assignments when staff and animal relationships are found to be disruptive to the animals.

5.5. Handling and Restraint

Any necessary handling and restraint must be done safely and appropriately, with minimal distress to animals, and personnel are trained in species-specific safe handling techniques/practices.

Protocols for species-appropriate handling and restraint methods should be developed, while tools and resources needed for safe handling and restraint should be available on-site and maintained in good working order. These will include, at least, appropriately sized stretchers, medical lift(s) and netting.

There should be protocols in place for managing animals should they not be near an area designed for handling and restraint in the event of an emergency (e.g., a cetacean in deep water a distance away from a medical lift or a netted bottom).

Animals being handled or restrained should be closely monitored by qualified staff (cetacean veterinarians and/or highly trained animal care staff) for signs of stress both during and after the handling or restraint.

Handling for veterinary care is done as expeditiously and carefully as possible in a manner that does not cause trauma, overheating, excessive cooling, physical harm, or unnecessary discomfort, and minimizes physical and psychological stress as much as possible.

Chemical capture is performed only by a licensed veterinarian and only when other methods are not possible due to the significant risks of sedating free-swimming cetaceans. Specific anaesthetic protocols, including record-keeping, are followed. Emergency resuscitation drugs and equipment (oxygen, on-demand PPV, etc.) must be on-hand during any sedation event.

Chemical capture is not used when multiple animals are in an enclosure except in an emergency situation. In such cases, all possible precautions are taken to prevent danger to personnel, all animals in the enclosure, and the animal being sedated.

5.6. Cetacean Transport (conducted only when strictly necessary – being transported to the refuge)

Ideally, the refuge location should be easily accessible and well connected. Reaching the site should be easy through roads in good conditions to facilitate the arrival of heavy vehicles delivering materials, animals and, occasional visitors. The presence of an airport within a <100 km radius will also be an asset. In any case, cetacean transport should be conducted only when necessary (e.g., being transported to the refuge).

A comprehensive plan that addresses every process step is established and communicated to all involved parties prior to any transport. Authority, roles and responsibilities are clear to all.

Health examinations are conducted prior to an animal's arrival at the refuge or prior to transfer to another facility. These examinations may include a complete physical exam with attention to parasite checks, necessary vaccinations, and completion of any tests required by regulations of the receiving state/province or country.

Candidates for transport should be medically and behaviourally evaluated prior to transport, and criteria should be established on an individual basis to ensure that the animal being transported is fit for transport (mentally, emotionally, and physically) and in appropriate condition for the receiving location (e.g., free from uncontrolled transmissible pathogens).

Health certificates and any required transport permits accompany the animal when being transported interstate or internationally.

Capture, restraint, and transportation methods consider the animal's temperament and behaviour in order to minimize injury and distress.

Equipment suitable for lifting, cradling (where applicable) and transportation of animals kept within the refuge is maintained in good condition and readily available. Transport containers and vehicles are cleaned after use.

All transport equipment should be appropriately fitted to the animal being transported and maintained in excellent condition and meet appropriate animal welfare standards. This equipment includes but is not limited to:

Stretchers

Cradles

Emergency medical/veterinary equipment

Monitoring equipment

Care equipment (e.g., spray bottles, sheets, A&D ointment)

Lifting equipment (e.g., cranes, lifting cables, taglines)

Communication equipment

When possible, animals should be conditioned to the possible stressors of transport, such as stretcher and cradle training.

All transport team must include members who have previous cetacean transport experience and all members should be trained on the transport procedure and aware of their individual roles within it

Transport routes should be predetermined and secured (e.g., security escort agreements in place, local municipalities informed) prior to transport.

Contingencies should be established for all parts of the transport and alternative arrangements should be available on standby during the transport.

The transportation route should be selected based on the welfare of the animal being transported, taking into consideration duration, method of transport, and safety.

The cetacean should be carefully monitored (respirations, heart rate, temperature, signs of distress or agitation) throughout the transport by trained staff.

Sources of physiological and psychological stress should be mitigated. Methods should be employed to: maintain optimal temperature (cooling/warming), mitigate positional stress (padding, positioners), minimize noise, bright light and movement around the animal, and keep individuals with familiar cohorts.

If the transport method uses a water-filled transport box, water temperature should be maintained in a species-appropriate range throughout transport.

An appropriate supply of emergency food (based on species, individual eating habits, and routine duration/logistics) should be transported with the cetacean.

A qualified cetacean veterinarian must be present throughout the transport.

All animals taken outside the refuge are kept securely at all times and managed in such a way that the animal is under control and not likely to suffer distress, cause injury or transmit or contract disease.

6. ECONOMICS; considerations on long-term sustainability and operational costs

The refuge will host cetacean primarily originating from the captivity industry and, whenever needed and possible, dolphins that have been rescued after stranding. Therefore, a cetacean refuge should be considered a permanent accommodation for all animals deemed to be unfit for release. Since these will be long-lived marine mammals, in many cases needing housing for a few decades, the long-term economic sustainability of this facility must be assured to every possible extent. A business plan should be developed and proposed considering all the costs and revenues.

In this document it is not possible to tailor a generic economic sustainability plan for a cetacean refuge model because this plan may vary largely depending on a number of variables (e.g., country, authorities involved, geography). In any case, commitment of long-term support from local, national, regional and international authorities is essential.

Additional possible sources of funding may include and are not limited to, among others, the following:

Private Donations from individuals, NGOs and foundations interested in marine conservation and animal welfare.

Corporate Sponsorships through partnerships with businesses interested in marine conservation and animal welfare.

Admission Charges from visitors and educational groups. Specialized tours focusing on education and conservation may be also an option.

Membership Programs: Annual memberships offering benefits to regular supporters.

Merchandising and educational materials (can be extended through an online store).

Collaborative Programs: Joint initiatives with universities, research institutions, and NGOs.

Application to different funding programs and calls

Considering the variability of funding, a clear document stating the organisation of the management of the refuge, including the different institutional bodies involved, should be clarified.

7. EDUCATION & OUTREACH

An effective educational program and outreach strategy can significantly enhance the impact of a cetacean refuge. By engaging the public, raising awareness, and fostering a connection between people and marine life, the refuge can build strong support for its conservation efforts and ensure long-term sustainability.

7.1. Education and research program development

Potential for an education/interpretation centre with multimedia resources providing information on the biology of the animals, their conservation needs as well as the rationale dictating the need for cetacean refuges.

Well-defined research proposals for non-invasive and unobtrusive respectful scientific research should be considered. These should be carefully reviewed by both, a scientific and an ethics committee, in collaboration with the refuge team. Priority should be given to the welfare of the animals hosted in the refuge and all proposals should include a protocol for the monitoring of the animals before, during and after the study/experiment is conducted. If any animal shows signs of distress when exposed to the research-related activities (directly or indirectly) the activity must be immediately interrupted.

Research and educational programs should be aimed to enhance conservation and welfare of the animals in the wild.

7.2. Public engagement

- ✓ The refuge may allow, under certain conditions, the presence of visitors (see economics section). Dolphin observation will be encouraged by using remote technologies (e.g., webcams, advantaged land-observation points). Educational programs will be conducted to inform the public about the implications and consequences of captivity as well as promoting research programs on the rehabilitation and, when possible, the release of dolphins at sea.
- ✓ Volunteer Programs and Paid volunteer opportunities may be considered for individuals interested in contributing to and working at the refuge.

7.3. Communication channels

By developing and implementing a well-rounded communication strategy, a cetacean refuge will be able to effectively promote its mission, engage with the community, and provide new opportunities for funding and collaborations (not only with potential sponsors but also, for instance, with research and conservation organisations). Key messages at the epicentre of the communication strategy must be very clear. Some to be considered may be:

Cetacean behaviour and ecology

Importance of Cetaceans (e.g., ecological, cultural, and economic significance)

Refuge's role

Cetacean conservation (threats, conservation strategies...)

How to help: steps for people to support the sanctuary (donations, volunteering, citizen science...).

Some communication channels to be considered are:

Website: Create a dedicated website with regular updates, articles, and educational resources.

Social media: Use platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube to share engaging content, such as videos, infographics, and stories.

Email Newsletters: Send regular updates to subscribers about news, events, and ways to get involved. Share compelling stories of individual cetaceans, success stories from the refuge, as well as profiles and/or testimonials of volunteers and staff.

Press Releases: Distribute press releases to media outlets to announce important news and events.

Community Events: Host events such as beach clean-ups, educational workshops, and guided tours of the refuge.

Partnerships: Collaborate with schools, universities, and other organisations to reach broader audiences.

Key metrics such as website traffic, social media engagement, email open rates, event attendance, and media coverage should be regularly evaluated (quarterly?) to get feedback on communication initiatives and their success.

Feedback from visitors, volunteers, and partners also important to assess the effectiveness of communication efforts.

Act accordingly and make adjustments to the strategy to improve outreach and engagement, as necessary.

ANNEX III - Note on Procedural Steps for Requesting Advice from the ACCOBAMS Advisory Committee on Semi-Enclosed Facilities

Step 1. Those seeking advice on issues related to semi-enclosed facilities for cetacean species in the ACCOBAMS Area are invited to firstly read carefully the Guidelines for Best Practices During the Installation and Management of Semi-enclosed Facilities for Cetacean Species in the ACCOBAMS Area⁶.

If after reading those guidelines they feel the need to ask for further advice, they are kindly requested to produce a concept note to present the initiative/project for which advice is being requested (e.g., dolphin refuge)

Concept note should include:

- Background and context.
- Specific questions or guidance sought.
- Relevant supporting documents, including national legal background and scientific data.

Step 2. Submission of the concept note to the ACCOBAMS Permanent Secretariat by e-mail.

Step 3. The ACCOBAMS Secretariat will review the request for completeness and relevance, will acknowledge receiving the above-mentioned message (Step 2) and, if duly completed, will forward it to the Advisory Committee on semi-enclosed facilities (AC).

Step 4. The Chairman of the AC receives the e-mail with the concept note and, after confirming that at this stage no other information is needed, this concept note will be shared with the rest of the AC members and convene a meeting, if needed, depending on urgency.

Step 5. The AC, after internal consultation, will share its opinion with ACCOBAMS SC. It may also be the case that additional information or clarification from the submitting party is requested by either AC or SC.

Step 6. Once a response has been formulated, it is sent to the requesting party, via the Secretariat.

Step 7. Follow-Up Actions by AC.

Implement recommendations or seek further clarification, if needed.

If the matter requires ongoing support, the body seeking advice may consider establishing a formal collaboration with ACCOBAMS or relevant working groups.

Step 8. Reporting and Feedback

Within one month after receiving a response from the Secretariat, the body seeking advice should provide feedback to ACCOBAMS on how the advice is meant to be implemented and establish a calendar for providing a brief report on it.

This procedure should help in refining future advisory processes and ensure alignment with conservation common objectives.

⁶ At the moment of presenting this note at SC16, the Guidelines document is still a draft doc.

RECOMMENDATION 16.14 - AREA-BASED MEASURES FOR CETACEAN CONSERVATION

Recalling that according to ACCOBAMS Conservation Plan (Annex 2 of the Agreement), Parties “shall co-operate to create and maintain a network of specially protected areas to conserve cetaceans” and “shall endeavour to establish and manage specially protected areas corresponding to the areas which serve as important habitat for cetaceans and/or which provide important food resources for them. Such specially protected areas should be established within the framework of the Regional Seas Conventions (OSPAR, Barcelona and Bucharest Conventions), or within the framework of other appropriate instruments”,

Recalling that in 2010, the ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee started a preliminary identification of areas of special importance for cetaceans in the Agreement Area, mainly based on ‘expert opinions’ (Resolution 4.15 Annex). Moreover, thanks to the ACCOBAMS efforts, including the recent ACCOBAMS Survey Initiative (ASI), knowledge of cetacean species has since greatly improved as has work in mapping pressure e.g. through the European Directive Marine Spatial Planning,

Recalling that at the MOP8 in 2022, Parties requested the revision of this Annex and of the ongoing process looking at quantifying anthropogenic pressures over cetacean habitats ‘taking into account the already existing mechanisms and tools related to area-based cetacean conservation’ (e.g. IMMAs, OECMs, MPAs, MSP, etc.),

Recalling the ACCOBAMS-SC12/2018/Doc35 “Recommendation 12.8 on the value of the designation of IMMAs and CCH to achieving ACCOBAMS objectives”, the report of SC15 conclusion 36 recommending to the Task Group on ‘Area-based measures for cetacean conservation’ to review and update the work to be done for “area-based measures for cetacean conservation”, also considering the recommendations from the workshop held in March 2022, the suggestion to replace the term “Cetacean Critical Habitat” with an appropriate terminology and the MOP8 discussions and Annex 14 of the report, and finally the internal workshop hold in March 2024 in order to reframe the process,

Aware of the Scientific Committee’s advice of the need for care and sensitivity when providing official maps which, although they provide a powerful communication tool, also have a potential capacity for misuse and/or misinterpretation,

Aware of the difficulties of appropriately combining overlapping maps created in different ways and from datasets of different spatial and temporal scales exercise to show robust and realistic co-occurrence to risk-area maps,

Recognising that IMMAs - “discrete portions of habitat, important to marine mammal species, that have the potential to be delineated and managed for conservation” - are an initiative of the Joint IUCN SSC/WCPA Task Force on Marine Mammal Protected Areas (the “Task Force”) and are identified following application of agreed criteria. This process has been acknowledged by CMS (Resolution 12.13, 2017), that *inter alia* requested Parties and invited Range States to identify specific areas where the identification of IMMAs could be beneficial,

Recalling the joint IMMA Task Force/ ACCOBAMS October 2016 workshop identifying IMMAs in the Mediterranean Sea (www.marinemammalhabitat.org/imma-eatlas/),

Recalling to the Post-2020 Regional Strategy for Marine and Coastal Protected Areas and Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures in the Mediterranean, adopted by the Barcelona Contracting Parties at their 22nd Meeting (COP 22) (Antalya, Türkiye, 7-10 December 2021).

The Scientific Committee **recommends:**

- (a) adoption of the terminology and process agreed at the (2022 and 2024 workshops) and in particular replacing the term ‘Cetacean Critical Habitat’ with the more appropriate **Cetacean Co-occurrence with Human activities**;
- (b) continuation of the work of the CCH Task Group to develop proposed CCHs area, taking into account the recommendations of the workshop, as well as existing mechanisms and tools related to area-based cetacean conservation presented in the annex to the workshop report;
- (c) further exploration with relevant experts (including those at the IWC Scientific Committee) on appropriate consideration and mapping of uncertainty and the integration of maps of cetacean and human activities, including experts on Marine Spatial Planning;
- (d) liaison with INFO/RAC and PAP/Rac and their mapping platform Kmap as well as continued exploration of the facilities of the NETCCOBAMS network;
- (e) active participation in the “Strategical Alliance among the Secretariats of ACCOBAMS, GFCM, IUCN-Med, UNEP/MAP through SPA/RAC and in collaboration with MedPAN” and the Pelagos Agreement, concerning Spatial-based Protection and Management Measures for Marine Biodiversity;
- (f) reiteration of the great value of the IMMA process to ACCOBAMS and the need for the re-assessment of the Mediterranean region for the identification of IMMAs in 2026 as a priority action for the next triennium;
- (g) replacement of Resolution 4.15 with the present one and ensuring that the Archived Resolution Annex being clearly marked with the following text:

This document was prepared in the framework of the 5th Meeting of the Parties to ACCOBAMS in 2010. It should not be published or quoted without the permission of the ACCOBAMS Secretariat. The designations employed and the presentation of the material in this document, that should be considered as a whole and not as extracts, do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the Agreement concerning the legal status of any State, Territory, city or area, or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of their frontiers or boundaries. The opinions expressed in this document do not necessarily represent the views of the Agreement.

RECOMMENDATION 16.15 - NETCCOBAMS

Considering the Recommendation 14.10 - NETCCOBAMS,

The SC **recommends**:

- to review and update the Terms of Reference of the expert working group (WG) on NETCCOBAMS;
- to develop Guidelines on NETCCOBAMS use including specification on access to maps, data and information according to different types of users, in order to guarantee the safe use of sensitive data;
- to the NETCCOBAMS WG to organise dedicated meetings (ToR to be prepared), as appropriate, to review existing maps, data and information present on the platform, and to agree on the best use of the platform's options;
- to the NETCCOBAMS WG to periodically meet, as appropriate, in order to determine which type of users can access the new material added into the platform (maps, data and information);
- that once published, the Secretariat should disseminate information on the value of the NETCCOBAMS online platform (including its contribution to achieved mitigation measures) to national and international fora, managers, stakeholders (e.g., shipping companies, ports and IMO) to increase the visibility of the work done and encourage its use and the submission of data.

ANNEX XI - REPORT OF THE BLACK SEA SUB-REGIONAL COORDINATION UNIT INCLUDING ACTIVITIES FROM NON-PARTIES



Report on the cooperation with ACCOBAMS Agreement Secretariat performing the functions of ACCOBAMS sub-regional Coordinating Unit for the Black Sea in 2023-2025

Since 2002, in line with Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the Black Sea Commission and ACCOBAMS (revised in 2012), the Permanent Secretariat of the Black Sea Commission (BSC PS) exercises its role of the Black Sea Sub Regional Coordination Unit for ACCOBAMS in regard to the conservation of the cetaceans of the Black Sea.

During the past triennium the following main activities were implemented:

- participation in relevant BSC-ACCOBAMS meetings, regular inter-secretarial meetings, *inter alia*, provided feedback during 15-16th ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee meetings and Sixth Meeting of the Extended Bureau of the Parties to ACCOBAMS, as well as all relevant meetings of the ASI Project and ACCOBAMS Webinar – Regional Training on genetic data collection and analysis;
- Cetacean conservation activities are included in all relevant regional strategic documents for the Black Sea (draft BSIMAP 2023-2027), draft BS SoE Report, revised annual reporting format, Black Sea Regional Action Plan on Marine Litter etc.);
- Item “Specimens of Black Sea bottlenose dolphins in captivity” was introduced into the BSIMAP for 2023-2027, as well as list of fisheries indicators for annual reporting to the Black Sea Commission, regularly collected by the BSC PS;
- The elaboration of Chapter “Conservation of Cetaceans” of the State of Black Sea Environment Report (BS SoE Report) is being supported by ACCOBAMS Secretariat; new publications on cetaceans in Black Sea are published;
- BSC PS participated in Joint initiatives with GFCM (High-level meeting on Black Sea fisheries, BlackSea4Fish Project), CBD Convention (Joint RSCs & RFOs meetings under Sustainable Ocean Initiative, EBSA workshops etc.), EC (projects, ocean governance, MSFD directive, UNEP (SDG 14) etc.), co-organised a joint side event with ACCOBAMS during UNOC 2025 in Nice, France in June 2025;
- Participated as partners in call of proposals lead by ACCOBAMS for implementation of MSFD for cetaceans and contributed to the activities under ABBIOMED Project;
- Supported efforts of the ACCOBAMS Permanent Secretariat in implementing the ASI Project “ACCOBAMS Survey Initiative”, an unprecedented large-scale activity coordinated by ACCOBAMS and involving Black Sea countries to estimate cetacean populations abundance and distribution in the Black Sea and contributed to dissemination of its results;
- Based on the joint initiative with ACCOBAMS Secretariat, on 6-7th March, 2024, BSC PS hosted in its premises in Istanbul a jointly organised meeting to discuss common subjects in relation to the Black Sea. It was attended by representatives from the ACCOBAMS Secretariat, the Black Sea Commission Permanent Secretariat, the EU/DG

Mare, the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean and the Black Sea (GFCM). Representatives from Black Sea ACCOBAMS Parties and some Members of the Scientific Committee also participated in the meeting;

- During meeting participants agreed to consider creation of a collaborative network between the EU/DGMARE, GFCM, ACCOBAMS, and the Black Sea Commission aimed to facilitate the joint response to the objective of addressing the critical high-rates of harbour porpoise bycatch in the Black Sea region” through coordinated efforts, data sharing, research, and policy implementation, within the ultimate goal of reducing and mitigating by-catches during fishing activities;
- Specific Black Sea Sub Task composed by experts from Black Sea Countries was created to provide annual summary information to ACCOBAMS Emergency Task Force to monitor strandings and bycatch; to implement postmortem investigations to preserve and store samples of bycaught animals for future analyses;
- Close work on biodiversity and cetaceans with dedicated regional projects, such as EU4EMBLAS, CENOBS, Black Sea BRIDGE, Black Sea DOORS, BS CONNECT etc. Currently continue coordination of joint efforts with three new projects recently launched in Black Sea region, such as: GEF UNDP/UNESCO Black Sea LME Project dealing with biodiversity and MPAs; World Bank Blueing the Black Sea Project dealing with pollution and FAO GFCM Project on Fisheries; the first project includes a component on cetaceans;
- Work on impact of marine litter on cetaceans is being carried out within collaboration with UNEP/MAP Barcelona Convention Secretariat under EU-funded project MarineLitterMED Project: including elaboration of ML monitoring guidelines (baselines), Black Sea ML assessment and “adopt-the-beach” measures in eligible countries;
- 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 needs.

ANNEX XII - REPORT OF THE MEDITERRANEAN SEA SUB-REGIONAL COORDINATION UNIT INCLUDING ACTIVITIES FROM NON-PARTIES



Mediterranean
Action Plan
Barcelona
Convention



Implementation of Actions By UNEP- MAP SPA/RAC for the Conservation of
Cetaceans in the Mediterranean (*September 2022 -September 2025*)

Within the framework of the Memorandum of Understanding SPA/RAC - ACCOBAMS Secretariat, signed in Monaco on 8 August 2023 for the period 2023-2025, the joint work programme has been updated with specific activities and incorporated into a new MoU signed in March 2025.

1. Evaluation and update of the Action plan for the conservation of cetaceans in the Mediterranean:

The Action Plan for the conservation of cetaceans in the Mediterranean Sea adopted by Decision IG.25/13 during COP22 (Antalya, Turkey 2021) will be evaluated and updated during the next biennium (2026-2027) in close collaboration with the Secretariat of ACCOBAMS and submitted for adoption by COP 25.

2. Advance the implementation of Ecosystem Approach in the Mediterranean and IMAP in coherence with regional and global developments

SPA/RAC has worked closely with national institutions to support the implementation of national IMAP monitoring programmes in six countries (Egypt, Israel, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Tunisia) through the EU-funded IMAP-MPA and EcAp-MED III projects, which ended in 2023 and 2024 respectively. These efforts enabled integrated monitoring in pilot sites, harmonised methods, capacity building, and contributions to the 2023 MED QSR elaboration.

Two new EU-funded initiatives — SEMPA and EcAp-Med Plus — were launched in 2023 and 2024, respectively, to provide continued support until 2027 in advancing Good Environmental Status.

The Barcelona CoP 23 (Portoroz, Slovenia, 5-8 December 2023) took note of [the 2023 Mediterranean Quality Status Report \(2023 MED QSR\)](#) (UNEP/MED IG.26/Inf.10) and endorsed its provisional Executive Summary (Decision IG.26/3) and a Summary for Policy Makers (SfPM).

As a contribution to the biodiversity (EO1) and non-indigenous species (EO2) chapters of the 2023 MED QSR, six thematic assessment reports—covering benthic habitats, cetaceans, the Mediterranean monk seal, seabirds, marine turtles, and non-indigenous species—were developed by the SPA/RAC. These reports were discussed during the CORMON Meeting on Biodiversity and Fisheries (Athens, Greece, 9–10 March 2023), the Integrated CORMON Meeting (Athens, Greece, 27–28 June 2023), and the Ecosystem Approach Coordination Group Meeting (Istanbul, 11 September 2023), where ACCOBAMS Secretariat representative took part.

It should be noted that the ASI data were among the main data sources used for the assessment of the state of cetaceans (GES assessment) under EcAp/IMAP EO1, that foremostly focused on the three common Indicators (CI): CI3 – Species distribution, CI4 – Population abundance and CI5 – Population demographic characteristics.

3. Review and update of the common indicators factsheets related to Biodiversity (EO1) and fisheries (EO3)

A proposed approach for updating the Common Indicator Factsheets related to Biodiversity (EO1), Non-Indigenous Species (EO2), and Fisheries (EO3), as well as updating the Data Dictionaries and Data Standards for CI 1 and 2 (Benthic

Habitats), CI 3, 4, and 5 (Marine Mammals, Marine Turtles, and Seabirds), and CI 24 (Marine Litter), was developed respectively by SPA/RAC, GFCM, and INFO/RAC, and presented at the last Biodiversity and fisheries CORMON Meeting (Athens, Greece, 7-8 April 2025).

4. The Post-2020 SAPBIO

SPA/RAC launched the mid-term assessment of the Post-2020 SAPBIO, focusing on startup activities and the elaboration of the simplified monitoring tables for national and regional actions and the framework for the future assessment of the collective implementation planned for expected results for 2027 and 2030. This process were conducted in close consultation with the Post-2020 Advisory Committee and were presented and reviewed during the Eleventh meeting of the Post-2020 SAPBIO National Correspondents (Athens, Greece 9-10 April 2025 and the Seventeenth Meeting of SPA/BD Focal Points (Istanbul, Türkiye, 20-22 May 2025).

5. Enhancing of effective conservation on cetacean critical habitats

The Ad hoc Group of Experts for Marine Protected Areas in the Mediterranean (AGEM) Terms of Reference were updated, and its composition was renewed, following the validation by the SPA/BD Focal Points. AGEM convened two meetings by teleconference in 2025. The draft Guidance on Other Effective area-based Conservation measures (OECM) and criteria application in the Mediterranean in the Mediterranean was developed in close collaboration with the AGEM and presented to the 17th meeting of SPA/BD Focal Points.

The Specially Protected Areas of Mediterranean Importance (SPAMIs) Evaluation System (SES) was updated following the amendment of the Format of the periodic review of SPAMIs by COP23. Video tutorials were produced to facilitate the use of the SES. Ordinary periodic and extraordinary reviews of 25 SPAMIs due in 2024-2025 biennium were conducted and presented for consideration by the 17th Meeting of SPA/BD Focal Points.

Thanks to the financial support of the Ministry of Environment of Italy (MASE), the fourth edition of SPAMI Twinning Programme (2024-2025) was launched, involving exchanges with Italian SPAMIs, training, and the design of collaborative action plans. Two civil society organisations (CSO) projects were implemented to support SPAMI governance. The four SPAMI Twinning programmes are under evaluation in order to assess their effectiveness and provide recommendations for future improvements.

6. Improvement of capacity on national organisations and experts; Meetings and workshops

SPA/RAC and the ACCOBAMS secretariat provided joint support for the 36th European Cetacean Society Conference, held in May 2025.

SPA/RAC participated to the workshop on ingested marine litter monitoring and entanglement evidence in the ACCOBAMS area convened on the 6 & 7 April 2024 in Catania, Italy and presented the ongoing activities within the framework of the EU funded projects Med Marine Litter II.

SPA/RAC supported the organisation of the Sixth Conference on Cetacean Conservation in South Mediterranean Countries, (CSMC6) held in Monastir, Tunisia, 13-15 November 2023.

Within the framework of the 2024 Fishforum “Forum on Fisheries sciences in the Mediterranean and the black sea held in Antalya” Türkiye (19-23 February 2023), the following Med bycatch/Depredation project partners; ACCOBAMS, GFCM, IUCN, MEDASSET, BirdLife Europe and Central Asia, WWF, TUDAV, have organised a workshop “Mitigating multi-taxa fisheries interactions in the Mediterranean: a collaborative approach to monitor and reduce vulnerable species bycatch and dolphin depredation”. The workshop aimed to showcase achievements and insights from both

projects, highlighting the MedBycatch Project's engagement of over one million people and the Depredation Project's expansion to multiple Mediterranean countries; and to present lessons learned and best practices drawn from impactful data on vulnerable species bycatch and cetacean–fisheries interactions.

SPA/RAC and ACCOBAMS gave a talk “Mitigating dolphin depredation in Mediterranean fisheries: results and insights from collaborative efforts for cetacean conservation and sustainable fisheries” during the Side event “Management, practices, and technology for sustainable fisheries and mariculture » held on 3 June 2025 during “one-ocean-science-2025,

SPA/RAC has participated to the side event The ACCOBAMS Survey Initiative II: A Crucial Collaborative Effort to Preserve Cetaceans in the Mediterranean and Black Seas, dedicated to the official launch of the ACCOBAMS Survey Initiative II (ASI-II), organised on the occasion of the 2025 United Nations Ocean Conference (UNOC3).

7. Cetaceans monitoring

SPA/RAC is supporting the telemetry fieldwork to understand the complex ecology of fin whales in the Mediterranean Sea and North-East North Atlantic waters; The tagging effort will be coordinated by Tethys Research Institute, in collaboration with researchers from the Universitat Politècnica de València.

ANNEX XIII - REPORT OF ACCOBAMS FOLLOW-UP COMMITTEE

The ACCOBAMS Follow-up Committee was created by the ACCOBAMS Parties at MOP5 through the adoption of the Resolution 5.4.

1. COMPOSITION

For the 2023- 2025 period, the composition of the ACCOBAMS Follow-up Committee was the following:

Members elected by Parties :

<p>Gaby KHALAF CNRS Lebanon Senior Consultant National Centre for Marine Sciences 189 Jounieh - Lebanon Tel: +961 330 3969 bihar@cnrs.edu.lb</p>	<p>Full term: 2023-2028</p>
<p>Bayram OZTÜRK Turkish Marine Research Foundation President P.K. 10 34825 Beykoz Istanbul - Türkiye Tel: +90 216 424 0772 tudav@tudav.org</p>	<p>Full term: 2023-2028</p>
<p>Imane TAI Institut National de Recherche Halieutique Boulevard Sidi Abderrahmane, 2 Aïn Diab, 20180 Casablanca - Morocco Tel: +212 672 827 416 taiimane.it@gmail.com</p>	<p>Full term: 2020-2025</p>
<p>Sarah CHENITI Inspectrice Ministère de la Pêche et des Productions Halieutiques Rue des quatre canons 16 000 Alger - Algérie aqua200271@gmail.com</p>	<p>Alternate</p>

Members elected by ACCOBAMS Partners:

Aurélie MOULINS CIMA Foundation Via Magliotto, 2 17100 Savona - Italy Tel : +39 019 230271 aurelie.moulins@cimafoundation.org	Full term: 2020-2025
Romulus-Marian PAIU Mare Nostrum NGO Executive director Tomis Blvd. n°215, 900647 Constanta - Romania Tel: +40 720258785 romulus.marian@gmail.com	Full term: 2023-2028
Dimitar POPOV Project Coordinator GREEN BALKANS NGO 1, Skopje str., office 10 Plovdiv 4004 - Bulgaria Tel: +359 (0) 32 626 977 dpopov@greenbalkans.org	Alternate

2. OVERVIEW OF THE MEETING AND PARTICIPANTS

The Fourth Meeting of the ACCOBAMS Follow-up Committee was held in Nice, France, on 2–3 September 2025.

The Committee was composed of four members, with two members absent.

Also present were the Chair of the ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee, representatives from two NGOs, and representatives from three Observing Parties: Algeria, Cyprus, and Malta.

The ACCOBAMS Secretariat was represented by Ms. Maÿlis Salivas (Executive Secretary), Ms. Camille Montiglio, Ms. Salomé Calley, and Mr. Tullio Scovazzi (Legal Advisor).

3. MAIN ACTIONS UNDERTAKEN**1. Adoption of the Agenda and Confidentiality Agreement**

At the opening of the meeting, the Committee reaffirmed its commitment to impartiality and integrity, in line with the principles governing the Follow-up Procedure. It was confirmed that all members present had already submitted their signed confidentiality undertakings and declarations of impartiality prior to the meeting.

Following this confirmation, the agenda was formally adopted. In addition to the scheduled items, the Committee agreed to include a dedicated discussion on proposed amendments to the Follow-up Procedure, with the aim of enhancing its clarity, efficiency, and effectiveness in future sessions.

2. Consideration of a New Submission (Spain)

The Committee examined a new submission by OceanCare, concerning Spain's failure to update the national conservation status of the sperm whale (*Physeter macrocephalus*) and the fin whale (*Balaenoptera physalus*) in the Mediterranean.

Although these two species are listed as *Endangered* on the IUCN Red List and recognised as such by ACCOBAMS Resolution 8.12, they remain categorized as *Vulnerable* under Spanish national legislation.

Spain was unable to attend the meeting due to internal institutional workload but provided a written response dated 11 April 2025, expressing openness to dialogue and readiness to provide further clarifications on its review process.

After reviewing the case, the Committee noted the admissibility of the submission and adopted by consensus Recommendation FC4.1, presented in Annex 3 of the official report.

Summary of the recommendation:

- Spain should clarify the procedure and timeline for updating its national Red List to align with the IUCN and ACCOBAMS standards.
- All Parties should be reminded of their obligation to harmonise national conservation statuses with international assessments to ensure coherence across the ACCOBAMS area.
- The Secretariat was tasked with collecting similar information from all Parties to monitor consistency in species classification.

3. Follow-up on Previous Submissions

The Committee reviewed the follow-up of two ongoing cases submitted by *OceanCare* in 2016:

- Military activities around South-East Crete (Greece)***
- Failure by several Parties to implement the ACCOBAMS Conservation Plan for Mediterranean Common Dolphins.***

Given their interconnected nature and shared themes, the Committee decided to examine both cases jointly.

a) *Military activities around South-East Crete (Greece)*

Despite multiple invitations and resolutions (notably Resolution 8.8.B), no new information has been received from Greece regarding the implementation of ACCOBAMS guidelines to address underwater noise since 2014.

The Committee reiterated the importance of transparency and cooperation, emphasising that all Parties have a duty to collaborate in good faith with the Follow-up Procedure.

Recommendation FC4.2:

- Greece should provide updated information on the implementation of the noise mitigation guidelines (Resolutions 4.17 and 7.13).
- The Committee will remain seized of the matter until adequate information is submitted.

b) *Failure by several Parties to implement the ACCOBAMS Conservation Plan for Mediterranean Common Dolphins*

- The second follow-up concerned the lack of implementation of Resolution 4.13 by 17 Parties.
- Despite several reminders, only 4 countries (Cyprus, Malta, Morocco and Spain) responded and with varying degrees of completeness. 14 Parties have yet to submit any information.

Recommendation FC4.2 (Part II):

- The format of the National Reports should be amended to include a specific section on cooperation with the Follow-up Committee.
- The Parties concerned are urged to provide the missing information without further delay.

4. Update on Implementation Issues as Requested by MOPs

a) Seismic and Military Activities Producing Underwater Noise

The Committee reviewed progress on the implementation of existing obligations related to underwater noise (Resolutions 6.17, 6.18, 7.13, and 8.17).

Key achievements include:

- The establishment of the ACCOBAMS Emergency Task Force for Stranding Events (AETFS).
- The organisation of the Joint ACCOBAMS–ASCOBANS Workshop with Navies (Toulon, November 2024), which strengthened collaboration between military and scientific actors.
- The continued development of the Noise Register and passive acoustic monitoring initiatives.

Parties were encouraged to:

- Engage actively with the AETFS and report atypical strandings promptly;
- Avoid or minimize noise-generating activities in sensitive areas (e.g., IMMAs, SPAMIs);
- Share seismic activity data via the Noise Register;
- Employ certified MMO/PAM operators for all offshore industrial activities.

b) Interactions Between Humans and Dolphins (Resolution 3.13)

The Committee acknowledged the progress made through the creation of the ACCOBAMS Advisory Committee on Semi-Enclosed Facilities and endorsed the draft Resolution 9.19 on Semi-Captivity (Passport and Guidelines) for adoption at MOP9.

Further recommendations were made to:

- Assess the scale of human–dolphin interactions in the wild;
- Gather national legislation data regarding these interactions;
- Continue monitoring implementation of Resolution 3.13

5. Other Business

Under this agenda item, the Committee examined in detail the proposed amendments to the Rules of Procedure of the Follow-up Committee, as referenced in Resolution 6.8 and presented in Annex 7 of the meeting documentation. The Legal Advisor, Professor Tullio Scovazzi, provided an in-depth explanation of the background and rationale for these proposed amendments. He recalled that, since the adoption of the current Rules of Procedure, several meetings of the Committee had highlighted the need for minor adjustments to improve clarity, efficiency, and internal consistency, without modifying the substance or the spirit of the Follow-up Procedure itself.

The proposed revisions aimed primarily to:

- clarify the roles and responsibilities of the Committee members and observers, particularly regarding participation rights and confidentiality obligations;
- streamline the submission and admissibility process, ensuring that communications from non-governmental organisations or third parties are processed in a transparent and timely manner;
- refine the reporting and recommendation framework, notably by standardising how the Committee's conclusions are presented to the Meeting of the Parties;
- and ensure better alignment between the Follow-up Committee's Rules of Procedure and the overall governance framework of ACCOBAMS.

Following this discussion, and in the absence of any objection, the Committee approved the Draft Resolution by consensus, as presented. It was agreed that the Secretariat would transmit the document to the Bureau, with a request for its inclusion in the provisional agenda of the Ninth Meeting of the Parties (MOP9) for formal consideration and adoption.

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RESOLUTION 9.1
GRANTING THE RIGHT TO VOTE

The Meeting of the Parties to the Agreement on the Conservation of Cetaceans of the Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea and contiguous Atlantic area:

Recalling Article III, paragraphs 5 and 6, of the Agreement regarding the right to vote,

Recalling Article 14, paragraph 2, of the Rules of Procedure of the Meeting of the Parties, which provides that “Representatives of Parties which are three or more years behind in paying their subscriptions on the date of the opening session of the Meeting of the Parties shall not be eligible to vote. However, the Meeting of the Parties may allow such Parties to continue to exercise their right to vote if it is satisfied that the delay in payment arises from exceptional circumstances”,

Convinced that decision-making at the Ninth Meeting of the Parties will benefit from the active participation of as many Parties as possible,

1. *Decides* that, although Libya is more than three years behind in paying its ordinary contributions, it is satisfied that the delay for payment arises from exceptional circumstances, and that this Party shall exercise its right to vote at the Ninth Meeting of the Parties.

RESOLUTION 9.2
LONG-TERM PENDING CONTRIBUTIONS

The Meeting of the Parties to the Agreement on the Conservation of Cetaceans of the Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea and contiguous Atlantic area:

Concerned about the question of arrears in the payment of contributions to the ACCOBAMS budget and supplementary fund that can adversely affect the implementation of the objective of the Agreement, which is to ensure that coordinated measures are taken to achieve and maintain a favourable conservation status for cetaceans,

Moved also by the desire to preserve good relationships with all ACCOBAMS Parties, and considering the involvement of all ACCOBAMS Parties as crucial for achieving the Agreement's objective,

Convinced that measures aimed at recovering unpaid contributions should be considered as a mean to facilitate the Party concerned in meeting its financial obligations,

Considering Article 14, paragraph 2, of the Rules of Procedure for the Meeting of the Parties,

Taking into consideration the recommendation by the Sixth Meeting of the ACCOBAMS Extended Bureau,

2. *Decides* that:

- Parties which are three or more years behind in paying their contributions on the date of the opening session of the Meeting of the Parties shall not be eligible to vote at that Meeting of the Parties;
- Representatives of Parties which are three or more years behind in paying their contributions shall not be eligible as chairperson or vice-chairperson of the Meeting of the Parties or as members or alternate members of the Follow-up Committee;
- Parties which are three or more years behind in paying their contributions shall not be eligible for financial support for the participation of their representatives to ACCOBAMS Meetings; and
- the above-mentioned measures do not apply if the Meeting of the Parties is satisfied, on the basis of a formal communication sent by the State concerned, that the delay in payment arises from exceptional circumstances. The decision will apply for the following triennium;

3. *Mandates* the Bureau to decide if governmental bodies of Parties which are five or more years behind in paying their contributions shall not be eligible for financial support from the Supplementary Conservation Grants Fund;

4. *Encourages* Parties which are behind in paying their contributions to keep contact with the Secretariat to reschedule the payment of the arrears under a written payment plan to be approved by the Bureau;

5. *Decides* that Rules of Procedure for the Meeting of the Parties will be amended accordingly.

RESOLUTION 9.3
AMENDMENTS TO THE RULES OF PROCEDURE FOR THE MEETING OF THE PARTIES

The Meeting of the Parties to the Agreement on the Conservation of Cetaceans of the Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea and contiguous Atlantic area:

Considering Resolution 9.2 on “Long-term Pending Contributions”,

1. *Decides* to amend the Rules of Procedure for the Meeting of the Parties as follows:
 - a) Paragraph 2 of Article 14 is deleted;
 - b) The subsequent paragraphs of Article 14 are renumbered accordingly;
 - c) A new Article 28 is added, stating as follows:

PENDING ARREARS OF CONTRIBUTIONS

Article 28

1. Parties which are three or more years behind in paying their contributions on the date of the opening session of the Meeting of the Parties shall not be eligible to vote at that Meeting of the Parties.
2. Representatives of Parties which are three or more years behind in paying their contributions, or persons nominated by these Parties, shall not be eligible as chairperson or vice-chairperson of the Meeting of the Parties or as members or alternate members of the Follow-up Committee.
3. Parties which are three or more years behind in paying their contributions shall not be eligible for financial support for the participation of their representatives to ACCOBAMS Meetings.
4. The Meeting of the Parties may decide that paragraphs 1, 2 and 3 of this Article do not apply if the Meeting of the Parties is satisfied, on the basis of a formal communication sent by the State concerned, that the delay in payment arises from exceptional circumstances. The decision will apply for the following triennium.
5. The Meeting of the Parties mandates the Bureau to decide if governmental bodies of Parties which are five or more years behind in paying their contributions shall not be eligible for financial support from the Supplementary Conservation Fund.
6. Parties which are behind in paying their contributions shall keep contact with the Secretariat in order to reschedule the payment of the arrears under a written payment plan to be approved by the Bureau.

- d) The previous Article 28 is renumbered as Article 29;

2. *Adopts* the amended Rules of Procedure for the Meeting of the Parties that are [annexed](#) to the present Resolution⁷.

⁷ Amendments in bold.

ANNEX
RULES OF PROCEDURE FOR THE MEETING OF THE PARTIES

PURPOSE

Article 1

1. These rules of procedure shall apply to any Session of the Meeting of the Contracting Parties to the Agreement on the Conservation on Cetaceans of the Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea and contiguous Atlantic area, convened in accordance with article III of the Agreement.
2. Insofar as they are applicable, these rules shall apply mutatis mutandis to any other meeting held in the framework of the Agreement on the Conservation on Cetaceans of the Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea and contiguous Atlantic area.

DATE AND PLACE OF MEETINGS

Article 2

1. Ordinary sessions of the Meeting of the Parties shall be held at intervals of not more than three years.
2. The Meeting of the Parties shall take place in the country chosen by the previous Meeting of the Parties on the basis of a formal invitation that should have been issued to this effect by the responsible authority of that country. If more than one Party issues an invitation to host the next session of the Meeting of the Parties, and two or more invitations are maintained after informal consultations, the Meeting of the Parties shall decide on the venue of the next session by secret ballot.
3. If no invitation has been received, the Meeting of the Parties shall be held in the country where the Secretariat has its seat, unless other appropriate arrangements are made by the Secretariat of the Agreement or the Secretariat of the Convention.
4. Extraordinary sessions of the Meetings of the Parties shall be convened by the Agreement Secretariat on the written request of at least two thirds of the Parties.

DELEGATES, CREDENTIALS, OBSERVERS

Article 3

Representatives

1. A Party to the Agreement (hereafter referred to as a "Party"⁸) shall be entitled to be represented at the Meeting by a delegation consisting of a Head of Delegation and such Alternative Representatives and Advisers as the Party may deem necessary.
2. The Representative of a Party shall exercise the voting rights of that Party. In his/her absence, an Alternative Representative of that Party shall act in his place.
3. States or regional economic integration organisations that have ratified, accepted or approved the Agreement or have signed it without reservations in respect of ratification, acceptance or approval or have acceded to it are represented at the Meetings of the Parties and exercise their voting rights, even though the Agreement has not yet entered into force for them.
4. Logistic and other limitations may require that no more than four delegates of any Party be present at a plenary session. The Secretariat shall notify Parties, observers and other participants of any such limitations in advance of the Meeting.

⁸ See Articles I, paragraph 3.i), and XIV of the Agreement. A Party is a State which has deposited with the Government of the Principality of Monaco its instrument of ratification, acceptance, approval or accession in due time before the Meeting.

Article 4
Credentials

1. The Representative or any Alternative Representative of a Party shall, before exercising the voting rights of the Party, have been granted powers by, or on behalf of, a proper authority, such as the Head of State, the Head of Government or the Minister of Foreign Affairs or the head of an executive body of any regional economic Organisation, enabling them to represent the Party at the Meeting and to vote.
2. Such credentials shall be submitted to the Secretariat of the Agreement at the beginning of the Meeting.
3. A Credentials Committee of not more than five representatives shall examine the credentials and shall report thereon to the Meeting. Pending a decision on their credentials, delegates may participate provisionally in the Meeting.
4. If credentials are submitted in a language other than one of the working languages of the Meeting (French and English), they shall be accompanied by a suitable translation into one of these two languages to permit their efficient validations by the Credentials Committee.

Article 5
Observers⁹

1. The United Nations, its Specialized Agencies, the International Atomic Energy Agency and any State not a Party to the Agreement may be represented at the Meeting by observers
2. Any Body or Agency technically concerned inter alia with the conservation of cetaceans and fisheries management, which is either:
 - a) an international Agency or Body; or
 - b) an international non-governmental Agency or body, or a national governmental Agency or body; or
 - c) a national non-governmental Agency or Body which has been approved for this purpose by the State in which it is located;
 and which has informed the Secretariat of the Agreement of its desire to be represented at the Meeting by observers, shall be permitted to be represented unless, for those referred to in paragraph 2b and 2c, at least one-third of the Parties present object.
3. Bodies and Agencies desiring to be represented at the Meeting by observers shall submit the name of their representatives and in the case of Bodies and Agencies, referred to in paragraph 2b and 2c, of this Article, evidence of the approval of the State in which they are located, to the Secretariat of the Agreement prior to the opening of the Meeting.
4. Logistic and other limitations may require that no more than two observers from any non-Party State, Body or Agency be present at the Meeting. The Secretariat shall notify Parties, observers and other participants of any such limitations in advance of the Meeting.

AGENDA
Article 6

1. The Secretariat shall prepare the provisional agenda of each Meeting, in consultation with the Convention Secretariat and the Sub Regional Coordination Units.
2. The provisional agenda of each ordinary session of the Meeting of the Parties shall include, as appropriate:
 - a) Items arising from the articles or the Annexes of the Agreement;
 - b) Items, the inclusion of which has been decided at a previous Meeting or which emanate from decisions taken at a previous Meeting;
 - c) Items referred to in paragraph 6 of the present article;

⁹ See Agreement, Article III, paragraph 4.

- d) Any item proposed by a Party, the Scientific Committee or the Secretariat.
3. The Secretariat shall, in consultation with the Bureau, include any item that has been proposed by a Party and has been received by the Secretariat after the provisional agenda has been produced, but before the opening of the Meeting, in a supplementary provisional agenda.
 4. The Meeting of the Parties shall examine the provisional agenda together with any supplementary provisional agenda. When adopting the agenda, it may add, delete, defer, or amend items. Only items, which are considered by the Meeting of the Parties to be urgent and important, may be added to the agenda.
 5. The provisional Agenda for an extraordinary session of the Meeting of the Parties shall consist only of those items proposed for consideration in the request for this session. The provisional agenda and any necessary supporting documents shall be distributed to the Parties at the same time as the invitation to the extraordinary session.
 6. Any item of the agenda of an ordinary session of the Meeting of the Parties, consideration of which has not been completed at the session, shall be included automatically in the agenda of the next session, unless otherwise decided by the Meeting of the Parties.

DOCUMENTS

Article 7

The documents for each ordinary session of the Meeting of the Parties, as per Article 6 paragraph 5 and proposals received from the Parties, as per Article 12 of the Rules of Procedure, shall be distributed to the Parties in the two working languages by the Secretariat at least sixty days before the opening of the Meeting.

BUREAU

Article 8

1. At opening session of each ordinary Meeting, the acting Chairperson, or in the absence of the Chairperson, a representative of the same Party or in its absence the Head of the Delegation of the host country of the Meeting of the Parties, shall preside until the Meeting of the Parties has elected its Chairperson.
2. At the commencement of the first sitting of each ordinary Meeting¹⁰, a Chairperson and a maximum of four Vice Chairpersons shall be elected from among the representatives of the Parties present at the Meeting, based on informal consultations conducted by the Secretariat.
3. The Chairperson shall participate in the Meeting in that capacity and shall not at the same time exercise the rights of a representative of a Party. The Party concerned shall designate another representative who shall be entitled to represent the Party in the Meeting and to exercise the right to vote.
4. If the Chairperson and/or one of the Vice-Chairpersons resign or are otherwise unable to complete the assigned term of office or to perform the functions of the office, a representative of the same Party shall be named by the Party concerned to replace the said officer for the remainder of that office's mandate.
5. For the purpose of the Meeting of the Parties and the Meeting of the Bureau, and throughout session, one of the Vice Chairpersons will be Reporter.

RULES OF ORDER AND DEBATE

Article 9

Powers of the Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson

1. In addition to exercising powers conferred elsewhere in these Rules, the Chairperson shall at plenary sessions of the Meeting:
 - a) open and close the session;

¹⁰ See Agreement, Article VI, paragraph 1.

- b) direct the discussions;
 - c) ensure the observance of these rules;
 - d) accord the right to speak;
 - e) put questions to the vote and announce decisions;
 - f) rule on points of order; and
 - g) subject to these Rules, have complete control of the proceedings of the Meeting and the maintenance of order.
2. The Chairperson may, in the course of discussion at a plenary session of the Meeting, propose to the Meeting of the Parties:
- a) time limits for speakers;
 - b) limitation of the number of times the members of a delegation or the observers from a State not a Party, body or agency may speak on any question;
 - c) the closure of the list of speakers;
 - d) accord the right of reply to any delegate after the closure of the speakers;
 - e) the adjournment or the closure of the debate on the particular subject or question under discussion; and
 - f) the suspension or adjournment of the session.
3. Without prejudice to Article 8, paragraph 4, for the debates the Chairperson may be replaced by the Vice-Chairperson.

Article 10

Seating, Quorum

1. Delegations shall be seated in accordance with the alphabetical order of the names of the Parties in the French language.
2. A quorum for plenary sessions of the Meeting shall consist of more than one-half of the Parties having delegations at the Meeting. No plenary session shall take place in the absence of a quorum.

Article 11

Right to Speak

1. The Chairperson shall call upon speakers in the order in which they signify their desire to speak, with precedence given to the delegations of the Parties.
2. A delegate or observer may speak only if called upon by the Chairperson who may call a speaker to order if the remarks are not relevant to the subject under discussion.
3. A speaker shall not be interrupted except on a point of order. The speaker may, however, with the permission of the Chairperson, give way during their speech to allow any delegate or observer to bring complement on a particular point in his speech.
4. The Chairperson of a committee or working group may be accorded precedence for the purpose of explaining the conclusions arrived at by that committee or working group.

Article 12

Submission of Proposals for Amendment of the Agreement and its Appendices

1. As a general rule, subject to any provisions of the Agreement itself,
 - a) proposals shall have been communicated at least 150 days before the session to the Secretariat, which shall have circulated them to all Parties in the working languages of the Meeting¹¹,

¹¹ See Agreement, Article X, paragraph 2.

- b) proposals arising out of discussion of the foregoing may be discussed at any plenary session of the Meeting provided copies of them have been circulated to all delegations not later than the day preceding the session.
2. The Chairperson may also permit the discussion and consideration of urgent proposals arising after the period prescribed with the subparagraph a) of this Article provided that they relate to proposed amendments which have been circulated in accordance with the subparagraph b) of this Article and that their consideration will not unduly inhibit the proceedings of the Meeting. The Chairperson may, in addition, permit the discussion of motions as to procedures, even though such motions have not been circulated previously.
3. After a proposal has been adopted or rejected by the Meeting it shall not be reconsidered unless a two-thirds majority of the Representatives participating in the Meeting so decide. Permission to speak on a motion to reconsider a proposal shall be accorded only to a delegate from each of two Parties wishing to speak against the motion, after which the motion shall immediately be put to the vote.

Article 13

Point of Order

1. During the discussion of any matter, a delegate may rise to a point of order, and the Chairperson in accordance with these Rules shall immediately decide the point of order. A delegate may appeal against any ruling of the Chairperson. The appeal shall immediately be put to the vote, and the decision of the Chairperson shall be maintained unless a majority of the Representatives present and voting otherwise decide. A delegate rising to a point of order may not speak on the substance of the matter under discussion.
2. The following motions shall have precedence in the following order over all other proposals or motions before the Meeting:
 - a) to suspend the sitting;
 - b) to adjourn the sitting;
 - c) to adjourn the debate on the particular subject or question under discussion;
 - d) to close the debate on the particular subject or question under discussion.

VOTING

Article 14

Methods of Voting

1. Without prejudice to the provisions of Article 4, paragraph 1, each delegation shall have one vote. Regional economic integration organisations, in matters within their competence, shall exercise their right to vote with the number of votes equal to the number of their member States which are Parties. In such case, the member States of such organisations shall not exercise their right individually¹².
2. The Meeting shall normally vote by show of hands, but any Representative may request a roll-call vote. The roll-call vote shall be taken in the French alphabetical order. The Chairperson may require a roll-call vote on the advice of the tellers where they are in doubt as to the actual number of votes cast and this is likely to be critical to the outcome.
3. All votes in respect of the election of officers or of prospective host countries for the next Meeting shall be by secret ballot and, although it shall not normally be used, any Representative may request a secret ballot for other matters. If seconded, the question of whether a secret ballot should be held shall immediately be voted upon. The motion for a secret ballot may not be conducted by secret ballot.
4. Voting by roll-call or by secret ballot shall be expressed by "Yes", "No" or "Abstain". Only affirmative and negative votes shall be counted in calculating the number of votes cast.

¹² See Agreement, Article III, paragraph 5.

5. Procedural decisions are taken by a simple majority.
6. If votes are equal, a second vote shall be taken. If the vote is also equal, the motion or amendment shall not be carried.
7. The Chairperson shall be responsible for the counting of the votes and shall announce the result. Tellers appointed by the Secretariat may assist the Chairperson.
8. After the Chairperson has announced the beginning of the vote, it shall not be interrupted except by a Representative on a point of order in connection with the actual conduct of the voting. The Chairperson may permit Representatives to explain their votes either before or after the voting, and may limit the time to be allowed for such explanations.

Article 15

Majority

Except where otherwise provided for under the provisions of the Agreement, these Rules or the Terms of Reference for the Administration of the Trust Fund, all votes on procedural matters relating to the forwarding of the business of the Meeting shall be decided by a simple majority of votes cast, while all other decisions shall be taken by a two-thirds majority of votes cast.

Article 16

Procedure for Voting on Motions and Amendments

1. A delegate may move that parts of a proposal or of an amendment be voted on separately. If objection is made to the request for such division, the motion for division shall be voted upon first. Permission to speak on the motion for division shall be accorded only to a delegate from each of two Parties wishing to speak in favour of and a delegate from each of two Parties wishing to speak against the motion. If the motion for division is carried, those parts of the proposal or amendment that are subsequently approved shall be put to the vote as a whole. If all operative parts of the proposal or the amendment have been rejected, the proposal or the amendment shall be considered to have been rejected as a whole.
2. When an amendment is moved to a proposal, the amendment shall be voted on first. When two or more amendments are moved to a proposal, the Meeting shall vote first on the amendment furthest removed in substance from the original proposal and then on the amendment next furthest removed there from, and so on until all amendments have been put to the vote. When, however, the adoption of one amendment necessarily implies the rejection of another amendment, the latter amendment shall not be put to the vote. If one or more amendments are adopted, the amended proposal shall then be voted upon. A motion is considered an amendment to a proposal if it merely adds to, deletes or revises part of that proposal.
3. If two or more proposals relate to the same question, the Meeting shall, unless it decides otherwise, vote on the proposals in the order in which they have been submitted. The Meeting may, after voting on a proposal, decide whether to vote on the next proposal.

Article 17

Elections

1. If in an election to fill one place no candidate obtains the required majority in the first ballot, a second ballot shall be taken restricted to the two candidates obtaining the largest number of votes. If in the second ballot the votes are equally divided, the Chairperson shall decide between the candidates by drawing lots.
2. If in the first ballot there is a tie amongst candidates obtaining the second largest number of votes, a special ballot shall be held amongst them to reduce the number of candidates to two.
3. In the case of tie amongst three or more candidates obtaining the largest number of votes in the first ballot, a special ballot shall be held amongst them to reduce the number of candidates to two. If a tie then results

amongst two or more candidates, the Chairperson shall reduce the number to two by drawing lots, and a further ballot shall be held in accordance with paragraph 1 of this Article.

Article 18

Election of Members of the Follow-up Committee

1. The election of members of the Follow-up Committee shall be held by secret ballot, unless, in the absence of any objection by one Party, the Meeting of the Parties decides on the members by consensus without taking a ballot.
2. Before the elections begins, the Chairperson shall appoint two tellers from among the delegates. He/she shall hand to them the list of States Parties and of organisations and institutions having the status of ACCOBAMS Partners (hereinafter referred to as "ACCOBAMS Partners") entitled to vote, as well as the lists of candidates nominated respectively by States Parties and ACCOBAMS Partners.
3. The Secretariat shall prepare voting papers with the list of candidates nominated by States Parties and shall distribute them to the States Parties entitled to vote.
4. The Secretariat shall prepare voting papers with the list of candidates nominated by ACCOBAMS Partners and shall distribute them to the ACCOBAMS Partners entitled to vote.
5. Each delegation shall cast its vote by encircling the names of those candidates (three in the case of States Parties and two in the case of ACCOBAMS Partners) for whom it desires to vote.
6. The States Parties and the ACCOBAMS Partners shall deposit their voting papers in the ballot box according to the roll call made by the Chairperson in the alphabetical order.
7. The tellers shall proceed to count the voting papers and to read the names encircled under the supervision of the Chairperson.
8. Voting papers on which more names have been circled than there are seats to be filled shall be considered invalid.
9. The candidates obtaining the greatest number of votes shall be declared elected up to the number of seats to be filled.
10. If there still remain seats to be filled, there shall be another round of voting.
11. If two or more candidates obtain the same number of votes and, as a result, the number of these candidates is greater than the remaining number of seats to be filled, there shall be an additional round of voting restricted to those candidates who obtained the same number of votes. If in this additional round of voting two or more candidates obtain the same number of votes, the Chairperson shall draw lots among them.
12. After each round of voting the Chairperson shall announce the results.

SECRETARIAT

Article 19

1. The Agreement Executive Secretary shall be the Secretary of the Meeting of the Parties.
2. The Secretariat shall provide and direct the staff as required by the Meeting of the Parties.

Article 20

1. The Secretariat shall¹³:
 - a) Arrange for interpretation at the Meeting;
 - b) Prepare, receive, translate, reproduce and distribute the documents which will be useful during the Meeting;

¹³ See Article IV of the Agreement.

- c) Draft the report of the Meeting, under the guidance of the Reporter, for consideration by the Bureau first and for final approval by the Meeting of the Parties;
- d) Make and arrange for keeping of sound recordings of the Meeting;
- e) Arrange for the custody and preservation of the documents of the Meeting;
- f) Publish and circulate the official documents which result from the Meeting;
- g) Generally perform all other work that the Meeting of the Parties may require.

LANGUAGES AND RECORDS

Article 21

Official and Working Languages

1. French and English shall be the official and working languages of the Meetings.
2. The official documents of the Meeting shall be distributed in those two languages.
3. Speeches made in any of the working languages shall be interpreted into the other working language.

Article 22

Other Languages

1. A delegate may speak in a language other than a working language. He shall be responsible for providing interpretation into a working language, and interpretation into the other working language may be based upon that interpretation.
2. Any document submitted to the Secretariat in any language other than a working language shall be accompanied by a translation into one of the two working languages, this translation being trustworthy.

Article 23

Report

1. The report of the Meeting shall be circulated to all Parties in the official languages of the Meeting.
2. Committees and working groups shall decide upon the form in which their report shall be presented.

PUBLICITY OF DEBATES

Article 24

Plenary Sessions

All plenary sessions of the Meeting shall be open to the public, except that in exceptional circumstances the Meeting may decide, by a two-thirds majority of Representatives present and voting, that any single session be closed to the public.

Article 25

Sessions of Committees and Working Groups

As a general rule, sessions of committees and working groups shall be limited to the representatives and to observers invited by the Chairpersons of the committees or working groups.

THE BUREAU, OTHER COMMITTEES AND WORKING GROUPS

Article 26

During the Meeting of the Party, the Bureau and the Reporter of the Meeting shall meet as often as necessary on request of his Chairman.

Article 27

Credentials Committee and Working Groups

1. In addition to the Credentials Committee, the Meeting of the Parties may establish working groups as may be necessary to enable them to carry out their functions. They shall define the terms of reference and composition of each working group, the size of which shall be limited according to the number of places available in assembly rooms.
2. The Meeting of the Parties may decide that any such working group may meet in the period between ordinary Meetings.
3. The Credentials Committee and each working group shall elect their own officers.
4. Insofar as they are applicable, these Rules shall apply mutatis mutandis to the proceedings of committee and working groups; however, interpretation may not be provided in sessions of the committee and working groups.

PENDING ARREARS OF CONTRIBUTIONS**Article 28**

1. **Parties which are three or more years behind in paying their contributions on the date of the opening session of the Meeting of the Parties shall not be eligible to vote at that Meeting of the Parties.**
2. **Representatives of Parties which are three or more years behind in paying their contributions, or persons nominated by these Parties, shall not be eligible as chairperson or vice-chairperson of the Meeting of the Parties or as members or alternate members of the Follow-up Committee.**
3. **Parties which are three or more years behind in paying their contributions shall not be eligible for financial support for the participation of their representatives to ACCOBAMS Meetings.**
4. **The Meeting of the Parties may decide that paragraphs 1, 2 and 3 of this Article do not apply if the Meeting of the Parties is satisfied, on the basis of a formal communication sent by the State concerned, that the delay in payment arises from exceptional circumstances. The decision will apply for the following triennium.**
5. **The Meeting of the Parties mandates the Bureau to decide if governmental bodies of Parties which are five or more years behind in paying their contributions shall not be eligible for financial support from the Supplementary Conservation Fund.**
6. **Parties which are behind in paying their contributions shall keep contact with the Secretariat in order to reschedule the payment of the arrears under a written payment plan to be approved by the Bureau.**

AMENDMENT**Article 29**

These Rules may be amended as required by decision of the Meeting.

RESOLUTION 9.4 SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE

The Meeting of the Parties to the Agreement on the Conservation of Cetaceans of the Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea and contiguous Atlantic area:

Recalling Article VII of the Agreement on the composition and functions of the Scientific Committee,

Considering that it is appropriate to amend the Annex to Resolution 8.3 (Rules of the Scientific Committee), in particular to align the Scientific Committee Rules of Procedures to international standards,

Commending the participation in the Scientific Committee of experts from CIESM, IUCN, the Scientific Committee of the International Whaling Commission (IWC), the Scientific Council of the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS) and the European Cetacean Society (ECS), of experts from the different regions, as well as of experts designated by the Parties on a voluntary basis,

Appreciating the offer by Italy to provide for the triennium 2023-2025, and on an experimental basis, a voluntary contribution to cover the expenses of participation to the Scientific Committee meetings of up to 8 experts from eligible Countries from the different regions,

Taking into account the Work Programme 2026-2028, as adopted by Resolution 9.5,

Stressing the need for establishing a closer link between the Scientific Committee of ACCOBAMS and the rest of the scientific community working on cetaceans in the Agreement Area,

Stressing the need for strengthening the representation of the Scientific Committee of ACCOBAMS, by increasing the number of experts from the different regions,

Stressing the need to ensure the diversity of experiences and competences and the equitable geographical distribution and gender balance of membership within the Scientific Committee,

Taking into consideration the recommendation by the Sixth Meeting of the ACCOBAMS Extended Bureau,

1. *Appoints*, as members of the Scientific Committee, the experts proposed by CIESM and IUCN for the period 2026-2028, as follows:

CIESM: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Loriane MENDEZ,- Ayaka Amaha OZTÜRK,- Simone PANIGADA;	IUCN: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Rimmel BEN MESSAOUD,- Léa DAVID,- Cristina FOSSI
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2. *Appoints*, as members of the Scientific Committee, the experts proposed by the Scientific Council of the CMS, the Scientific Committee of the IWC and the ECS for the period 2026-2028, as follows:
 - Mark SIMMONDS, proposed by the Scientific Council of the CMS,
 - Greg DONOVAN, proposed by the Scientific Committee of the IWC;
 - Tilen GENOV, proposed by ECS;
3. *Asks* the Scientific Committee to appoint, at its first Meeting of the triennium, a Chairperson and a Vice-Chairperson, as well as “Task Managers”;
4. *Recommends* that the new Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson of the Scientific Committee are not experts nominated by the same organisation and that gender and geographical balance are also considered;
5. *Invites* the outgoing Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson to assist the Secretariat in the preparation of the 17th Meeting of the Scientific Committee;
6. *Takes note* of the assessment, by the Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson, of *curricula vitae* of experts from the different regions;
7. *Appoints*, as members of the Scientific Committee and taking into consideration the available financial resources, two experts from the different regions, as follows:
 - Souad LAMOUTI and Vincent RIDOUX, for the Western Mediterranean and contiguous Atlantic area,
 - Martina ĐURAS and Giancarlo LAURIANO, for the Central Mediterranean,
 - Anastasia KOMNENOU and Céline MAHFOUZ, for the Eastern Mediterranean,
 - Pavel GOL’DIN and Natia KOPALIANI, for the Black Sea;
8. *Thanks* CIESM, IUCN, IWC, the Secretariat of CMS and ECS for bearing the financial responsibility for their experts’ participation for the triennium 2026-2028;
9. *Decides* to amend the Rules of procedure of the Scientific Committee, as [annexed](#) to this Resolution;
10. *Agrees* that the present Resolution replaces Resolution 8.3.

ANNEX
Rules of Procedure of the Scientific Committee¹⁴

GENERAL FUNCTIONS

Article 1

1. The Scientific Committee, established in accordance with Article VII of the Agreement, provides scientific advice and information to the Meeting of the Parties or to the Parties through the Secretariat.
2. The functions of the Scientific Committee are defined in Article VII, paragraph 3, of the Agreement.

COMPOSITION

Article 2

1. The Scientific Committee shall consist of the following members:
 - three experts proposed by **the International Commission for the Scientific Exploration of the Mediterranean (CIESM)**;
 - three experts proposed by **the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)**;
 - **one expert proposed by the Scientific Committee of the International Whaling Commission (IWC)**;
 - **one expert proposed by the Scientific Council of the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS)**;
 - **one expert proposed by the European Cetacean Society (ECS)**;
 - up to three experts from each region, as defined in the [Appendix](#), appointed by the Meeting of the Parties;
2. The above **five** organisations may propose to support **additional experts to the Scientific Committee. The *curricula vitae* of any additional expert shall be provided to the current Chairperson of the Scientific Committee for relevant record-keeping.**
3. The Chairperson and the Vice-Chairperson of the Scientific Committee **shall be** elected by **and among** the members of the Scientific Committee **appointed under paragraph 1 of this Article** at the first Meeting of the triennium.
4. The Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson of the Scientific Committee shall not be **experts nominated by** the same organisation. Gender, geographical balance, and alternation in all roles of the Scientific Committee should be considered.
5. **Any Party may designate, on a voluntary basis, one additional expert to the Scientific Committee. The cost of his/her participation to the meetings of the Scientific Committee shall not be covered by the Agreement's funds. The *curricula vitae* of any additional expert shall be provided to the current Chairperson of the Scientific Committee for relevant record-keeping.**
6. **Members of the Scientific Committee shall exercise their functions in their personal capacity and shall not represent any ACCOBAMS Party, group of ACCOBAMS Parties or organisation. This applies to all members, including any expert that a Party designates on a voluntary basis under paragraph 5 above.**

¹⁴ Amendments in bold

SELECTION OF THE MEMBERS AND TERMS OF OFFICE

Article 3

1. The selection of the Scientific Committee members **shall** take into consideration the following criteria, finalised by the Extended Bureau in accordance with the Work Programme proposed to the Parties:
 - a) To be experts in one or more fields relevant to cetacean conservation science;
 - b) To possess an appropriate level of quality, relevance, productivity and originality in activities related to cetacean conservation and research, as demonstrated through scientific publications and technical reports, communications to conferences, participation in working groups or committees at national or international levels;
 - c) To be available to participate in the work of the Scientific Committee, attend its meetings and contribute to the working groups, with the required continuity;
 - d) To be proficient in one of the Agreement's two working languages (English and French) and, **preferably**, have a sufficient knowledge of the other.
2. CIESM, IUCN, **the Scientific Committee of IWC, the Scientific Council of CMS and ECS shall propose qualified experts** in close consultation with the Bureau, which then reports the outcome of these consultations to the Meeting of the Parties.
3. **In the case of experts from regions, the** criteria above **shall** be ascertained through **an** evaluation of **the relevant curricula vitae, which shall be carried out** by the Scientific Committee Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson. **This evaluation** shall be submitted to the Meeting of the Parties.
4. The priorities set up in the Work Programme for each triennium, as well as the need to ensure a balanced geographical representation, shall be taken into account in selecting the members of the Scientific Committee by the Meeting of the Parties.
5. At its first Meeting, four "Task Managers" are designated by the Scientific Committee among its members. As far as necessary, these appointments can be modified during the triennium upon decision of the Chairperson of the Scientific Committee in consultation with the Vice-Chairperson and the Bureau.

Article 4

1. The terms of office of the members shall expire at the closure of the ordinary Meeting of the Parties following the one at which they were appointed.
2. Starting from 2026, all leading roles (Chairperson, Vice-Chairperson and Task Managers) shall have a maximum of two consecutive terms.

MEETINGS

Article 5

1. The Chairperson shall preside over the meetings of the Scientific Committee, prepare the provisional agenda in consultation with the Secretariat, and liaise with members between meetings of the Committee. The Chairperson may represent the Committee as required and carry out other functions as may be delegated to him/her by the Committee, within the limits of the Committee functions.

2. The Vice-Chairperson shall assist the Chairperson. He/she shall preside at meetings of the Scientific Committee in the absence of, or in the event of the Chairperson being unable to act. He/she shall on those occasions exercise the powers and duties prescribed for the Chairperson.
3. At its first meeting after the Meeting of Parties, the Scientific Committee shall assign specific topics for each Task Manager taking into account the priorities set up in the Work Programme for the triennium. Each Task Manager, in addition to his/her role as member of the Scientific Committee, shall coordinate the works of the Scientific Committee concerning the topics that he/she has been assigned by the Scientific Committee. Each Task Manager shall provide a report to the meetings of the Scientific Committee on the topics he/she is in charge of.
4. **The experts from regions** shall work together to provide a report to the meetings of the Scientific Committee on the conservation status of cetaceans and relevant activities in **their respective region**.
5. **As a rule, the meetings of the Scientific Committee shall be held in person. Hybrid meetings may be held if the Chairperson of the Scientific Committee, in agreement with the Secretariat, deems it appropriate.**

Article 6

1. The Scientific Committee may establish ad hoc working groups as needed to deal with specific tasks. It shall define the terms of reference and composition of each working group.
2. The meetings of the working groups shall be held, where possible, in conjunction with other events or intersessionally via remote tools.
3. The Scientific Committee may consider reports from other relevant meetings and working groups established under the Agreement, when necessary.
4. These Rules shall apply, *mutatis mutandis*, to the meetings of working groups.

Article 7

1. The Chair may decide to invite other experts, including experts in legal and socio-economic matters, to attend meetings (in person or remotely) as observers, with no additional cost for the Trust Fund, as deemed necessary. If their participation requires funding from ACCOBAMS, the Bureau will decide on their attendance, in consultation with the Secretariat.
2. ACCOBAMS Partners may participate as observers to the Meeting of the Scientific Committee.

Article 8

1. Notices of meetings, including date and venue, shall be sent to all Parties, to the members of the Scientific Committee and to ACCOBAMS Partners, by the Secretariat at least 45 days in advance and, in the case of extraordinary meetings, at least 14 days in advance.
2. The Secretariat of the Agreement, with the support of the Sub-Regional Coordination Units, shall undertake secretarial tasks during the meetings of the Scientific Committee and of its working groups and shall provide administrative and logistical support.

3. A report of each Meeting shall be prepared by the Secretariat as soon as possible and shall be communicated to all members and observers of the Scientific Committee, to all Parties and ACCOBAMS Partners.
4. The report shall be posted on the ACCOBAMS website.

Article 9

1. Recommendations by the Scientific Committee shall be adopted by consensus.
2. If consensus cannot be reached regarding an issue, **recommendations by the Scientific Committee shall be adopted by majority of members of the Scientific Committee appointed under Article 2, paragraph 1, present and voting. All positions expressed about this issue** during the meeting shall be included in the meeting report.

Article 10

1. The Meeting of the Scientific Committee shall be convened once a year during the first two years of the triennium by the Secretariat of the Agreement in consultation with the Chairperson.
2. Extraordinary meetings may be convened if the Bureau so agrees.

COMMUNICATION PROCEDURE

Article 11

1. In application of Article II, paragraph 2, of the Agreement, when a Party asks for advice on exceptions to the prohibition on deliberate taking of cetaceans, the Secretariat shall immediately communicate the request to the Chairperson and to the members of the Scientific Committee for advice.
2. Within 30 days, the Chairperson takes a decision on the request also on the basis of the advice received from the other members of the Scientific Committee and communicates it to the Secretariat for immediate communication to the requesting Party.

Article 12

1. Between sessions, any member of the Scientific Committee or the Sub-Regional Coordination Units, through the Secretariat, or the Secretariat directly, may submit a written proposal to the Chairperson for a decision within the limits of the functions of the Scientific Committee.
2. The Chairperson shall forward the proposal to the Scientific Committee members. Comments shall be submitted within 30 days from the date of that communication to all members of the Scientific Committee and to the Secretariat.
3. If no comments nor objections on a proposal are received from a member of the Scientific Committee, the proposal shall be considered as adopted. Its adoption shall be notified to those who have made the proposal. If any member of the Scientific Committee objects to a proposal within the deadline, the proposal shall be referred to the next meeting of the Scientific Committee.

Article 13

1. When, in the opinion of the Scientific Committee, an emergency arises, requiring the adoption of immediate measures to avoid deterioration of the conservation status of one or more cetacean species, the Chair may ask the Secretariat to contact the relevant Parties urgently.

WORKING LANGUAGES

Article 14

1. The working languages of the Scientific Committee shall be English and French.
2. Simultaneous translation in English and French may be provided for the plenary sessions of the meetings of the Scientific Committee if funding is available.
3. Working documents shall be made available in English or in French and may be translated if funding is available.

REPORT

Article 15

The Chairperson of the Scientific Committee shall submit to each ordinary Meeting of the Parties and to each meeting of the Bureau a written report on the Scientific Committee's work since the previous ordinary Meeting of the Parties.

FINAL PROVISIONS

Article 16

These Rules shall apply immediately upon their adoption by the Parties.

Article 17

These Rules may be amended as required by a decision of the Meeting of the Parties.

Appendix

Article 1

In order to ensure balanced geographical representation in the Scientific Committee, the geographical scope of the Agreement is divided into four regions.

Article 2

For the purpose of facilitating **the designation of members for the Scientific Committee, the Parties are subdivided into the following four regions:**

Region	Parties
Western Mediterranean and contiguous Atlantic area	Algeria, France, (Italy), Monaco, Morocco, Portugal, Spain, (Tunisia)
Central Mediterranean	Albania, Croatia, (Greece), (Italy), Libya, Malta, Montenegro, Slovenia, (Tunisia)
Eastern Mediterranean	Cyprus, Egypt, (Greece), Lebanon, Syria, (Türkiye)
Black Sea	Bulgaria, Georgia, Romania, (Türkiye), Ukraine

Article 3

At the moment of the nomination of experts from the regions, because of their geographical situation, Greece, Italy, Tunisia and Türkiye shall select their attachment to a single region:

- **'Western Mediterranean' or 'Central Mediterranean' for Italy and Tunisia;**
- **'Central Mediterranean' or 'Eastern Mediterranean' for Greece;**
- **'Black Sea' or 'Eastern Mediterranean' for Türkiye.**

RESOLUTION 9.5
WORK PROGRAMME AND BUDGET 2026-2028

The Meeting of the Parties to the Agreement on the Conservation of Cetaceans of the Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea and contiguous Atlantic area:

Acting in accordance with the commitments of the Parties to conserve cetaceans in conformity with the Agreement, especially the fundamental obligations placed upon Parties in Article II,

Recalling Article IX, paragraphs 1 and 2, of the Agreement, stating that the Parties shall determine the scale of contributions to the budget and that the Meeting of the Parties shall adopt a budget by consensus,

Acknowledging the relevant work being carried out in other organisations, in particular within the framework of the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS), the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, the International Whaling Commission (IWC), the Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats (Bern Convention), the Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment and the Coastal Region of the Mediterranean (Barcelona Convention), the Convention on the Protection of the Black Sea against Pollution (Bucharest Convention) and the Agreement for the Establishment of the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM),

Acknowledging with appreciation:

- the financial support and in-kind contributions provided by the Government of H.S.H. the Prince of Monaco for the ACCOBAMS Secretariat under the Headquarters Agreement,
- the voluntary contributions provided by the Governments of Italy, Monaco, and Spain,
- the co-financing from SPA/RAC, CIESM and International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN),
- the financial support provided by MAVA Foundation, European Union, UNEP/MAP and FAO/GFCM through specific projects and initiatives,
- the support from Partner organisations for Agreement activities,

Thanking the Scientific Committee for its work and advice to Parties in setting up accurate conservation measures,

Thanking also the Sub-Regional Coordination Units and the ACCOBAMS Partners for their continuous support to the implementation of the Agreement,

Aware that scientific research in the Agreement area remains essential to identify populations with the least favourable conservation status and to address the conservation priorities,

Conscious that the current heterogeneity of management and research capacity in the area covered by the Agreement must be addressed by capacity-building and public awareness,

Stressing the need to increase collaboration with those international organisations whose mandates encompass interrelated aspects in the same area of the Agreement, in the spirit of the ecosystem approach,

Recognising the need to set priorities,

Taking into consideration the results of the Meeting of National Representatives organised in June 2024, where the needs and priorities of Parties for the implementation of the Agreement have been identified,

Stressing the importance of the payment by all Parties of the contributions due to the budget of the Agreement,

Taking into account Resolution 9.2 on “Long-term Pending Contributions”,

Recalling that Article IX, paragraph 3 of the Agreement, calls for voluntary contributions to increase the funds available for monitoring, research, training and projects related to conservation,

Recalling Resolutions 1.7 and 7.8, establishing and implementing a Supplementary Conservation Fund,

1. *Takes note of* the audited accounts for the period 2023-2025 presented by the ACCOBAMS Secretariat;
2. *Adopts* the Budget for 2026-2028, as in [Annex 1](#) to the present Resolution;
3. *Recalls* that Parties shall contribute to the budget, in accordance with Article III, paragraph 8 (e), of the Agreement, at the scale agreed upon by the Meeting of the Parties;
4. *Agrees* to apply, for the calculation of the minimum ordinary contributions, a percentage of the total budget, instead of a fixed amount;
5. *Agrees* to the scale and amounts of contributions of Parties to the Agreement, as listed in [Annex 2](#) to the present Resolution, and to the application of that scale to any new Parties pro rata of the remaining financial year;
6. *Requests* Parties, in particular those that pay the minimum contribution, to consider paying for the entire triennium in one instalment at the beginning of the period;
7. *Further requests* Parties to pay their contributions as promptly as possible, but, in any case, no later than at the end of March of the corresponding year and in compliance with national legislation;
8. *Asks* the Parties that have unpaid pledges to pay their pending contributions within a reasonable time, at the latest two to three months after the end of 2025, in order to close the budget for the 2023-2025 triennium as soon as possible;
9. *Requests* the Bureau to:
 - monitor the accrual of unspent funds on the ACCOBAMS budget with a view to providing the Secretariat with guidance to prevent the accumulation of unspent funds or, as appropriate, on their timely utilisation;
 - monitor the maintenance by the Secretariat of an adequate secured fund, and the application of paragraph 19 of [Annex 3](#) to the present Resolution on the Terms of Reference for Administration of the Budget;
10. *Invites* Parties, Range States and Organisations to consider the feasibility of providing personnel for the ACCOBAMS Secretariat;

11. *Also invites* Parties and States that are not Parties to the Agreement, as well as governmental, intergovernmental and non-governmental Organisations and other possible donors, to consider contributing to the implementation of the Agreement on a voluntary basis;
12. *Approves* the terms of reference for administration of the Agreement Budget for the period 2026-2028, as set out in [Annex 3](#) to the present Resolution, as well as the guidelines for the acceptance of financial contributions, as set out in [Annex 4](#) to the present Resolution, provided that no voluntary contribution shall entail any present or future financial liability for the Agreement Trust Fund without the prior consent of the Parties or the Bureau;
13. *Entrusts* the ACCOBAMS Secretariat to seek appropriate external funds to support the implementation of the Agreement;
14. *Agrees* to provide financial support for the participation to the ACCOBAMS Meetings of the Parties of delegates (one delegate by country) from countries with middle and low incomes, as classified by the World Bank as of February 2025 and as listed in [Annex 5](#) to the present Resolution, excluding countries with arrears of more than three years of contribution to the Trust Fund, unless decided otherwise by the Meeting of the Parties based on Resolution 9.2 and Resolution 9.3;
15. *Adopts* the Programme of Work for 2026 – 2028, as presented in [Annex 6](#) to the present Resolution;
16. *Urges* Parties to support projects and activities in line with the Work Programme by means of financial and in-kind contributions and to report thereon to the Tenth Meeting of the Parties;
17. *Urges* Parties to fully commit themselves in the ACCOBAMS Meeting of National Representatives, which should be organised in 2027, by having a representative attending the Meeting;
18. *Recommends* Parties, in order to prepare for the ACCOBAMS Meeting of National Representatives, to organise through ACCOBAMS Focal Points a half-day national meeting to collect all the relevant data prior the Meeting, if necessary;
19. *Urges* Parties and specialised international and national organisations to develop international cooperative projects for implementation of the Work Programme and to keep the ACCOBAMS Secretariat fully informed of progress;
20. *Further urges* Parties and *encourages* national and international organisations and other donors to provide financial assistance to Countries in need of capacity-building to support the implementation of the Agreement and of the Work Programme, directly or through the financial mechanisms of the Agreement, in particular through the Supplementary Conservation Fund;
21. *Asks* Parties, non-Parties, Partners, all relevant organisations and experts to share all relevant information regarding their activities on the NETCCOBAMS platform;
22. *Calls on* the Scientific Committee, the ACCOBAMS Secretariat, the Bureau, the Sub-Regional Coordinating Units, ACCOBAMS Partners and international and national non-governmental Organisations to promote the actions necessary to facilitate the implementation of the Work Programme, bearing in mind the Resolutions adopted by the Meetings of the Parties;

23. *Calls on* the Scientific Committee to further promote cooperation with scientific institutions of the ACCOBAMS Area;
24. *Requests* the ACCOBAMS Secretariat to strengthen co-operation and develop activities with other relevant bodies;
25. *Instructs* the ACCOBAMS Secretariat to:
 - prepare a zero nominal growth scenario and a real nominal growth scenario to be included as reference scenarios in the draft Programme of Work and Budget for the triennium 2029-2031, to be submitted to MOP10;
 - disseminate the Work Programme for priority actions for 2026-2028, collaborate closely in its implementation with the Secretariats of other relevant conventions, international organisations and ACCOBAMS Partners, and seek appropriate donors for its implementation;
 - inform in time the National Focal Points of ACCOBAMS of workshops and meetings, as well as of the establishment of working groups, within the ACCOBAMS framework.

ANNEXES

[ANNEX 1](#): Budget 2026-2028

[ANNEX 2](#): Annual Contributions of Parties to the ACCOBAMS Trust Fund 2026-2028

[ANNEX 3](#): Terms of Reference for Administration of the Budget

[ANNEX 4](#): Guidelines for Accepting Voluntary Financial Contributions

[ANNEX 5](#): Eligibility for Funding to Attend Meetings of the ACCOBAMS Parties

[ANNEX 6](#): Programme of Work 2026-2028

ANNEX 1 - Budget 2026 -2028

Table 1- BUDGET OC - 2026 - 2028 based on a non-decrease amount for conservation actions (in €/euros)

	Approved budget - OC 2023- 2025	Proposed budget – OC	Secured from Remaining	Additional required funds	LB1101	LB1102	LB1103	LB1104	LB1201	LB1202	LB 1203	LB 1300	LB 1400	LB1501	LB1502	LB1600	LB2100	LB2200	LB2300	LB2400	LB2500	LB52	LB53	LB54					
General Management and Administrative support																													
Institutional Meetings & General Management ¹⁵ (Administrative staff, Administrative Assistance, Bank fees, Hospitality)					36 000	165 000	165 000	82 500	3 000	6 000	12 000	1 500	2 400																
MA1a	Strengthen involvement of all key stakeholders in ACCOBAMS's operations													3 000	40 600		66 000	52 000	25 000						30 000				
MA2a	Mobilising and diversifying funding sources																												
MA3a	Improve the level of implementation of and compliance with ACCOBAMS Resolutions as well as the monitoring of its progress															40 000					5 000	2 000							
MA4a	Ensure implementation of the ACCOBAMS's cetacean conservation standards in the adjacent areas																												
triennium budget General Management and Administrative support					666 900	737 000		115 000	36 000	165 000	165 000	82 500	3 000	6 000	12 000	1 500	2 400		40 600	40 000	66 000	52 000	25 000	5 000	2 000	30 000			
							852 000																						
Conservation actions																													
CA1a	Cetacean population estimates and distribution				36 400	0	35 000	2 005 000																					
CA1b	Population Structure				0	0	0	130 000																					
CA1c	Monitoring cetaceans status				0	27 000	5 000	150 000							2 000										25 000				
CA1d	Functional stranding networks and responses to emergency situations				26 000	30 000		144 000							5 000										25 000				
CA2a	Interactions with fisheries / aquaculture				18 000	25 000		875 000																	25 000				
CA2b	Anthropogenic underwater noise				26 000	30 000		296 000																	30 000				
CA2c	Vessel strikes				8 000	5 000	5 000	151 000																	5 000				
CA2d	Cetacean watching				0	0		210 000																					
CA2e	Marine litter				17 000	0	5 000	130 000																					
CA2f	Chemical & biological pollution				0	0	0	80 000																					
CA2g	Climate change				0	0	0	8 000																					
CA2i	Captivity related issues				0	0	6 000	29 000																					
CA3a	Area-based measures for cetacean conservation				0	10 000	15 000	105 000																	10 000				
CA4a	Information /Communication / Awareness				65 500	30 000	5 000	185 000																		30 000			
CA5A	Cetacean culture				-	0		3 000																					
triennium budget Conservation Actions					196 900	157 000	86 000	4 501 000																					
							6 076 000																						
TOTAL triennium budget						894 000	86 000	4 616 000	36 000	165 000	165 000	82 500	3 000	6 000	12 000	1 500	2 400	10 000	40 600	40 000	66 000	52 000	25 000	5 000	2 000	60 000	60 000	60 000	
					6 217 400	6 923 000																							
Triennium budget by year & Budgetary Line (LB)						LB1101	LB1102	LB1103	LB1104	LB1201	LB1202	LB 1203	LB 1300	LB 1400	LB1501	LB1502	LB1600	LB2100	LB2200	LB2300	LB2400	LB2500	LB52	LB53	LB54				
					2026	12 000	65 000	65 000	27 500	1 000	2 000	4 000	500	800	3 000	15 000	20 000	-	22 000	7 000	-	-	25 000	25 000	20 000				
					2027	12 000	65 000	65 000	27 500	1 000	2 000	4 000	500	800	3 000	14 000	20 000	3 000	30 000	7 000	5 000	2 000	25 000	25 000	20 000				
					2028	12 000	65 000	65 000	27 500	1 000	2 000	4 000	500	800	4 000	10 600	-	63 000	-	11 000	-	-	10 000	10 000	20 000				

¹⁵ See table 2. below on the description of budget lines

Table 2 – BUDGET OC – 2026 – 2028 based on different options (in €/euros)

		2023 -2025	2026 -2028
Institutional Meetings, General Management and Administrative support			
General Management			
1100	Administrative staff		
1 101	Executive Secretary Housing Allowance	36 000	36 000
1 102	Programme & Project Officer 1	150 000	165 000
1 103	Programme & Project Officer 2	150 000	165 000
1 104	Accounting and Programme Assistant (50%)	75 000	82 500
1200	Administrative Assistance		
1 201	Translators	3 000	3 000
1 202	Fund management controller	6 000	6 000
1 203	External Assistance	9 000	12 000
1300	Bank fees	1 500	1 500
1400	Hospitality	2 400	2 400
Administrative support			
1 501	Coordination Units	9 600	10 000
1 502	Secretariat staff travels	39 400	40 600
ACCOBAMS Strategy			
1 600	Evaluation and ACCOBAMS Strategy	0	40 000
Institutional Meetings			
2100	Meeting of the Parties	61 000	66 000
2200	Scientific Committee	49 000	52 000
2300	Bureau	25 000	25 000
2400	Meeting of National Representatives	15 000	5 000
2500	Follow-up Committee Meeting	5 000	2 000
TOTAL Institutional Meetings & Management		636 900	714 000
Support to Conservation actions			
52	Human-cetacean interactions / Emergency situations	77 000 <i>(including 8 000€ from remaining amounts)</i>	86 000 <i>(including 26 000€ from remaining amounts)</i>
53	Habitats / Research and monitoring	97 000 <i>(including 40 600€ from remaining amounts)</i>	85 000 <i>(including 25 000€ from remaining amounts)</i>
54	Information/ Communication/Public awareness	106 000 <i>(including 4 500€ from remaining amounts)</i>	65 000 <i>(including 5 000€ from remaining amounts)</i>
TOTAL Conservation		280 000 <i>(including 53 100€ from remaining amounts)</i>	236 000 <i>(including 56 000€ from remaining amounts)</i>
TOTAL Budget for the triennium		916 900 <i>(including 53 100€ from remaining amounts)</i>	950 000 <i>(including 56 000€ from remaining amounts)</i>
TOTAL Budget for the triennium (without remaining amounts from previous triennium)		863 800	894 000

ANNEX 2 - Annual Contributions of Parties to the ACCOBAMS Trust Fund 2026-2028

	UN scale 2026-2028	ACCOBAMS key 2026 -2028	Annual Contributions 2026-2028
Albania	0,01	1,0000	2 972
Algeria	0,087	1,0522	3 126
Bulgaria	0,071	1,0000	2 972
Croatia	0,088	1,0643	3 162
Cyprus	0,035	1,0000	2 972
Egypt	0,182	2,2011	6 540
France	3,858	21,9000	65 076
Georgia	0,009	1,0000	2 972
Greece	0,28	3,3863	10 062
Italy	2,813	21,2000	62 996
Lebanon	0,022	1,0000	2 972
Libya	0,04	1,0000	2 972
Malta	0,02	1,0000	2 972
Monaco	0,011	1,0000	2 972
Montenegro	0,004	1,0000	2 972
Morocco	0,059	1,0000	2 972
Portugal	0,328	3,9668	11 787
Romania	0,358	4,3296	12 865
Slovenia	0,077	1,0000	2 972
Spain	1,895	18,7000	55 567
Syrian Arab Republic	0,006	1,0000	2 972
Tunisia	0,018	1,0000	2 972
Türkiye	0,685	8,2842	24 617
Ukraine	0,074	1,0000	2 972
TOTAL		100	297 401

ANNEX 3 - Terms of Reference for Administration of the Budget

1. The terms of reference for administration of the budget of ACCOBAMS shall refer to the financial years beginning 1st January 2026 and ending 31st December 2028.
2. The budget shall be administered by the Executive Secretary according to these Terms of reference.
3. The financial resources of the budget shall originate from:
 - (a) contributions from the Parties according to Annex 2, as well as contributions from new Parties, and
 - (b) voluntary contributions from Parties, contributions from States not Party to the Agreement, other governmental, intergovernmental and nongovernmental organisations and other sources.
4. All contributions to the budget shall be paid in Euros.
5. With regard to contributions from States that become Parties after the beginning of the financial period, the initial contribution (from the first day of the third month after the deposit of the instrument of ratification, acceptance or accession, until the end of the financial period) shall be determined pro rata on the basis of the contributions of other Parties according to the adopted scale of assessments and depending on the remaining annual financial exercise.
6. Contributions by all Parties throughout the triennium 2026-2028 are calculated on the basis of the United Nations scale of assessments applicable for [2025], with the modifications needed to adapt it to the ACCOBAMS Parties.
7. The contributions are due on 1st January 2026, 1st January 2027 and 1st January 2028, and shall be paid into the following account:

<i>Account holder</i>	<i>Swift code</i>	<i>IBAN code</i>
ACCOBAMS	CFMOMCMX	MC 02 1273 9000 7001 0702 3000 M76

8. For convenience of the Parties to the Agreement, the Executive Secretary shall notify them as soon as possible regarding their calculated contributions for each year of the financial period.
9. Voluntary contributions received into the budget and not immediately required for financing activities shall be invested at the discretion of the Executive Secretary, in consultation with the Bureau, and any generated income shall be used to implement the Agreement.
10. The budget shall be audited by a fund management controller.
11. The budget estimates of income and expenditures for each calendar year of the financial period shall be prepared in Euros and submitted to the Meeting of the Parties to the Agreement.
12. The estimates for each calendar year covered by the financial period shall be divided into sections and objectives of expenditure, be specified according to budget lines, be consistent with the programmes of work to which they relate, and be accompanied by information as may be required by or on behalf of the contributors.

13. The proposed budget, including all necessary information, shall be dispatched by the ACCOBAMS Secretariat to all Parties at least 90 days before the date established for the opening of the Meeting of the Parties.
14. The budget shall be adopted by consensus at the Meeting of the Parties.
15. The ACCOBAMS Secretariat can, if needed, transfer funds up to 20% from one budget line of the approved budget, to another budget line within the same budget section. If the needed transfer of funds within the same budget section is higher than 20% of the budget line from which the transfer is made, the Secretariat shall request the authorisation of the Bureau.
16. Should the ACCOBAMS Secretariat anticipate a shortfall in resources over the financial period, the ACCOBAMS Secretariat shall consult the Bureau about priorities for expenditure.
17. Commitments against the resources of the budget may only be made if they are covered by sufficient income.
18. No transfer of funds shall be authorised from the ordinary contributions of the Trust Fund to the Supplementary Conservation Fund.
19. A secured fund is created, equivalent to 30% of the administrative budget.
20. A dedicated fund for emergency situations is created and constituted of voluntary contributions by Parties, International Organisations and public and private donors.
21. At the end of each calendar year of the financial period, the ACCOBAMS Secretariat shall submit the annual accounts to the Bureau. These shall include details of actual expenditures and comparisons with the original provisions for each budget line.
22. The ACCOBAMS Secretariat shall provide the Bureau an estimate of proposed expenditures for the coming year, and simultaneously, or as soon as possible, the communication of the accounts and reports referred to in the preceding paragraphs.
23. The ACCOBAMS Secretariat shall present the audited accounts for the financial exercises to the Meeting of the Parties.
24. The present terms of reference shall be implemented by the Executive Secretary.

ANNEX 4 - Guidelines for Accepting Voluntary Financial Contributions

1. General rules

No voluntary contribution, gift or donation for a specific purpose may be accepted if considered incompatible with the policies and aims of the Agreement, or the UNEP/CMS.

2. Approval of donors

2.1 Donors who are not governmental institutions of Parties or economic integration organisations or riparian States not Party to the Agreement, must be approved as such by the Bureau before their contributions are accepted by the ACCOBAMS Secretariat.

2.2 Sources known to have been involved in interests or activities which conflict with the aims of the Agreement or the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals and any organisation or individual who has deliberately brought, or might bring, the Agreement into public disrepute, shall be excluded. The same shall apply where there is a risk that a source might try to influence the decisions of any organ of the Agreement where, in the opinion of the Scientific Committee, this source has, or has had in the past, an environmentally unfriendly attitude.

3. Acceptance of Voluntary contributions

3.1 Voluntary contributions shall only be accepted when the purpose is consistent with the policies and aims of the Agreement.

3.2 No voluntary contributions shall have an immediate or ultimate financial liability for the Agreement Trust Fund without the prior consent of the Parties or the Bureau.

3.3 If indirect costs occur, in relation to administrative support of the activity implemented through a voluntary contribution, including financial and information resources management, and not included in the project budget targeted by the voluntary contribution, then the Secretariat can retain a percentage up to 4% of the dedicated voluntary contribution, up to 50 000 €, and of 7% for the dedicated voluntary contribution of more than 50 000 €. The Secretariat is asked to report on the application of this provision to the Bureau and to the Meeting of Parties.

3.4 All monetary contributions shall be paid in freely convertible currency; exceptions may, however, be made for special projects if the currency in question can effectively be used.

3.5 Voluntary contributions in kind may be accepted, provided that they are used to cover activities approved by the Meeting of the Parties. These may include, *inter alia*, direct or indirect involvement in a joint project, free office accommodation, equipment, or the secondment of staff.

ANNEX 5 - Eligibility for Funding to Attend Meetings of the ACCOBAMS Parties

Based on the scale of middle and low incomes of the World Bank in as of February 2025 the ACCOBAMS Secretariat is authorised to cover, upon budget availability, travel and accommodation fees of the representatives of the following Parties for the Meetings of the Parties of ACCOBAMS (one delegate/Party):

- Albania (pending on settlement of unpaid pledges)
- Algeria
- Egypt
- Georgia
- Lebanon
- Libya (pending on settlement of unpaid pledges)
- Montenegro
- Morocco
- Syrian Arab Republic (pending on settlement of unpaid pledges)
- Tunisia
- Türkiye
- Ukraine

ANNEX 6 - Programme of Work for 2026-2028

MANAGEMENT OF THE AGREEMENT (MA)

MA1	INVOLVEMENT OF KEY STAKEHOLDERS
MA1a	Strengthen involvement of all key stakeholders in ACCOBAMS's operations

Expected outcomes

Proposed Action(s)	Priority	Action led by and in cooperation with	Means of implementation	Total Budget (€)	OC 2026-2028	Funds secured (€)			Required additional VC/EF (€)
						OC 2023-2025	VC	EF	
Ensure ACCOBAMS institutional functioning / governance / process Strengthen involvement of all riparian Countries to encourage accession to the Agreement	Main	Secretariat, Parties, Non-Party Range States, Scientific Committee Partners, SRCUs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organising ACCOBAMS Institutional Meetings: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Meeting of the Parties - Scientific Committee Meetings - Bureau Meetings Inviting Observers, including riparian Countries Non-Parties, and relevant experts to ACCOBAMS Meetings Liaising with the Depositary to encourage accession to the Agreement of riparian states 	146 000 €	66 000 € LB 2100 52 000 € LB 2200 25 000 € LB 2300 3 000 € LB 1501				-
Establish/strengthen partnerships and collaborations with all relevant IGOs, NGOs, and international/national entities Establish synergies with the European Union policies (MSFD, HD), Barcelona Convention, Bucharest Convention and other relevant Agreements and Organisations strategies	Main	Secretariat, Parties, Non-Party Range States, Scientific Committee Partners, SRCUs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establishing MoU with relevant IGOs, government bodies, scientific organisations, Universities, NGOs and relevant organisations. Participating in relevant Meetings, fora and WG Contributing to the development of relevant regional policies documents / reports Ensuring dialogue between regional Conventions to facilitate the reporting by Countries in the framework of other Conventions 	40 600 €	40 600 € LB1502				
Enforce communication within the ACCOBAMS community and strengthen exchanges of information on national and regional projects / activities / initiatives	Medium	Parties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Using NETCCOBAMS platform as sharing/consultation tool - Exchange of information on national reports and regional projects / activities / initiatives 	90 000 €	30 000 € LB54				60 000€
Reinforce synergies with and between Partners	Medium	Partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Considering new applications for ACCOBAMS Partnership Organising meetings of ACCOBAMS Partners in order to share expertise/ knowledge / information Reviewing the ACCOBAMS Partners status 	10 000 €	0€				10 000 €
TOTAL MA1a - Strengthen involvement of all key stakeholders in ACCOBAMS's operations				286 600	216 600				70 000 €

MA2	ENSURE ADEQUATE FUNDING, IN PARTICULARLY FOR CONSERVATION ACTIVITIES
MA2a	Mobilising and diversifying funding sources

Expected outcomes

Proposed Action(s)	Priority	Action led by and in cooperation with	Means of implementation	Total Budget (€)	OC 2026-2028	Funds secured (€)			Required additional VC/EF (€)
						OC 2023-2025	VC	EF	
Fund projects under the Supplementary Conservation Fund (SCF) related to cetacean conservation	Main	Secretariat, Parties, Non-Party Range States, Scientific Committee Partners, SRCUs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Launching a new ACCOBAMS call for proposals for projects related to cetacean conservation 	45 000 € New call under SCF	0€				45 000 €
Diversify funding sources to develop projects /actions in line with ACCOBAMS priorities	Main		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Launching call for voluntary contributions Exploring and examining international funding opportunities for cetacean conservation projects in the framework of partnership with donors Developing proposal for a sponsorship program Organising encounters with relevant potential donors Leveraging existing partnerships and collaborations with all IGOs, NGOs, and international/ national entities Securing national funds to be used as cofundings to support project proposals developed by national organisations 	<i>Budget from other actions</i>	0€				
Strengthen national capacities in cetacean conservation project development and fundraising	Main		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sharing information on funding opportunities 	-	0€				- €
TOTAL MA2a - Mobilising and diversifying funding sources				45 000 €	0€	-	-	-	45 000 €

MA3	IMPLEMENTATION OF AND COMPLIANCE WITH ACCOBAMS
MA3a	Improve the level of implementation of and compliance with ACCOBAMS Resolutions as well as the monitoring of its progress

Expected outcomes	
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Proposed Action(s)	Priority	Action led by and in cooperation with	Means of implementation	Total Budget (€)	OC 2026-2028	Funds secured (€)			Required additional VC/EF (€)
						OC 2023-2025	VC	EF	
Revise the ACCOBAMS Strategy (2018-2025) and propose a new one after evaluating overall Agreement's effectiveness	Main	Secretariat, Parties, Scientific Committee Partners, SRCUs, Non-Party Range States	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evaluating the overall Agreement's effectiveness Preparing an ACCOBAMS Strategy (2026-2037) in collaboration with all ACCOBAMS bodies 	40 000 €	40 000 € (LB 1600)				-
Reinforce the involvement of National Focal Points	Main	Secretariat, Parties, Non-Party Range States Scientific SRCUs, Committee Partners,	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Disseminating the guide on the role of the ACCOBAMS National Focal Point Providing regular update on the implementation of Resolutions by Parties Organising the Meeting of National Representatives with sub-regional meetings to develop the 2026-2028 Programme of Work by identifying actions related to cetacean conservation, according to national priorities (<i>online</i>) 	5 000 €	5 000 € (LB2400)				-
Propose remedy actions in cases of non-follow-up with ACCOBAMS Resolutions and infringements	Main	Follow up Committee Secretariat, Parties, Scientific Committee Partners, SRCUs, Non-Party Range States	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Convening a Follow up Committee meeting (<i>online</i>) Applying Follow up Procedures 	2 000 €	2 000 € (LB 2500)				-
TOTAL MA3a- Improve the level of implementation of and compliance with ACCOBAMS Resolutions as well as the monitoring of its progress				47 000 €	47 000 €	-	-	-	-

MA4	ACCOBAMS EXTENSION AREA
MA4a	Ensure implementation of the ACCOBAMS's cetacean conservation standards in the adjacent areas

Expected outcomes	
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Proposed Action(s)	Priority	Action led by and in cooperation with	Means of implementation	Total Budget (€)	OC 2026-2028	Funds secured (€)			Required additional VC/EF (€)
						OC 2023-2025	VC	EF	
Promote the ratification of Amendment for geographical extension of the Agreement area to the Atlantic	Main	Secretariat Depositary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Liaising with the Depositary to encourage relevant national authorities to ratify the Amendment for geographical extension of the Agreement area to the Atlantic (Ref Res A/4.1) Providing all Focal Points with explanatory note on the Amendment Providing support to National Focal Points to solve problems regarding the ratification of the Amendment through the organisation of trilateral meetings between the National Focal Point, the Secretariat and an ACCOBAMS legal advisor 	-	0€	-	-	-	-
TOTAL MA4a - Ensure implementation of the ACCOBAMS's cetacean conservation standards in the adjacent areas				-	0€	-	-	-	-

TOTAL MANAGEMENT OF THE AGREEMENT (MA)	Total Budget (€)	OC 2026-2028	Funds secured (€)			Required additional VC/EF (€)
			OC 2023-2025	VC	EF	
	378 600 €	263 600 €	-	-	-	115 000 €
TOTAL MANAGEMENT OF THE AGREEMENT (MA) including General Management & Administrative Staff (473 400 €)	852 000 €	737 000 €				115 000 €

CONSERVATION ACTIONS (CA)

CA 1 a	Cetacean population estimates and distribution
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Expected outcomes	Improved knowledge of cetacean populations in the ACCOBAMS Area Global distribution and abundance of cetaceans in the Mediterranean Sea and Black Seas established, based on results of surveys
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Proposed Action(s)	Priority	Action led by and in cooperation with	Means of implementation	Total Budget (€)	OC 2026-2028	Funds secured (€)			Required additional VC/EF (€)	
						OC 2023-2025	VC	EF		
Promote the implementation of the Long-Term Monitoring Programme, taking into consideration monitoring and reporting obligations of countries (MSFD, Barcelona Convention, Bucharest Convention)	Main	Scientific Committee Secretariat Parties, Non-Party Range States Partners, SRCUs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Secure funds for implementing ASI2, including investigating the existence of possible funding at national / regional levels Continue with the development and implementation of a simulation framework to examine the performance of different future survey strategies (synoptic, regional/national) - contract Undertake synoptic basin-wide surveys in the ACCOBAMS Area with a focus on abundance and trends in 2026/2027 (ASI-II) with the support of the ASI Steering Committee, the LTMP Contact Group (Res 8.10) and of the SC to review and update as necessary the field and analytical protocols Promote synchronisation and standardisation of existing monitoring efforts to contribute to LTMP purpose (coordination meetings at the sub-regional level, Working Group on cetaceans monitoring...) Collaborate with relevant organisations, such as the UNEP/MAP Barcelona Convention System (EcAp/IMAP, QSR), the Bucharest Convention and the European Commission (MSFD) Utilise advanced statistical methods and machine learning techniques to integrate and analyse data from various sources, ensuring robust and accurate abundance estimates and distribution models. 	3 335 000 € ¹⁶ <i>(a detailed budget of ASI-II is presented in the MOP9 document MOP9/Doc31)</i>		30 000 € Remaining from different unspent Budgetary Lines	500 000 € from OFB (France – MoU in dev on 20 August 2025)			2 005 000 €
Promote the use of ASI-I data by increasing the visibility of ASI-II (and future) datasets and related results and encourage further analyses	High	Scientific Committee Secretariat SRCUs Parties, Non-Party Range States Partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implement a centralised data repository to facilitate data sharing and collaboration among different organisations and stakeholders. Use the NETCCOBAMS Activity on “ACCOBAMS Survey Initiative” to handle the sharing of ASI Data Promote ASI-II data and results in relevant fora Share ASI-II data following received requests in accordance with ASI Terms of use and archiving/monitoring of the requests Collect outputs of work and analysis conducted following ASI-I & II full dataset requests to be used by the SC to give best scientific advice Submit ASI-II results to the IWC SC 			5 000 € LB53 (Developing protocols on standardised monitoring methods for multidisciplinary surveys/ Ferris)	600 000 € from Italy (in kind) 150 000 € from Principality of Monaco	45 000 € Remaining from ASI-I		
Promote data collection at sub-regional and national levels (in coherence with ACCOBAMS survey methodologies)	Main	Scientific Committee, Secretariat, Parties, Non-Party Range States,	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue facilitating exchanges and coordination between Parties on sub-regional surveys Continue organising training activities on monitoring methods/protocols and data analysis for smaller-scale surveys (at local, national and sub-regional levels) Update handbooks on standardised monitoring 							

¹⁶ the real budget is 3 500 000 € but 165 000€ is in the administrative budget since one project officer will be dedicated to monitoring conservation actions including LTMP and ASI-II during the 2026-2028 period

		Partners, SRCUs	<p>methods (aerial surveys, boat-based surveys, acoustic surveys...)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collaborating with relevant organisations, such as UNEP/MAP Barcelona Convention System (EcAp/IMAP, QSR), the Bucharest Convention and the European Commission (MSFD) 						
Promote data collection from multidisciplinary surveys (such as fisheries / acoustic surveys), innovative technologies (UAV, satellite) and of platforms of opportunity (ferries, whale watching vessels, navy vessels, etc..)	High	Scientific Committee Secretariat Parties, Non-Party Range States Partners, SRCUs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review results from activities in pilot areas to collect data using multidisciplinary surveys (such as fisheries/acoustic surveys), innovative technologies (UAV, satellite) and platforms of opportunity (ferries, whale watching vessels, navy vessels, etc..) based on recommendations of previous studies Review collaboration with existing regional fisheries surveys (MEDITS, MEDIAS) and relevant organisations such as GFCM and ICCAT Review collaborations with relevant existing initiatives/projects/networks on platforms of opportunity Organise meetings/workshops to discuss possible synergies and shared methodology and data analysis – ToR Develop, update and standardise protocols for multidisciplinary surveys Review & Update the "Guidelines for the Monitoring of the Range of Cetaceans, Abundance and Demographic Characteristics of Populations" in synergy with IMAP Regularly review « Best Available Technologies » and assess potential contribution to LTMP 						
TOTAL CA1a - Cetacean population estimates and distribution				3 335 000 €	0	35 000 €	1 250 000 €	45 000 €	2 005 000 €

CA 1 b		Population Structure							
Expected outcomes		<p>Improved knowledge on population structure in the ACCOBAMS Area and species conservation management plans completed</p> <p>Exchange of samples is facilitated for joint analysis</p> <p>Data exchange is facilitated for basin wide analysis</p>							
Proposed Action(s)	Priority	Action led by and in cooperation with	Means of implementation	Total Budget (€)	OC 2026-2028	Funds secured (€)			Required additional VC/EF (€)
						OC 2023-2025	VC	EF	
Improve photo ID data collection and dissemination: - Update and harmonise protocols on data collection for photo ID - Share photo ID data	High	Scientific Committee Secretariat Parties, Non-Party Range States Partners, SRCUs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organise experts meeting for best practices guide on how to collect data for comparison – ToR Organise regional experts' trainings on analysis on photo ID (including drone photo ID), including AI (Artificial Intelligence)– ToR Facilitate data sharing and the creation of large scale photo-id catalogues for in-depth analysis (see CMP actions)– ToR 	10 000 € 35 000 € 20 000 €	0 €				65 000 €
Improve data collection on cetacean populations genetic in the ACCOBAMS Area Development of genetical identification of population structure (particularly for Mediterranean), including e.g., eDNA	High	Scientific Committee Secretariat Parties, Non-Party Range States Partners, SRCUs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote the ACCOBAMS Best practices on data collection on cetacean populations genetic Facilitate analysis of existing tissue samples (including those from biopsies) to address questions on stock structure and genetic diversity Harmonise procedures for samples exchanges among CITES scientific and forensic institutions in the ACCOBAMS area Collaborate with relevant organisations (CITES, ABS Nagoya Protocol...) Promote the use of new technics such as genomics and proteomics 	0 30 000 € 5 000 € 15 000 €	0 €				50 000€
Other ecological markers	Medium		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organise a workshop on the incorporation of ecological markers in the definition of population structure (Ecological Management Units) for cetaceans in the framework of international scientific events or meetings, in collaboration with ICES, IWC – ToR Promote studies of age structure and population demography 	10 000 € 5 000 €	0 €				15 000 €
TOTAL CA1b - Population Structure				130 000 €	0 €				130 000 €

CA 1 c		Monitoring cetaceans status							
Expected outcomes		<p>Regional conservation plans (Med and BS) for cetacean are promoted at the national level</p> <p>Relevant conservation management plans are developed and implemented</p> <p>National Action Plans are developed and implemented in several Countries</p>							
Proposed Action(s)	Priority	Action led by and in cooperation with	Means of implementation	Total Budget (€)	OC 2026-2028	Funds secured (€)			Required additional VC/EF (€)
						OC 2023-2025	VC	EF	
Support in implementing Regional Conservation Plans for cetaceans (in Black Sea and in Mediterranean Sea)	Main	SRCUs Parties Non-Party Range States Secretariat Scientific Committee, Partners,	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support the BSC in the revision of the Regional Conservation Plan for cetacean in Black Sea, taking into consideration the IWC/ACCOBAMS Conservation Management Plan framework Support the SPA/RAC in the implementation, assessment and update of the Mediterranean Action Plan for Cetaceans adopted by Parties to the Barcelona Convention 	2 000 €	2 000 € (LB 1501)				
Develop/ revise/ implement relevant Conservation Management Plans for cetacean species	Main	Scientific Committee Secretariat, Parties Non-Party Range States, Partners, SRCUs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organise Experts Workshops to develop Conservation Management Plans for sperm whales and Ziphius, taking into account all national conservation plans – ToR 	20 000 €					150 000€
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organise stakeholders Workshops to finalise Conservation Management Plans for fin whales, Risso's, bottlenose and common dolphins, taking into account all national conservation plans - ToR 	80 000 €	25 000 € (LB53)		5 000 € VC France (LB 6350)		
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support the implementation of relevant actions of the approved Conservation Management Plans for cetacean species, emphasising coordination actions 	80 000 €			10 000 € VC Monaco (LB 6900)		
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider the development of killer whales CMP, taking into account the existing national conservation plans 	10 000 €					
Facilitate the Development/ revision/ implementation of National Action Plans for cetaceans	High	Parties Non-Party Range States, Secretariat, SRCUs Scientific Committee, Partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supporting the revision / development of National Action Plans for cetaceans in collaboration with SRCUs and national authorities, through participatory process involving all relevant organisations (NGOs, associations, national partners...) Establishment of national Working Groups or Councils in the framework of National Actions Plan 	7 000 €	0€	5 000 € Remaining LB53	2 000 € VC Italy (LB 6600)		
TOTAL CA1c - Monitoring cetaceans status				199 000 €	27 000 €	5 000 €	17 000 €		150 000€

CA 1 d	Functional stranding networks and responses to emergency situations								
Expected outcomes	Official National Stranding networks are established and operating Information on stranding events is regularly exchanged among national networks								
Proposed Action(s)	Priority	Action led by and in cooperation with	Means of implementation	Total Budget (€)	OC 2026-2028	Funds secured (€)			Required additional VC/EF (€)
						OC 2023-2025	VC	EF	
Set up /Reinforce official national stranding networks (with all national institutions concerned and relevant international agreements)	Main	Parties, Non-Party Range States, Scientific Committee, Secretariat, Partners, SRCUs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Disseminate studies on legal/institutional status of National stranding networks in order to assist experts in the establishment of official national stranding network when relevant – Parties Provide assistance in the preparation of a legislative framework to settle the national coordination network- Parties Organise trainings on necropsies, response to live strandings and emergency situations, including mass strandings, in the ACCOBAMS Area, and on the use of relevant databases – ToR 	40 000 €	5 000 € (LB 1501) 10 000 € (LB 53)				25 000 €
Encourage collaboration among national networks of Parties	Main	Scientific Committee Secretariat Parties, Non-Party Range States Partners, SRCUs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Disseminate the procedures on Best Practices on cetacean post-mortem investigation and tissue sampling resulted from the harmonisation process in ACCOBAMS and ASCOBANS Update the Terms of Reference (ToR) for the ACCOBAMS Emergency Task Force for Stranding events (AETFS) by considering other existing initiatives, prioritising support for capacity building requests and emergency responses Maintain and Update List of existing stranding experts and stranding networks contact points/coordinators 	5 000 €					45 000 €
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Update ACCOBAMS Documents related to strandings management and investigations (best practices, guidelines, and protocols) through regular meetings/workshops among experts. 	20 000 €	15 000 € (LB53)				
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote Technologies for remote assistance during investigations 	5 000 €					
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implement Capacity Building through training modules targeting veterinarians and biologists involved in post-mortem investigations using new technologies (e.g., virtual/augmented reality, metaverse, 3D printing) and tele-necropsy Create an Emergency Fund through voluntary contributions by Parties, international organisations, and public and private donors 	30 000 €					
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enter relevant national data into relevant regional databases, such as MEDACES Support and finance of MEDACES 	54 000 €	0€				54 000 €
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reinforce a network to exchange information on sampling through NETCCOBAMS Platform 	20 000 €	0€				20 000 €
TOTAL CA1d - Functional stranding networks and responses to emergency situations				174 000 €	30 000€				144 000 €

CA 2 a	Interactions with fisheries / aquaculture
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Expected outcomes	Impacts of cetaceans' bycatch and depredation are assessed and reduced Ecotourism activities (whale watching and pescaturism) are proposed as an alternative income source to fishermen impacted by depredation
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Proposed Action(s)	Priority	Action led by and in cooperation with	Means of implementation	Total Budget (€)	OC 2026-2028	Funds secured (€)			Required additional VC/EF (€)
						OC 2023-2025	VC	EF	
Support countries in monitoring and mitigating depredation and bycatch situations	Main	Secretariat, Parties, Scientific Committee (JBWG), Non-Party Range States, Partners, SRCUs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintain and support the work of the ACCOBAMS/ASCOBANS Joint Bycatch Working Group Organise workshops to share experience and results, including from past projects on interactions with fisheries – ToR Improve data collection on interactions with fisheries (implementation of on-board observers' programs whenever it is possible and port questionnaires...) and testing mitigation measures Use of stranding data to assess bycatch mortality (using drifting models and/or necropsy findings) Collaborate with relevant entities, in particular with GFCM, EC (DG MARE and DG Environment), UNEP/MAP Barcelona Convention System (EcAp/IMAP, QSR) and IWC BMI, ICCAT, ICES Support the network with EC, GFCM and BSC to address the critical issue of harbor porpoise bycatch in the Black Sea Implement active awareness-raising programs among fishermen to encourage reporting of bycatch events, improving data collection and assessing the extent of this threat more precisely Conduct training programs for local and regional stakeholders on advanced monitoring techniques, data analysis, and the use of new technologies Promote the importance of cetacean conservation in relevant international fora and policy discussions Establish a robust monitoring and evaluation framework to assess the effectiveness of implemented strategies and make necessary adjustments Regularly review and update guidelines and protocols related to bycatch monitoring and mitigation measures, as well as to safe release of bycaught animals, to incorporate the best available advice and practices 	<p>15 000 €</p> <p>600 000 €</p> <p>20 000 €</p> <p>10 000 €</p> <p>10 000 €</p> <p>50 000 €</p> <p>50 000 €</p> <p>10 000 €</p> <p>20 000 €</p> <p>15 000 €</p>	25 000 € (LB 52)				775 000 €

Provide support to Parties to promote the development of ecotourism activities as an alternative income to fishers (pescatourism and whale watching)	High	Secretariat, Parties Scientific Committee, Non-Party Range States, Partners, SRCUs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support the development of sustainable ecotourism activities in pilot sites, taking into consideration ACCOBAMS Cetacean Watching Guidelines Consider socio-economic aspects of alternative solutions 	100 000 €	0€				100 000 €
TOTAL CA2a - Interactions with fisheries / aquaculture				900 000 €	25 000 €				875 000 €

CA 2 b		Anthropogenic underwater noise							
Expected outcomes		Main anthropogenic activities generating underwater noise are monitored in the ACCOBAMS Area Use of mitigation measures for anthropogenic activities generating underwater noise							
Proposed Action(s)	Priority	Action led by and in cooperation with	Means of implementation	Total Budget (€)	OC 2026-2028	Funds secured (€)			Required additional VC/EF (€)
						OC 2023-2025	VC	EF	
Encourage the monitoring of anthropogenic activities generating underwater noise	Main	Scientific Committee including through the JNWG Secretariat, Parties Non-Party Range States, Partners, SRCUs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organise an in-person meeting of the CMS/ACCOBAMS/ASCOBANS JNWG Raise awareness amongst countries by organising an awareness & consultation workshop at national level with different stakeholders, especially at ministerial level Invite Port authorities to develop incentive programmes to encourage the monitoring of and reduction in underwater noise emissions, and to report regularly all activities generating noise to improve the mapping for Noise Hotspots Report Organise trainings for national entities on noise monitoring, including analyses of PAM collected data in some identified priority areas – ToR Keep managing the regional noise register Keep feeding data on impulsive noise generating sources from the entire ACCOBAMS Area into the regional noise register managed by ACCOBAMS Promote the use of NETCCOBAMS to gather data Provide necessary data to update risk maps and generate maps for the Black Sea by considering relevant target species Complete the Noise Hotspots Report II Revise and updating the ACCOBAMS Guidelines on underwater noise taking into account outcomes from recent projects Prepare a study on the effects of underwater noise generated by the projected increase of wind farms in the ACCOBAMS Area – ToR Continue developing the concept of “quiet zones,” updating noise models in NETCCOBAMS, comparing noise modelling results with <i>in situ</i> recordings, monitoring anthropogenic noise activities, and developing new mitigation measures Continue cooperation on underwater noise issue with other international Organisations, such as CMS, ASCOBANS, IWC, UNEP/MAP Barcelona Convention System (EcAp/IMAP, QSR), IMO, REMPEC and EU (MSFD) and collaboration with other regional projects on noise issues 	20 000 € 20 000 € 10 000 € 30 000 € 30 000 € 10 000 € 60 000 € 8 000 € 15 000 € 50 000 € 8 000 €	25 000 € (LB 52)				251 000 €

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support investigation of impacts of underwater noise on health status and prey 	15 000 €					
Encourage the use of mitigation measures for anthropogenic activities generating underwater noise	Main	Scientific Committee including through the JNWG Secretariat, Parties Non-Party Range States, Partners, SRCUs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve enhanced training of regulators on the appropriate application of the CMS Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) and ACCOBAMS Noise Guidelines • Promote the ACCOBAMS Highly qualified MMO/PAM operators' certificate • Support the development and update of the ACCOBAMS HQMMO/PAM training tools • Revise and update the ACCOBAMS "Guide for Parties to use mitigation measures " • Continue developing joint project/initiatives for simulating mitigation measures such as speed reduction and related benefits, as well as considering results • Develop cooperation on underwater noise issues with other International Organisations 	20 000 €	5 000 € LB 52				15 000 €
Exchange of relevant information with competent authorities related to military activities / exercises	High	Scientific Committee including through the JNWG Secretariat, Parties Non-Party Range States, Partners, SRCUs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular information letter from the Secretariat to NATO and to national Navy forces to raise attention of impacts on noise on cetaceans and to propose mitigation measures • Continue organising regular joint ACCOBAMS/ASCOBANS workshops with national Navy forces and NATO members – ToR • Support research backing demining activities in the Black Sea: development and implementation of the "Post-War Plan for Black Sea Cetaceans" with a focus on the removal of all types of underwater explosives, including mines, with the minimal impact on cetaceans and marine ecosystem. 	30 000 €	0 €				30 000 €
TOTAL CA2b - Anthropogenic underwater noise				326 000 €	30 000 €				296 000€

CA 2 c		Vessel strikes							
Expected outcomes		Reduction of ship strikes in high risk areas							
Proposed Action(s)	Priority	Action led by and in cooperation with	Means of implementation	Total Budget (€)	OC 2026-2028	Funds secured (€)			Required additional VC/EF (€)
						OC 2023-2025	VC	EF	
Monitor / assess high-risk areas for vessel strikes (CCH) in the Mediterranean Sea and adjacent Atlantic Area	High	Scientific Committee Secretariat, Parties, Non-Party Range States, Partners, SRCUs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a joint Ship Strikes Working Group with the Pelagos Agreement • Continue the entry of vessel strikes data in relevant databases, such as the IWC central database on vessel strikes • Identify high risk areas for vessel strikes by encouraging studies that improve understanding of temporal and spatial distribution of shipping and of cetaceans (IMMAs), and support interactive maps of areas with high risk of strikes for crews of relevant ships • Enhance efforts to quantify ship strike occurrences through necropsies and photo-identification studies • Promote the use of the IWC ship strikes database and of NETCCOBAMS • Support efforts to improve access to the temporal and spatial distribution of shipping, particularly vessels that do not transmit AIS information • Continue cooperation on ships strike issue with other International Organisations, such CMS, IHO, IWC, EMSA (EU) / REMPEC / IMO and Pelagos Agreement and contributing in any other relevant initiatives, projects and workshops in the ACCOBAMS Area 	<p>3 000 €</p> <p>30 000 €</p> <p>10 000 €</p> <p>10 000 €</p> <p>8 000 €</p>	5 000 € (LB 52)	5 000 € (LB 52)			51 000 €
Promote the use of mitigation measures	High	Secretariat, Scientific Committee Parties, Non-Party Range States, Partners, SRCUs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review the results of existing efforts and encouragement of the development of new real time cetacean localisation projects, which are designed to be complementary tools in avoiding ship strikes; and review of the progress on the development of a whale-safe certificate • Strengthen cooperation between countries that share marine areas with high risk of collision for cetaceans in order to develop a joint and coherent management for these areas • Foster the development of incentive systems to shipping companies adopting suggested mitigation measures • Support national or regional projects in order to reduce the risk of collision • Evaluate the effectiveness of implemented or proposed new mitigation measures (such as the 	<p>30 000 €</p> <p>10 000 €</p> <p>30 000 €</p> <p>20 000 €</p> <p>20 000 €</p>	0 €			20 000 € ShiPrint	100 000 €

			APMs in the North-Western Mediterranean PSSA)						
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support development of standards and accelerate the process for nautical charts to be updated and reflect the areas crucial for the protection of marine life 	10 000 €					
TOTAL CA2c - Vessel strikes				181 000 €	5 000€	5 000€		20 000€	151 000€

CA 2 d		Cetacean watching							
Expected outcomes		Cetacean watching activities are properly conducted in the ACCOBAMS Area							
Proposed Action(s)	Priority	Action led by and in cooperation with	Means of implementation	Total Budget (€)	OC 2026-2028	Funds secured (€)			Required additional VC/EF (€)
						OC 2023-2025	VC	EF	
Monitoring status of whale watching activities in the ACCOBAMS Area and their potential adverse impacts on individual cetaceans and on populations	High	Scientific Committee through the WWWG, Parties, Secretariat Non-Party Range States, Partners, SRCUs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implement a pilot study to define the whale watching "carrying capacity" in a targeted geographical area where commercial whale watching is intensively practiced Conduct an analysis of existing national legislations related to cetacean watching to support the work of experts and coordinate with the Pelagos WG Collaborate with relevant organisations, such as CMS, IWC and Pelagos Agreement Update the list of WW operations 	150 000 € 5 000 € 5 000 €	0 €	5 000 € (LB 52)			155 000 €
Promote the use of whale watching vessels as platforms of opportunity	Medium	Scientific Committee through the WWWG, Parties, Secretariat Non-Party Range States, Partners, SRCUs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue testing and updating the IlogWhales App that incorporates the common procedure for data collection by whale watching operators, making sure that there is compatibility with other similar programmes running on collaborative platforms (eg.: OBSenMER) Organise photo-ID and data collection training for whale watching operators, with the final goal of sharing the collected data 	50 000 €	0 €				50 000 €
Support the implementation of the HQWW certificate in the ACCOBAMS Area	High	Secretariat, Partners Parties Non-Party Range States, Scientific Committee SRCUs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote the implementation of the HQWW certificate by Parties and in areas -based management measures in collaboration with relevant projects/organisations Organise Trainings on HQWW Revise the regulations governing the use of the collective certification mark "High Quality Whale Watching®" (HQWW) with the objective of simplifying the implementation at the national level and facilitate replication in other geographical areas" Liaise with relevant tourism organisations 	10 000 €	0 €	5 000 € (LB 52)			5 000 €
TOTAL CA2d - Cetacean watching				220 000 €	0	10 000 €			210 000 €

CA 2 e		Marine litter							
Expected outcomes		Improved monitoring of marine litter in relation with cetaceans.							
Proposed Action(s)	Priority	Action led by and in cooperation with	Means of implementation	Total Budget (€)	OC 2026-2028	Funds secured (€)			Required additional VC/EF (€)
						OC 2023-2025	VC	EF	
Monitor the impacts of marine litter (ingested marine litter / microplastics / entanglements in ghost nets) on cetaceans	High	Scientific Committee Secretariat, Parties Non-Party Range States, Partners, SRCUs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support actions to implement the best practice guidelines for cetacean <i>post-mortem</i> investigation, including the assessment of ingested marine litter and entanglement in ghost nets Promote/support/liaise with projects and research activities to develop standardised methods to detect the occurrence and effects of marine litter, including microplastics, in cetacean species Standardise diagnostic methods to evaluate the presence of marine litter in marine mammals' gastrointestinal tracts, categorise and quantify identified marine litter, detect plastic additives and absorbed contaminants, and develop risk, impact, and mortality index Facilitate regional collaboration between tissue banks to exchange tissue samples for joint analyses and retrospective studies Identify hot-spot areas for marine litter accumulation and identify threat to cetacean species occurring in those areas Develop a proposal to use cetacean species as indicators of marine litter in the ACCOBAMS Area Collaborate with relevant organisations (ASCOBANS, IWC, MEDPOL, IMO, FAO) including through joint activities Promote cetacean species as indicators for microplastics and macro-litter pollution at the ACCOBAMS scale and encourage their inclusion as indicator species within the IMAP candidate indicator 24 and MSFD descriptor 10 Promote campaigns on the ban of single-use plastics 	50 000 € 10 000 € 15 000 € 5 000 € 30 000 € 10 000 € 15 000 €	0 €	5 000 € (LB 52)			130 000 €
TOTAL CA2e – Marine litter				135 000 €	0 €	5 000€			130 000 €

CA 2 f		Chemical & biological pollution							
Expected outcomes		Improved monitoring of chemical & biological pollution on cetaceans.							
Proposed Action(s)	Priority	Action led by and in cooperation with	Means of implementation	Total Budget (€)	OC 2026-2028	Funds secured (€)			Required additional VC/EF (€)
						OC 2023-2025	VC	EF	
Monitor the impact of chemical & biological pollution (such as pathogens, invasive species) on cetaceans	Medium	Scientific Committee Secretariat, Parties Non-Party Range States, Partners, SRCUs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop an inventory of institutions or laboratories within the ACCOBAMS Area able to analyse samples for legacy and emerging pollutants Establish a common database on diseases and chemical burdens 	5 000 €	0 €				80 000 €
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assess cumulative effects and multiple stressors, including chemicals, marine litter, climate change, and emerging pathogens, on cetaceans in ACCOBAMS Area – Ideally through a dedicated workshop – ToR Disseminate the best practices to assess the impact of chemical pollution on cetaceans with a focus on emerging contaminants 	25 000 €					
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organise trainings on the best practices to assess the impact of chemical pollution – ToR 	20 000 €					
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collaborate with relevant organisations, initiatives and projects to better understand the toxicological effects of macro and micro-litter ingestion in cetaceans, considering chemical, ecotoxicological, and physical effects 	10 000 €					
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Define and develop new methods to evaluate exposure to plastics and plastic additives in free-ranging organisms, using approaches like -omics to reveal exposure to various stressors and identify new endpoints 	10 000 €					
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop new diagnostic techniques to understand the effects of cumulative stressors on cetaceans, both through the examination of stranded animals and in vitro experiments using new technologies 	10 000 €					
TOTAL CA2f - Chemical & biological pollution				80 000 €	0 €				80 000 €

CA 2 g		Climate change							
Expected outcomes		ACCOBAMS cooperates with regional initiatives on climate change, taking into account cetacean conservation							
Proposed Action(s)	Priority	Action led by and in cooperation with	Means of implementation	Total Budget (€)	OC 2026-2028	Funds secured (€)			Required additional VC/EF (€)
						OC 2023-2025	VC	EF	
Contribute to regional initiatives on climate change	Medium	Scientific Committee Secretariat, Parties Non-Party Range States, Partners, SRCUs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Receive and consider the report from CMS workshop Assess the carbon footprint of bottom trawl fisheries in the Mediterranean Sea in terms of their contribution to climate change, including both direct and indirect greenhouse gas emissions 	8 000 €	0 €				8 000 €
Total CA2g - Climate change				8 000 €	0 €				8 000 €

CA 2 i		Captivity related issues							
Expected outcomes		All specimens held in captivity in the ACCOBAMS Area are listed Advisory Committee on captivity issues and semi-enclosed facilities is operational							
Proposed Action(s)	Priority	Action led by and in cooperation with	Means of implementation	Total Budget (€)	OC 2026-2028	Funds secured (€)			Required additional VC/EF (€)
						OC 2023-2025	VC	EF	
Identify specimens held in captivity in the ACCOBAMS Area	High	Scientific Committee Parties Non-Party Range States, Secretariat Partners, SRCUs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue the work of the ACCOBAMS Advisory Committee on semi-enclosed facilities Continue updating the overview of specimens held in captivity in the ACCOBAMS Area in collaboration with international organisations (such as CITES) Reinforce collaboration with NFP/NGO/ACCOBAMS Partners/CITES authorities in each country Implement the cetacean genetic passport process, including genetic and biological data for cetaceans in aquaria and dolphinaria Disseminate Guidelines for Best Practices during the Installation and Management of Semi-enclosed Facilities for Cetacean Species in the ACCOBAMS area, as well as the Procedural Steps for Requesting Advice from the ACCOBAMS Advisory Committee on Semi-Enclosed Facilities when considering initiatives related to semi-enclosed facilities, by organising one workshop 	15 000 € 20 000 €	0 €	6 000 € (LB 52)			29 000 €
TOTAL CA2i - Captivity related issues				35 000 €	0 €	6 000 €			29 000 €

CA 3 a		Area-based measures for cetacean conservation							
Expected outcomes		Cetacean Critical Habitats are updated IMMAs are updated and new ones are identified Implementation of relevant measures are initiated in some pilot Cetacean Critical Habitats							
Proposed Action(s)	Priority	Action led by and in cooperation with	Means of implementation	Total Budget (€)	OC 2026-2028	Funds secured (€)			Required additional VC/EF (€)
						OC 2023-2025	VC	EF	
Regularly update Cetacean Co-occurrence & Human activities (CCH) and Important Marine Mammal Areas (IMMAs), as appropriate, including by identifying priority areas for action to mitigate the known threats (bycatch...) / area-based management measures	Main	Scientific Committee Secretariat, Parties Non-Party Range States, Partners, SRCUs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strengthen links through meetings and workshops with Duke Marine Lab., MSP group or authorities, other relevant scientific groups working on SDM, human mapping and overlapping maps – ToR Organise workshops within the SC to review and revise existing maps of SDM modelling exercises or human pressure maps Organise workshop considering some trials in pilot areas of the overlapping process to identify CCH Participate/collaborate to the upcoming IMMA workshop Reinforce collaboration with the "Strategical Alliance among the Secretariats of ACCOBAMS, GFCM, IUCN-Med, UNEP/MAP through SPA/RAC and in collaboration with MedPAN" and the Pelagos Agreement for spatial-based protection and management measures Liaise with INFO/RAC and PAP/RAC, and their mapping platform KMAP and explore the facilities of the NETCCOBAMS network 	100 000 €	5 000 € (LB 53)	15 000 € (LB 53)			80 000 €
Support implementation of relevant measures for adequate management in CCH	Main	Scientific Committee Secretariat, Parties Non-Party Range States, Partners, SRCUs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify and promote relevant management measures in pilot CCH, in collaboration with all stakeholders, including network of MPAs managers Collaborate with other Organisations, such as UNEP/MAP Barcelona Convention System (EcAp/IMAP, QSR), SPA/RAC (AGEM), BSC, IMO, IWC, GFCM, IUCN and the Pelagos Agreement Define threat based Ranking protocol of CCH 	30 000 €	5 000 € (LB 53)				25 000 €
TOTAL CA3a - Area-based measures for cetacean conservation				130 000 €	10 000 €	15 000 €			105 000 €

CA 4 a		Information /Communication / Awareness about cetaceans							
Expected outcomes		All ACCOBAMS Bodies, national focal/contact points, Partners and other relevant national institutions, Organisations and experts are familiar with activities implemented by or relevant for ACCOBAMS and share accurately information General public and other relevant stakeholders are aware about cetaceans and need for their conservation through activities supported by or linked to ACCOBAMS							
Proposed Action(s)	Priority	Action led by and in cooperation with	Means of implementation	Total Budget (€)	OC 2026-2028	Funds secured (€)			Required additional VC/EF (€)
						OC 2023-2025	VC	EF	
Maintain regular information/ communication about ongoing activities, cooperation and funding possibilities, cetacean conservation scientists and experts operating in the region and other relevant information; facilitate communication among cetacean conservation actors of the ACCOBAMS Area, in particular in Southern Mediterranean countries	Main	Secretariat Parties Scientific Committee Non-Party Range States, Partners, SRCUs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parties & Sec: Implement the ACCOBAMS Communication Strategy: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> upgrading communication products improving presence on social networks assessing the effectiveness of the Communication Strategy Development of NETCCOBAMS Platform (see MA1a) Promote the use of ACCOBAMS certificates and all ACCOBAMS Best Practices Update ACCOBAMS Guidelines and promote them - ToR Link conservation with human culture activities (UNESCO/Ocean decade) by initiating joint natural history exhibitions and offering expertise and knowledge eg identify heritage sites Promote knowledge about importance of museum collections SC: Provide advice to the Secretariat on scientific aspects of the Communication strategy 	100 000 €	20 000 € (LB 54)	5 000 € (LB 54)			75 000 €
Promote citizen sciences uses	Medium	Secretariat Parties Scientific Committee Non-Party Range States, Partners, SRCUs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide and overview of initiatives and tools already in place/in order to mutualise efforts in particular at the level of young people Organise a Workshop on how to collect data and data exchanges through citizen science - ToR 	25 000 €	0 €				25 000 €
Introduce in a new Country / Disseminate the ACCOBAMS Teaching Module courses	Medium	Secretariat Parties Scientific Committee Non-Party Range States, Partners, SRCUs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote updated ACCOBAMS teaching module in universities dealing with cetacean conservation - ToR Translation of the Teaching Module to national languages of ACCOBAMS Parties 	30 000 €	0 €				30 000 €
Promote and disseminate public awareness tools	High	Secretariat Parties Scientific Committee Non-Party Range States, Partners, SRCUs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organise a Conference on cetacean conservation in South Mediterranean Countries - CSMC – ToR Disseminate public awareness tools in national languages Support publications by national experts in international journals 	40 000 € 15 000 € 10 000 €	10 000 € (LB 54)				55 000 €
TOTAL CA4a - Information /Communication / Awareness about cetaceans				220 000 €	30 000€	5 000 €			185 000 €

CA 5 a	Cetacean culture
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Expected outcomes	The potential importance of social learning and culture for cetacean conservation in the ACCOBAMS region is considered
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Proposed Action(s)	Priority	Action led by and in cooperation with	Means of implementation	Total Budget (€)	OC 2026-2028	Funds secured (€)			Required additional VC/EF (€)
						OC 2023-2025	VC	EF	
Promote Cetacean culture	Medium	Secretariat Parties Scientific Committee Non-Party Range States, CMS & ASCOBANS, Partners, SRCUs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Receive and discuss the report of the ACCOBAMS working group on Culture and Social learning Create a joint ASCOBANS/ACCOBAMS Working Group on Culture and Social learning 	3 000 €	0 €				3 000 €
TOTAL CA5a - Cetacean culture				3 000 €	0 €				3 000 €

TOTAL CONSERVATION ACTIONS (CA)	Total Budget (€)	OC 2026-2028	Funds secured (€)			Required additional VC/EF (€)
			OC 2023-2025	VC	EF	
	6 076 000 €	157 000 €	86 000 €	1 267 000 €	65 000 €	4 501 000€

TOTAL BUDGET (MA + CA)	Total Budget (€)	OC 2026-2028	Funds secured (€)			Required additional VC/EF (€)
			OC 2023-2025	VC	EF	
	6 923 000 €	894 000€	86 000 €	1 267 000 €	65 000 €	4 616 000 €

RESOLUTION 9.6
ENDORSEMENT OF FOLLOW-UP COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS

The Meeting of the Parties to the Agreement on the Conservation of Cetaceans of the Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea and Contiguous Atlantic Area:

Having examined the report of the Fourth meeting of the ACCOBAMS Follow-up Committee,

1. *Endorses* the conclusions and recommendations issued by the Fourth Meeting of the Follow-up Committee (Nice, 2nd-3rd September 2025) on the follow-up of existing obligations and commitments related to (i) seismic and military activities producing underwater noise in the ACCOBAMS area, and (ii) interactions between humans and dolphins by Resolution 3.13 (dolphin interaction program).
2. *Adopts* the following Resolutions:

RESOLUTION.9.6.A

FOLLOW-UP SUBMISSION BY OCEANCARE ON THE FAILURE BY SPAIN TO UPDATE THE CONSERVATION STATUS OF THE SPERM WHALE (*PHYSETER MACROCEPHALUS*) AND THE FIN WHALE (*BALAENOPTERA PHYSALUS*) IN THE MEDITERRANEAN FROM THE CURRENT CATEGORY OF 'VULNERABLE' TO 'ENDANGERED' ACCORDING TO THE IUCN RED LIST STATUS OF CETACEAN SPECIES AND THE ACCOBAMS RESOLUTION 8.12

The Meeting of the Parties to the Agreement on the Conservation of Cetaceans of the Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea and Contiguous Atlantic Area:

Acting upon recommendation FC4.1 of the Follow-up Committee,

Having examined the considerations and recommendations of the Follow-up Committee, as recorded in the reports of its second, third and fourth Meetings,

Basing itself on the motivations stated in the above-mentioned reports,

Considering that the 7th Meeting of the Parties “endorsed the measures recommended by the Follow-up Committee” (para. 64 of the report of the 7th Meeting of the Parties),

1. *Finds* that the submission is admissible;
2. *States* that:
 - Resolution 8.12 on IUCN Red List status of cetacean species in ACCOBAMS Area by inviting Parties to take note of the IUCN Red List status of cetacean species and by urging them to implement measures to address the threats posed by the populations assessed and to update their national Red Lists, with particular regards to

Critically Endangered and Endangered populations, constitutes a strong recommendation addressed to all ACCOBAMS Parties;

- accordingly, Parties are under an obligation to start a process under their national legislation to review the conservation status of the species in question and to take a decision within reasonable time about a possible change of their status, either following the recommendation in Resolution 8.12 or, if not, justifying their decision under convincing reasons;
 - IUCN Red List assessments can be considered as a fully reliable expert document about species conservation status and the same can be said about relevant recommendations of the ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee;
3. *Appreciates* that the Government of Spain has started the process for reviewing the status of the sperm whale and fin whale Mediterranean sub-populations according to the legal protection status of species in waters under national jurisdiction and that it has shown full openness to dialogue and willingness to provide additional information;
 4. *Recommends* to the Government of Spain to provide, as soon as possible, further information to the Follow-up Committee about the procedure to be followed for modifying the conservation status of the sperm whale and fin whale Mediterranean sub-populations and about the existence of a time-schedule for completing the procedure undertaken.
 5. *Entrusts* the ACCOBAMS Secretariat with the task of asking all the ACCOBAMS Parties to provide information about the procedure being followed for modifying the conservation status of cetacean species under national legislation and about the existence of a time-schedule for completing the procedure and to circulate such information to the Meeting of the Parties and to the Follow-up Committee;
 6. *Invites* the Scientific Committee to consider this information in the relevant ACCOBAMS/IWC Conservation Management Plans;
 7. *Requests*
 - the Follow-up Committee to remain seized of the submission;
 - the Secretariat to transmit this Resolution to the Party and the Partner concerned.

RESOLUTION 9.6.B**FOLLOW-UP OF SUBMISSION BY OCEAN CARE ON THE ASSESSMENT AND CONTROL BY GREECE OF MILITARY ACTIVITIES AROUND SOUTH-EAST CRETE AND FOLLOW UP OF SUBMISSION BY OCEANCARE ON THE FAILURE BY ALBANIA, ALGERIA, CROATIA, CYPRUS, EGYPT, FRANCE, GREECE, ITALY, LEBANON, LIBYA, MALTA, MONACO, MONTENEGRO, MOROCCO, SLOVENIA, SPAIN, SYRIA, TUNISIA TO IMPLEMENT THE ACCOBAMS CONSERVATION PLAN FOR MEDITERRANEAN COMMON DOLPHINS**

The Meeting of the Parties to the Agreement on the Conservation of Cetaceans of the Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea and Contiguous Atlantic Area:

Acting upon recommendation FC4.2 of the Follow-up Committee,

Having examined the considerations and recommendations of the Follow-up Committee, as recorded in the reports of its second, third and fourth Meetings,

Basing itself on the motivations stated in the above-mentioned reports,

Considering that the 7th Meeting of the Parties “endorsed the measures recommended by the Follow-up Committee” (para. 64 of the report of the 7th Meeting of the Parties),

1. *States* that:

- the Follow-up Committee was established under resolution 5.4, adopted by consensus by the Meeting of the Parties, which encouraged Parties to make use of the follow-up procedure as a non-confrontational means for preventing and settling disputes;
- this implies an obligation by all State Parties to cooperate in good faith in the procedure before the Follow-up Committee;
- under Resolution 8.8.B, the Meeting of the Parties invited Greece to provide information to the ACCOBAMS Secretariat about how, since 2014, the Guidelines annexed to Resolution 4.17 and the Guidelines annexed to Resolution 7.13, which in 2019 replaced the previous ones, have been implemented;
- under Resolution 8.8.E, the Meeting of the Parties invited the fifteen Parties that hadn't replied, namely Albania, Algeria, Croatia, Cyprus, Egypt, France, Greece, Italy, Lebanon, Libya, Monaco, Montenegro, Slovenia, Syria and Tunisia, to provide information to the Follow-up Committee, through ACCOBAMS Secretariat, on specific measures taken for the implementation of the Conservation Plan for short-beaked common dolphins in the Mediterranean Sea, or any other measures considered relevant for their protection;

2. *Appreciates* the provision of replies by Croatia, Cyprus, Malta, Morocco and Spain about the implementation of this Conservation Plan;

3. *States* that the persistent lack of cooperation by thirteen Parties affects both the credibility and the effectiveness of the Follow-up Committee, of the Meeting of the Parties and of the Agreement itself;

4. *Decides* to amend the format of the National Report by including a section on cooperation with the Follow-up Committee, if applicable;

5. *Requests* :

- the Follow-up Committee to remain seized of the submission;
- the Secretariat to transmit this Resolution to all Parties and the Partner concerned.

RESOLUTION 9.7
AMENDMENTS TO THE FOLLOW-UP PROCEDURE

The Meeting of the Parties to the Agreement on the Conservation of Cetaceans of the Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea and Contiguous Atlantic Area:

Recalling Article III, paragraph 8 c), of the Agreement and Resolution 5.4 on the establishment of the ACCOBAMS Follow-up Procedure,

Stressing that this Follow-up Procedure is to be considered as a means for preventing disputes and for facilitating the implementation of the Agreement,

Noting with appreciation the work accomplished by the Follow-up Committee,

Desirous to improve and facilitate the functioning of the ACCOBAMS Follow-up Procedure,

1. *Decides* to amend Annex 1 (Rules on the ACCOBAMS Follow-up Procedure) to Resolution 6.8:
2. *Approves* the amended text of the Rules on the ACCOBAMS Follow-up Procedure, as [annexed](#) to this Resolution (amendments in bold);
3. *Approves* the submissions form as [annexed](#) to this Resolution;
4. *Encourages* the Parties, the Permanent Secretariat and the ACCOBAMS Partners to make use of the Follow-up Procedure as a non-confrontational means for preventing and settling disputes;
5. *Decides* that the present Resolution replaces Resolution 6.8.

ANNEX 1
RULES ON THE ACCOBAMS FOLLOW-UP PROCEDURE¹⁷

Article 1 - Legal Basis

The following Follow-up Procedure (hereinafter referred to as “the Procedure”) is based on Article III, paragraph 8 c), of the Agreement.

Article 2 - Objectives and Nature of the Procedure

1. The objective of the Procedure is to monitor, facilitate and promote follow-up with the provisions of the Agreement, taking into account the specific situation of each Party and with a view to preventing disputes. The Procedure shall complement the work performed by other bodies of the Agreement.
2. The Procedure shall be carried out in a simple, flexible, expeditious, fair, transparent, cost-effective and non-confrontational way.

Article 3 - Structure and Election of the Follow-up Committee

1. A Follow-up Committee (hereinafter referred to as “the Committee”) is hereby established.
2. The Committee shall consist of five members and two alternate members elected during the Meetings of the Parties. Three of the members and one alternate member shall be elected by secret ballots by Parties from a list of candidates nominated, one by each Party. Two of the Members and one alternate member shall be elected by secret ballots by the organisations and institutions having the status of ACCOBAMS Partner (hereinafter referred to as “ACCOBAMS Partners”) from a list of candidates nominated, one by each of them. The alternate members are the candidates who immediately follow for the number of votes received the members elected by the Parties and the members elected by the ACCOBAMS Partners.
3. The alternate member elected by the Parties shall serve in the absence of a Committee member elected by the Parties. The alternate member elected by the ACCOBAMS Partners shall serve in the absence of a Committee member elected by the ACCOBAMS Partners.
4. The full term of office of the Committee members commences at the end of an ordinary Meeting of the Parties and runs until the end of the second ordinary Meeting of the Parties thereafter.
5. At the time of the first election, the term of office of two Committee members elected by the Parties and of one Committee member elected by the ACCOBAMS Partners shall be limited to the period between the end of this ordinary Meeting of the Parties and the end of the subsequent one. The Committee members in question shall be drawn by lots.
6. The Committee members elected by the Parties shall not include more than one national of the same Party.
7. Nominated candidates shall be persons of high moral character and shall have recognised competence in the fields dealt with by the Agreement, including legal matters. In the election of the Committee members, consideration shall be given to the diversity of experiences and competences and to the equitable geographical and gender distribution of membership. Members of the Bureau cannot be members of the Committee at the same time.
8. The procedure for the nomination of candidates for the Committee shall be the following:
 - a) nominations shall be sent to the Secretariat of the Agreement not later than twelve weeks before the opening of the Meeting of the Parties during which the election is to take place;

¹⁷ Amendments in bold.

- b) each nomination shall be accompanied by a *curriculum vitae* of the candidate, including personal contact details, in at least one of the official working languages of the Agreement;
- c) the Secretariat shall distribute the nominations and the *curricula vitae*.

9. The Committee members shall not serve for more than two consecutive terms.
10. The Committee members and their alternates shall serve in their personal capacity and shall act objectively in the best interest of the Agreement. Committee members and alternate members shall, before taking up their duties, sign a solemn declaration that they will perform their functions impartially and conscientiously.
11. The Committee shall elect its own President and Vice-President. The Vice-President shall, in addition, serve as the *rapporteur* of the Committee.

Article 4 - Meetings of the Committee

1. The quorum of the Committee shall consist of three members, including at least two members elected by the Parties.
2. The Committee shall meet at least once every three years.
3. Depending on the workload, the Committee may decide to hold additional meetings, in particular in conjunction with other bodies established by the Agreement.
4. The Secretariat shall arrange for and service the meetings of the Committee.
5. The Committee meetings shall be open, as observers, to ACCOBAMS Parties, to the Chairperson of the Bureau, to one member of the Scientific Committee, as nominated by it, and, unless the Party whose follow-up is in question requests otherwise, to ACCOBAMS Partners.
6. **The submitting Party or Partner and the Party whose follow-up is in question are entitled to participate in the consideration of the submission by the Committee and shall have the opportunity to present their views and any relevant information, expert advice and document.**
7. The Party whose follow-up is in question, other Parties and ACCOBAMS Partners shall not take part in the elaboration and adoption of the related Committee recommendation, nor shall they be involved in the adoption of the report of the Committee. **The Secretariat can attend the elaboration and adoption of the Committee's recommendations and reports only for the purpose to provide services to the meeting of the Committee.**
8. Without prejudice to the previous paragraphs, the Committee may, in appropriate circumstances, undertake some of its activities through electronic communications.

Article 5 - Adoption of Recommendations and Reports

1. The Committee shall make every effort to adopt its recommendations and reports by consensus. If all efforts to reach a *consensus* have been exhausted and no recommendation or report has been adopted, they shall be **adopted** by a majority of the members present and voting.
2. Any Committee member or alternate member shall, with respect to any matter that is under consideration by the Committee, avoid direct or indirect conflict of interest. When a member finds himself or herself faced with a direct or indirect conflict of interest, that member shall bring the issue to the attention of the Committee before consideration of the matter. If the majority of the other Committee members find that the conflict occurs, the concerned member shall not participate in the elaboration and adoption of a recommendation or report of the Committee in relation to that matter.
3. Any Committee member can attach his or her dissenting or separate opinion to the relevant recommendation or report.

Article 6 - Functions of the Committee

1. The Committee shall:
 - a) consider any submission made in accordance with Articles 7 to 9 below, with a view to determining the facts and causes of the matter of follow-up and assisting the Party concerned in its resolution;
 - b) adopt recommendations that it considers appropriate to resolve such a follow-up issue;
 - c) ensure the follow-up of its recommendations and of the relevant decisions of the Meeting of the Parties and report the results to the latter, based on the synthesis of the Parties implementation reports and other relevant information;
 - d) at the request of the Meeting of the Parties, review general issues of implementation and follow-up under the Agreement and prepare a report, including relevant recommendations on them, to be presented at the Meeting of the Parties;
 - e) report on its activities at each ordinary Meeting of the Parties and make recommendations as it considers appropriate.
2. The Committee's recommendations shall include motivations and, wherever appropriate to assist the Party concerned to implement the Agreement, legal and technical advice on the required measures, strategies and time schedules.
3. Recommendations and reports shall be finalised by the Committee not later than twelve weeks in advance of the Meeting of the Parties at which they are to be considered.
4. The Committee, through the Secretariat, shall notify the Party concerned in writing of its recommendations. The Party concerned shall be given the opportunity to comment in writing on the recommendations.

Article 7 - Submissions by Parties

1. A submission may be brought before the Committee by one or more Parties that have reservations about another Party's follow-up with its obligations under the Agreement.
2. A submission made under paragraph 1 above shall be addressed in writing to the Secretariat and shall be supported by corroborating information. The Secretariat shall, within one week of receiving a submission, send a copy of it to the Party whose follow-up is in question. Any reply and supporting information shall be submitted to the Secretariat and to the Parties involved within three **months or longer period in particular circumstances, but in no case later than six months**. The Secretariat shall transmit the submission and the reply, as well as all corroborating information, to **the submitting Party and to the Committee**, which shall consider the matter as soon as practicable.
3. A submission may be brought before the Committee by a Party that concludes that, despite its best efforts, it is or will be unable to comply fully with its obligations under the Agreement.
4. A submission made under paragraph 3 above shall be addressed in writing to the Secretariat and shall explain the specific circumstances that the Party considers to be the cause of its non-follow-up. The Secretariat shall transmit the submission and the supporting information to the Committee, which shall consider the matter as soon as practicable.
5. The Committee may decide not to proceed with a submission which it considers is:
 - a) an abuse of the right to make such submission; or
 - b) manifestly ill-founded or unreasonable; or
 - c) incompatible with the provisions of the Agreement or this Procedure.

Article 8 - Submissions by the Secretariat

1. Where the Secretariat, also on request by the Scientific Committee, becomes aware of possible non-follow-up by a Party with its obligations under the Agreement, it may request the Party concerned to furnish necessary information about the matter.
2. If there is no response or the matter is not resolved within three months, or such longer period as the circumstances of the matter may require, but in no case later than six months, the Secretariat shall bring the matter to the attention of the Committee, which shall consider it as soon as practicable. The Secretariat shall immediately inform the Party concerned of its submission. **Any reply and supporting information shall be submitted to the Secretariat within three months or longer period in particular circumstances, but in no case later than six months. The Secretariat shall transmit the reply, as well as all corroborating information, to the Committee, which shall consider the matter as soon as practicable.**

Article 9 - Submissions by ACCOBAMS Partners

1. A submission may be brought before the Committee by one or more ACCOBAMS Partners that have reservations about a Party's follow-up with its obligations under the Agreement.
2. A submission made under paragraph 1 above shall be addressed in writing to the Secretariat and shall be supported by corroborating information. The Secretariat shall, within one week of receiving a submission, send a copy of it to the Party whose follow-up is in question. Any reply and supporting information shall be submitted to the Secretariat and to the Partner involved within three months or **longer period in particular circumstances, but in no case later than six months**. The Secretariat shall transmit the submission and the reply, as well as all corroborating information, to the Committee, which shall consider the matter as soon as practicable.
3. The Committee may decide not to proceed with a submission which it considers is:
 - a) an abuse of the right to make such submission; or
 - b) manifestly ill-founded or unreasonable; or
 - c) incompatible with the provisions of the Agreement or this Procedure.

Article 10 - Procedure before the Committee

In carrying out its functions, the Committee may:

- a) consider any relevant information submitted to it by the Party whose follow-up is in question, by other ACCOBAMS Parties, by the Secretariat or by ACCOBAMS Partners;
- b) request further information from any sources and draw upon outside expertise, as it considers necessary and appropriate;
- c) undertake, with the agreement of the Party concerned, information gathering in the territory of one Party;
- d) consult with other Agreement bodies and in particular with the Scientific Committee;
- e) request information from any Parties, through the Secretariat, on the general issues of implementation and follow-up under its consideration.

Article 11 - Confidentiality

1. The procedure before the Committee and the documents examined by the Committee are confidential, unless the Party concerned agrees to their publicity.

2. **The Committee members, alternate members, observers and members of the Secretariat attending the Committee's meeting shall sign a confidentiality agreement.**

Article 12 - Consideration by the Meeting of the Parties

1. The Meeting of the Parties may decide, upon consideration of recommendations of the Committee and taking in account the capacity of the Party concerned and factors such as the cause, type, degree and frequency of non-follow-up, to:
 - a) endorse the measures recommended by the Committee;
 - b) take any other non-confrontational action it deems appropriate.
2. The Meeting of the Parties' decisions under paragraph 1 above also include motivations.
3. The Meeting of the Parties, through the Secretariat, shall notify the Party concerned in writing of its decisions.

Article 13 - Relationship between settlement of disputes and the Follow-up Procedure

The present Follow-up Procedure shall be without prejudice to Article XII of the Agreement on the settlement of disputes.

Article 14 - Enhancement of Cooperation

In order to enhance cooperation between this and other Follow-up Procedures adopted under other treaties, the Meeting of the Parties may request the Committee to communicate, as appropriate, with the relevant bodies of those treaties and report back to it with any relevant recommendation.

ANNEX 2
SUBMISSIONS FORM

1. Name of the submitting Party or Organisation / institution having the status of ACCOBAMS Partner:
(If the submission is presented by the Secretariat, indicate "Secretariat")

2. Contact person:
(Person who has the capacity to represent the submitting Party or organisation / institution having the status of ACCOBAMS Partner. If the submission is presented by the Secretariat, this information is not necessary)
 - Name and position:
 - Address for correspondence:
 - Tel.:
 - E-mail:

3. Name of the Party concerned by the submission:

4. Relevant provision(s) of the Agreement concerned by the alleged non-follow-up situation:
(List as precisely as possible the provisions of the Agreement that the Party concerned is alleged not to follow-up)

5. Statement identifying the question of non-follow-up:
(Include all matters of relevance to the assessment and consideration of the submission. When a submission is made by a Party regarding its own non-follow-up, it has to provide the specific circumstances that it considers to be the cause of its situation)

6. Information supporting the submission:
(Relevant national legislation, national decisions, results of other procedures, etc. Indicate if any other domestic or international procedures have been undertaken to address the issue of non-follow-up which is the subject of the communication)

7. Any other information (existence of an environmental impact assessment (EIA), size of projects, maps of the area, etc.)

8. List of the documents annexed to the submission:
(Only copies are accepted)

Date:

Signature:

(of the person specified under No. 2 or, in case of a submission by the Secretariat, of the ACCOBAMS Executive Secretary)

This form has to be sent to the ACCOBAMS Follow-up Committee through the Secretariat at the following address:

ACCOBAMS Executive Secretary

Les Jardins d'Apolline - Bât. C

1, Promenade Honoré II

98000 Monaco (Principality of Monaco)

E-mail: secretariat@accobams.net

RESOLUTION 9.8
NETCCOBAMS

The Meeting of the Parties to the Agreement on the Conservation of Cetaceans of the Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea and contiguous Atlantic area:

Recalling Resolution 8.7 on “NETCCOBAMS”,

Taking into consideration Recommendation 16.15 of the Scientific Committee on “NETCCOBAMS”,

1. *Requests* the Scientific Committee to review and update the Terms of Reference of the expert Working Group on NETCCOBAMS;
2. *Asks* the NETCCOBAMS Working Group to:
 - develop Guidelines on NETCCOBAMS use, including specifications on access to maps, data and information, according to different types of users, in order to guarantee the safe use of sensitive data;
 - organise dedicated meetings (Terms of Reference to be prepared), as appropriate, to review maps, data and information present on the platform, and to agree on the best use of the platform’s options;
 - periodically meet, as appropriate, in order to determine which type of users can access the new material added into the platform (maps, data, and information);
3. *Asks* the Secretariat to disseminate information on the value of the NETCCOBAMS online platform, including its contribution to achieved mitigation measures, among national and international fora, managers and stakeholders (such as the International Maritime Organisation, port authorities, shipping companies), to increase the visibility of the work done and encourage the use of NETCCOBAMS and the submission of data on this platform.

RESOLUTION 9.9
ACCOBAMS PARTNERS

The Meeting of the Parties to the Agreement on the Conservation of Cetaceans of the Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea and contiguous Atlantic area:

Recognising the significant role played by ACCOBAMS Partners in the conservation of cetaceans in the Agreement area,

Moved by the desire to simplify the documentation requested for applying to the status of ACCOBAMS Partner,

Acknowledging the necessity to clarify the procedure for the withdrawal of this status,

Taking into consideration the recommendation by the Sixth Meeting of the ACCOBAMS Extended Bureau,

1. *Decides* to amend the criteria for applying to the status of ACCOBAMS Partner as follows:

- a) Sub-paragraph c) of paragraph 3 of [Annex 1](#) is replaced by the following sub-paragraph: “c) a note concerning the applicant’s capacity and experience in the field of cetacean conservation;”
- b) Paragraph 2 of [Annex 2](#) is replaced by the following: “2. ACCOBAMS Partners shall present, at the latest two months after the first meeting of the Scientific Committee of the triennium, a programme of collaboration with the Secretariat. The programme shall include all activities to be carried out in the frame of the partnership and related to the conservation plan and the support to the Secretariat.”
- c) The first sentence of paragraph 5 of [Annex 2](#) is replaced by the following sentence: “5. Before each Meetings of the Parties, ACCOBAMS Partners shall report on the use of the ACCOBAMS logo and on the implementation of their relevant activities, such as:
 - (i) providing support to cetacean conservation by implementing practical research, collection and analysis of information or other educational and training activities;
 - (ii) implementing partnership ventures, such as for training and education, technical and scientific expertise, policy development or evaluation and assessment, particularly where such ventures have brought new and additional benefits to the functioning of the ACCOBAMS partnership;
 - (iii) cooperation with national and international governmental and non-governmental bodies;
 - (iv) contribution to the further development of policies and tools of the Agreement and their application, particularly by assisting Parties to meet their obligations under the Agreement;
 - (v) communication with the Secretariat and cooperation with it in the achievement of ACCOBAMS objectives, including through integration of information in the NETCOBAMS platform.”
- d) Paragraph 8 of [Annex 2](#) is replaced by the following paragraph:

“8. On proposal by the Secretariat, the Bureau may decide to withdraw the status of ACCOBAMS partner if no activities are reported, if they are considered not to be relevant or are contrary to the achievement of the ACCOBAMS objective or to the present Rules and commitments or if there has been no communication with, the Secretariat for three years. The Bureau may warn the ACCOBAMS Partner concerned that the proposal of withdrawal will be put on the Bureau’s agenda of its subsequent Meeting, explaining the reason/s why.

Withdrawal of the Partner's status does not prejudice any legal action for improper use of the ACCOBAMS Partner logo."

e) Point 3 of [Annex 3](#) is replaced by the following point:

"3. A note concerning the applicant's capacity and experience in the field of cetacean conservation";

2. *Adopts* the amended annexes to the present Resolution;

3. *Decides* that the present Resolution replaces Resolution 7.9.

ANNEX 1¹⁸**CRITERIA FOR APPLYING TO THE STATUS OF ACCOBAMS PARTNER**

1. ACCOBAMS Partners can be Entities based either within ACCOBAMS Parties or in States Non-Parties to the ACCOBAMS, whose cetacean conservation actions are developed within the Agreement area;
2. These Entities shall belong to one of the following types:
 - Public National Entities;
 - Non-Governmental Organisations;
 - Public and private Research Institutes;
 - Private Companies;
3. The following documents shall be sent to the ACCOBAMS Secretariat by the applicant:
 - a) a copy of the Entity's statute, in original language and translated into English or French, indicating the objectives of the Entity;
 - b) a signed Declaration of Commitment (included in the Application form here attached as Annex 3), declaring that the Entity actions include conservation of cetaceans and of their habitat, human-cetacean interactions or other activities relevant with the spirit of the Agreement;
 - c) a note concerning the applicant's capacity and experience in the field of cetacean conservation;**
 - d) the Curriculum Vitae of the person responsible of the entity applying for the ACCOBAMS Partner status;
 - e) a signed copy of the Rules and Commitments (here attached as Annex 2), together with a commitment to comply with them; f) a copy of the Application form duly filled and signed (here attached as Annex 3).

¹⁸ Amendments in bold

ANNEX 2
RULES AND COMMITMENTS OF ACCOBAMS PARTNERS

1. ACCOBAMS Partners shall be expected to contribute on a regular basis and to the best of their ability to the further development of policies, technical and scientific tools of the Agreement and to their application.
2. ACCOBAMS Partners shall present, at the latest two months after the first meeting of the Scientific Committee of the triennium, a programme of collaboration with the Secretariat. The programme shall include all activities to be carried out in the frame of the partnership and related to the conservation plan and the support to the Secretariat.
3. ACCOBAMS Partners shall make proper use of the ACCOBAMS Partners logo in compliance with ACCOBAMS Resolution 4.21.
4. ACCOBAMS Partners shall communicate with the Secretariat on activities related to ACCOBAMS objectives. ACCOBAMS Partners shall share information, including their publications, with their National Focal Point. ACCOBAMS Partners that own original data on cetaceans in the Agreement area are strongly encouraged to share such data, as appropriate, through NETCCOBAMS, the MEDACES stranding database and through the OBIS SEAMAP database and any other relevant tools.
5. **Before each Meetings of the Parties, ACCOBAMS Partners shall report on the use of the ACCOBAMS logo and on the implementation of their relevant activities, such as:**
 - i. **providing support to cetacean conservation by implementing practical research, collection and analysis of information or other educational and training activities;**
 - ii. **implementing partnership ventures, such as for training and education, technical and scientific expertise, policy development or evaluation and assessment, particularly where such ventures have brought new and additional benefits to the functioning of the ACCOBAMS partnership;**
 - iii. **cooperation with national and international governmental and non-governmental bodies;**
 - iv. **contribution to the further development of policies and tools of the Agreement and their application, particularly by assisting Parties to meet their obligations under the Agreement;**
 - v. **communication with the Secretariat and cooperation with it in the achievement of ACCOBAMS objective, including through integration of information in the NETCOBAMS platform**

To this end, their reports shall reach the Secretariat and the relevant National Focal Point at the latest two months before the Bureau meeting held to prepare the Meeting of the Parties.

6. Partners shall be invited to participate, in an observer capacity and as advisors, in all activities of the Agreement, except when otherwise decided by the Meeting of the Parties.
7. ACCOBAMS Partners could be invited to contribute to the development of project proposals, project implementation and to the evaluation of project results.
8. **On proposal by the Secretariat, the Bureau may decide to withdraw the status of ACCOBAMS partner if no activities are reported, if they are considered not to be relevant or are contrary to the achievement of the ACCOBAMS objective or to the present Rules and commitments or if there has been no communication with the Secretariat for three years. The Bureau may warn the ACCOBAMS Partner concerned that the proposal of withdrawal will be put on the Bureau's agenda of its subsequent Meeting, explaining the reason/s why. Withdrawal of the Partner's status does not prejudice any legal action for improper use of the ACCOBAMS Partner logo.**

Date and place

Name of the person responsible of the entity applying for the ACCOBAMS Partner status

Signature Stamp and/or logo if applicable.

ANNEX 3
APPLICATION FORM

Applicants shall send all relevant documents by email at: secretariat@accobams.net or by mail at the following address:

ACCOBAMS Secretariat
Les Jardins d'Apolline - Bloc C
1, Promenade Honoré II
98000 MONACO

The _____ (name of the Entity applying), represented by (Name of the person responsible of the entity applying for the ACCOBAMS Partner status) _____, in quality of _____, with the aim to apply for the ACCOBAMS Partner status declares that the application contains the following elements:

1. A copy of the statute of the Entity (in original language and a translation into English or French);
2. The signed Declaration of Commitment (included in the Application form) declaring that the Entity actions include conservation of cetaceans and of their habitat, human-cetacean interactions or other activities relevant with the spirit of the Agreement;
- 3. A note concerning the applicant's capacity and experience in the field of cetacean conservation;**
4. Curriculum Vitae of the person responsible of the entity applying for the ACCOBAMS Partner status;
5. A signed copy of the Rules and Commitments (Annex 2 of the Resolution).

DECLARATION OF COMMITMENT

On behalf of _____ (name of the Entity applying), I commit to comply with the rules and commitments specified in Annex 2 to ACCOBAMS [Resolution 9.9].

Actions of _____ (name of the Entity applying) include conservation of cetaceans and of their habitat, human-cetacean interactions or other activities relevant with the spirit of the Agreement.

Name of the Entity:

Address, Telephone/fax, e-mail, website:

Social media link(s):

Place and date:

Name of the person responsible of the entity applying for the ACCOBAMS Partner status:

Signature Stamp and/or logo if applicable.

RESOLUTION 9.10 POST-WAR PLAN FOR BLACK SEA CETACEANS

The Meeting of the Parties to the Agreement on the Conservation of Cetaceans of the Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea and contiguous Atlantic area:

Recalling Resolution 8.17 on “Anthropogenic Noise” which “asks the Scientific Committee to develop a post-war Plan for the Black Sea region towards the mitigation of warfare consequences on cetaceans, their habitat and their preys” (paragraph 7),

Taking into consideration that the above-mentioned paragraph is clearly not restricted to looking into noise generating activities and impacts, but addresses all consequences resulting from warfare activities including marine pollution, eutrophication, increased risk of infections, increased risk of bioinvasions of alien (non-indigenous) species, as well as activities not directly related to combat, such as construction works (especially those producing underwater noise or altering the seascape), or changes in shipping routes,

Noting that military operations may have adversely impacted all the riparian countries to some degree,

Taking into consideration the results of the Joint ACCOBAMS – Black Sea Commission Meeting (March 2024, Istanbul, Türkiye), where it was stated that: “In the framework of the AETFS (ACCOBAMS Emergency Task Force for Stranding events), a specific “Black Sea” Sub-Task, composed of experts from Black Sea Countries is to be created and will provide annual summary information to the AETFS and to the “Network for harbour porpoise bycatch in the Black Sea between the European Commission, DG Mare, GFCM, ACCOBAMS and the Black Sea Commission”,

Recalling the “Trilateral Initiative” launched in 2024 between the naval forces of Bulgaria, Romania and Türkiye, with its respective Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), signed in Istanbul on 11th January, 2024, and the establishment of the Mine Countermeasures Black Sea (MCM BLACK SEA) Task Group to ensure the safety of maritime traffic against the threat of naval mines in the Black Sea through the surveillance, identification, and neutralisation of naval mines, while conducting related search and rescue operations,

Taking into consideration Recommendation 16.1 of the Scientific Committee on “Post-war Plan for Black Sea cetaceans”,

1. *Requests* the Secretariat to:
 - a) organise dedicated regional workshops in collaboration with the Black Sea Sub-Regional Coordination Unit, including experts on the relevant topics,
 - b) elaborate the road map for the Post-war Plan for the Black Sea region towards the mitigation of warfare consequences on cetaceans, their habitat and their preys (hereinafter, Post-war Plan for the Black Sea), and
 - c) enhance collaboration with naval forces and cooperation on dedicated projects focused on underwater munitions clearance and demining operations,

2. *Invites* Black Sea Parties and experts to consider, *inter alia*, the areas, topics, activities and measures listed in the [Annex](#) to this Resolution during the work on the Conservation Management Plan for the Black Sea cetaceans and the Post-war Plan for the Black Sea;
3. *Further invites* Parties to promote implementation of applicable activities and measures under the Post-war Plan for the Black Sea as soon as it is adopted, regardless of the military situation.

ANNEX

Areas, topics, activities and measures relevant for the Post-war Plan for the Black Sea region towards the mitigation of warfare consequences on cetaceans, their habitat and their preys

Assessment

1. Comprehensive monitoring of underwater noise, chemical pollution, marine debris and biological indicators of stress in animals, as well as *postmortem* studies, studies of pathology, lifespan and population structure, are necessary for understanding and managing the war impact and other anthropogenic impacts (construction, seismic surveys), until it is secured that the post-war impacts have been decreased to pre-war levels.
2. Collecting and long-term archiving of organ and tissue samples for the purposes of multiple screening and identification of causes of death, including but not limited to identification of contaminants, pathogens, ingestion of or entanglement in marine debris, evidence of acoustic trauma or blast injury, brain damage and indicators of individual stress are important efforts to be considered. Building and enhancing the capacity of the Parties, including national stranding networks and tissue banks, will contribute to this effort.
3. The following are also particularly relevant:
 - assessment of the losses, damage and potential possibility or need for restoration of species, populations and habitats;
 - development and application of existing remote sensing methods for assessing marine and coastal environments (including detection and reporting of sea mines and ammunition, other objects which can threaten the cetaceans and their prey at the sea floor);
 - enhancing new technology, including screening techniques for identification of contaminants, pathogens and alien (non-indigenous) species introduced by war related activities.
4. Assessing the impacts on distribution and abundance of prey for cetaceans is necessary, including assessment of potential shift in distribution of species and populations, their feeding and breeding grounds and migration routes due to warfare activities. This may include cooperation with the GFCM and other dedicated national and international bodies related to fisheries.
5. Assessing increase of bycatch risk and related bycatch mitigation measures in light of shifts in prey distribution and other stress factors affecting animal health should ideally also be considered.

Action

6. Demining is crucial for the short and long-term health of cetaceans and the entire marine ecosystem. By prioritizing the removal of explosives, both historical and contemporary, using Best Available Technology and Best Environmental Practices, can lead to minimizing the impact of explosions on the environment and to supporting ongoing research efforts. This may include building on existing demining initiatives in the North and Baltic Seas to develop comprehensive guidance for identifying and safely removing all types of underwater explosives, both floating and sunk.
7. Establishing new marine protected areas by Parties planned on the basis of previously identified Important Marine Mammal Areas (IMMAs), including transboundary and international reserves, will be important for cetacean conservation. Biosphere reserves may be suggested for areas of high cultural importance and exceptionally high anthropogenic impact, including those damaged by war.

8. It is recommended that response to stranding events is enhanced by Parties, aligned with strengthening the national stranding networks and cooperation with the relevant task force for a better response and capacity to carry out *postmortem* investigation, and hence collect, preserve and analyse samples.
9. Development and implementation of bycatch mitigation measures including those responding to post war effects are recommended to be further elaborated by Parties, along with monitoring of bycatch.
10. It is recommended that education and public awareness campaigns for the Black Sea marine ecosystem under pressure, particularly from military activities, are provided and created by Parties for a broad audience and professionals in relevant fields.
11. A post-war basin-wide synoptic survey of cetaceans in the form of aerial survey will be necessary for updating the status of cetacean populations in the Black Sea.
12. Cooperative regional effort is necessary for achieving the aforementioned objectives. This also may involve international and transboundary projects and agreements, as well as the Sub-Regional Coordination Unit.
13. Acting in coordination with the naval forces and other relevant governmental bodies of coastal countries.

RESOLUTION 9.11

ABUNDANCE AND DISTRIBUTION, INCLUDING ACCOBAMS SURVEY INITIATIVE II AND THE ACCOBAMS LONG-TERM MONITORING PROGRAMME (LTMP)

The Meeting of the Parties to the Agreement on the Conservation of Cetaceans of the Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea and contiguous Atlantic area:

Recalling the commitment in principle shown by the Parties to ACCOBAMS Survey Initiative 2 (ASI-II) as part of the ACCOBAMS Long-Term Monitoring Programme (LTMP) expressed in Resolution 8.10,

Noting that, despite the exhortations of Resolution 8.10 and the efforts of the Secretariat, the Scientific Committee and some Parties, the necessary funds to implement the work required to start the LTMP programme and ASI-II were not fully obtained,

Convinced that new technologies do not, certainly at present time, provide a scientifically (or economically) viable alternative to the existing protocols for ASI-II,

Stressing the urgency that Parties meet their commitments to ASI-II as soon as possible,

Welcoming the continuous efforts made by the Secretariat and the Bureau to reactivate the LTMP contact group, to find solutions to appoint relevant experts, to increase the visibility of the project and to attract potential funders,

Fully recognising the formal launch of the Second ACCOBAMS Survey Initiative (ASI-II) at the dedicated side-event during the 3rd United Nations Ocean Conference (UNOC3) (Nice, 11th June 2025),

Commending the efforts of Parties who provided financial support for the implementation of ASI-II and expressing appreciation to other donors who have already committed funds,

Noting that a significant contribution of funds for ACCOBAMS Survey Initiatives may come from donors different from ACCOBAMS Parties,

Taking into consideration Recommendation 16.2 of the Scientific Committee on “Abundance and distribution”, as well as Recommendation 16.3 on “ASI-II and the ACCOBAMS LTMP”,

Acknowledging the work carried out by the ASI Steering Committee, composed by representatives of IUCN-Med, SPA/RAC, Black Sea Commission Permanent Secretariat, ISPRA and OFB,

Taking note of the outcome of the selection processes for a) the consultant appointed to provide advisory, technical, and administrative support for the development of ASI-II and b) for the Scientific Coordinator of ASI-II,

1. *Stresses* the fundamental importance of a synoptic ASI-II survey and the LTMP to the ability of ACCOBAMS to meet its stated objective;

2. *Confirms* that ASI-II needs to follow the approved survey design principles and methods adopted during ASI-I, modified in the light of (a) consideration of the geopolitical situation; (b) final evaluation of the density maps from ASI-I; (c) the available funding; and d) the activities by the Parties providing in-kind contributions;
3. *Requests* the ASI Steering Committee to continue its engagement by maintaining its role in guiding the strategic direction and implementation of the ACCOBAMS Survey Initiative;
4. *Decides* to implement ASI-II for the Mediterranean and the contiguous Atlantic area in 2026;
5. *Mandates* the Secretariat to report to the Bureau regarding the feasibility of extending the duration of the contracts of the consultant and the Scientific coordinator as appropriate and mandates the Bureau to decide on the respective extension;
6. *Mandates* the Bureau to assess the feasibility of the implementation of the ASI-II in the Black Sea in summer 2027;
7. *Stresses* that the first ACCOBAMS Survey Initiative (ASI-I) experience has shown that the scientific and logistical work involved in organising and coordinating such a large-scale, multi-national survey cannot be achieved in a timely fashion without a long-standing financial support;
8. *Urges* Parties to provide financial and/or in-kind contributions for the implementation of ASI-II;
9. *Mandates* the Executive Secretary, in collaboration with the Chair of the Scientific Committee and the support of the Bureau, to urgently contact the Parties to:
 - reiterate in a practical manner their commitment to Resolution 8.10;
 - secure the necessary financial contributions, or at least formal commitments, to allow the necessary planning time for a summer 2026 survey;
10. *Mandates* the Executive Secretary, in collaboration with the Chair of the Scientific Committee and the support of the Bureau, to further approach potential donors to consider contributing to the implementation of ASI-II;
11. *Requests* the Secretariat, in collaboration with the Scientific Committee, to review the relevant 2017 Integrated Monitoring and Assessment Programme (IMAP) factsheets and to present their updates to the Biodiversity CORMON (Ecosystem Approach Correspondence Group on Monitoring) meeting in June 2026.

RESOLUTION 9.12 POPULATION STRUCTURE

The Meeting of the Parties to the Agreement on the Conservation of Cetaceans of the Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea and contiguous Atlantic area:

Recalling ACCOBAMS Resolution 3.9 “Guidelines for the establishment of a system of tissue banks within the ACCOBAMS area and ethical code”,

Recalling Resolution 8.11 “Cetacean population genetics”,

Recalling also the need for institutions dedicated to the preservation of body samples or parts from marine mammals of the Mediterranean and Black Seas and adjacent waters, which should promote non-invasive or post-mortal collection of samples from cetaceans living in these waters, prepare such samples for long-term storage, as well as distribute them to the community of marine mammal researchers,

Recalling Recommendations from the ACCOBAMS Workshop on Data Collection on Cetacean Population Genetics (Monaco, September 2022),

Taking into account Recommendation 16.5 of the Scientific Committee on “Population structure”,

1. *Encourages* Parties to take note of the report of the ACCOBAMS Workshop on Data Collection on Cetacean Population Genetics, as well as the associated ACCOBAMS Best Practices on Cetacean Population Genetics;
2. *Encourages* Parties to:
 - collect updated information regarding research results on population genetics and to include it in their National Report;
 - register their scientific institutions following the provisions of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) and/or the Nagoya Protocol on Access to Genetic Resources and the Fair and Equitable Sharing of Benefits Arising from their Utilization to the Convention on Biological Diversity (Nagoya protocol) to facilitate scientific exchange of specimens needed to conduct taxonomic and species-conservation research, and to conduct wildlife forensic research;
3. *Urges* Parties to contact scientists and scientific institutions in the territory under their jurisdiction to facilitate greater understanding of the scientific exchange provisions of Article VII, paragraph 6, of the CITES and /or the requirements of the Nagoya Protocol on the non-commercial loan, donation or exchange of scientific specimens;
4. *Calls upon* Partners to conduct sample collection and research on population genetics, to apply the [ACCOBAMS Best Practices on Cetacean Population Genetics](#)¹⁹ in their work and to regularly provide the Secretariat with

¹⁹ Please refer to document “ACCOBAMS Best Practices on Cetacean Population Genetics” https://accobams.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/ACCOBAMS-BEST-PRACTICES-CETACEAN-GENETICS-ENGLISH_final-version.pdf

relevant information to update the [online cetacean sample database](#)²⁰, as well as the list of [suitable genetics laboratories](#)²¹ and new scientific publications;

5. *Decides* that the present Resolution replaces Resolution 8.11.

²⁰ Please refer to the document « Database of existing cetacean samples in the ACCOBAMS area » https://accobams.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/sample_database_population-genetics.pdf

²¹ Please refer to the document « Suitable genetics labs in the ACCOBAMS area » <https://accobams.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Suitable-genetics-labs-in-the-ACCOBAMS-area.pdf>

RESOLUTION 9.13
STRANDING ISSUES
(ACCOBAMS EMERGENCY TASK FORCE FOR STRANDING EVENTS, FUNCTIONING STRANDING NETWORKS)

The Meeting of the Parties to the Agreement on the Conservation of Cetaceans of the Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea and contiguous Atlantic area:

Recalling Resolution 8.2 by which Parties agreed to encourage the creation of a regional Task Force and collaborations among national networks of Parties for stranding events and provisioned Conservation Action 1d for 2022/2025,

Recalling Resolution 8.15, stressing the need to establish and to ensure the continuous functioning of stranding networks, reiterating the need for the improvement of data collection on cetacean population and pathology, reiterating the need to further collaborate at a regional level between tissue banks, so to facilitate the exchanges of tissue samples for joint analyses,

Recalling also Resolution 7.14 on “Best practices in monitoring and management of cetacean stranding”, as well as Resolution 4.16 on “Guidelines for a coordinated cetacean stranding response”,

Welcoming the creation of the ACCOBAMS Emergency Task Force for Stranding events (AETFS), and *stressing* its added value in countries where stranding networks are not well established,

Noting that participants in the meeting jointly organised by the Secretariats of ACCOBAMS and of the Black Sea Commission that took stock of common subjects in relation to the Black Sea (Istanbul, 6-7 March 2024) agreed that, in the framework of the AETFS, a specific “Black Sea” Sub-Task, composed of experts from the Black Sea Countries, should be created,

Noting that standardised *post mortem* investigations and harmonised interpretation of findings were considered relevant for the implementation of different ACCOBAMS strategies, like those related to bycatch, ship strikes, marine litter and underwater noise,

Taking into consideration Recommendation 16.6 of the Scientific Committee on “Stranding Issues (AETFS, Functioning Stranding Networks)”,

1. *Requests* the two co-chairs of the AETFS to update the terms of reference (ToR) for AETFS by taking into consideration other existing initiatives in terms of objectives and to establish a prioritisation system to provide support in case of capacity-building request and emergency response;
2. *Decides*:
 - to consider as an emergency situation a cetacean stranding event, which can overwhelm local resources and/or represent a transboundary emergency situation (e.g., mass strandings, stranding of large whales, unusual mortality events, epidemic outbreaks), as well as a single event involving threatened, endangered

or data deficient species in the ACCOBAMS Area (e.g., Cuvier's beaked whales, sperm whales, Strait of Gibraltar killer whales)²²,

- that all emergency situation occurring in the ACCOBAMS Area require to be promptly reported to the AETFS through the Secretariat;
 - that a specific section is added in the National Report;
3. *Requests* the Secretariat, in collaboration with the AETFS:
- to keep a continuously updated list of existing stranding experts and stranding networks contact points or coordinators, to be included in the ACCOBAMS website, to facilitate reporting and communication;
 - to keep updated lists of tissue banks, responsible institutions designed by the Parties and laboratories registered as CITES scientific or forensic institutions, including the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH) collaboration centers, for facilitating transboundary exchange of samples and investigations;
 - to update existing ACCOBAMS documents related to strandings management and investigations (best practices, guidelines and protocols), when needed, through regular meetings among experts to include novel findings and analyses, and to promote harmonisation in interpreting post mortem findings;
 - to implement capacity building through training modules targeting veterinarians and biologists involved in post mortem investigations, using novel technologies (i.e., virtual and augmented reality, metaverse, 3D printing) and including principles of forensic photographs and tele-necropsy;
4. *Encourages* Parties to consider the systematic adoption of technologies for remote assistance during investigations, supporting the acquisition of suitable hardware and software to routinely apply this approach in the ACCOBAMS Area;
5. *Invites* National Focal Points to provide the appropriate support to collect information on any human-related activity that could be related to the stranding event, as well as stranding network coordinators and relevant authorities, to help bring carcasses to appropriate laboratories, that have the necessary facilities to perform examinations proposed in Resolution 7.14, in order to allow in-depth identification of causes of death;
6. *Decides* to create an emergency fund constituted of voluntary contributions by Parties, International Organisations and public and private donors, which is managed by the ACCOBAMS Secretariat with the advice of the AETFS, in order to create simple and effective procedures to support expensive analyses (e.g., toxicology, genomics, research on hearing), samples exchange by Parties and/or expert travel for investigations on emergencies in Parties asking for support;
7. *Invites* the AETFS and the ACCOBAMS Secretariat to develop the procedures for requests of funding, and *asks* the Secretariat to submit them to the ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee and to the ACCOBAMS Bureau for approval.

²² Please refer to the document : "Best practice on cetacean post mortem investigation and tissue sampling"https://accobams.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/MOP7.Doc33_Best-practices-on-cetacean-post-mortem-investigation.pdf

RESOLUTION 9.14
INTERACTIONS BETWEEN FISHERIES AND CETACEANS

The Meeting of the Parties to the Agreement on the Conservation of Cetaceans of the Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea and contiguous Atlantic area:

Reiterating that bycatch in fishing gear is a widespread and significant threat to cetaceans across the Agreement Area, particularly in the Black Sea, where bycatch was identified as the main source of human-induced mortality for the threatened Black Sea harbour porpoise (*Phocoena phocoena relicta*),

Recalling that the ACCOBAMS Survey Initiative - the first synoptic survey conducted in 2018 and 2019 - provided baseline cetacean abundance estimates for the whole Agreement Area, and that during the same period in the Black Sea, intensive work on the assessment of bycatch levels and testing of mitigation measures, such as acoustic deterrent devices (pingers), was carried out in the framework of CeNoBS and ACCOBAMS Supplementary Conservation Grants Fund (SCF) projects,

Further recalling that the above projects were followed by the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean's (GFCM) CetaByM project, which confirmed the effectiveness of Wideband PAL (Porpoise Alert Devices) pingers in the mitigation of porpoise bycatch in the Black Sea,

Noting that new data from the Black Sea and the Mediterranean Sea have indicated that common dolphins (*Delphinus delphis*) and bottlenose dolphins (*Tursiops truncatus*) are affected differently by fishing activities, with common dolphins (*Delphinus delphis*) being more susceptible to bycatch in mid-water trawls, particularly in the Black Sea, while bottlenose dolphins (*Tursiops truncatus*) are more frequently involved in depredation interactions with purse seiners, especially in the Mediterranean Sea, and that such interactions might have lethal effects on these species,

Noting the ongoing collaboration between UNEP/MAP and the GFCM to advance EO1 and EO3 indicators for bycatch of vulnerable and non-target species and the harvest of commercially exploited fish and shellfish respectively,

Recalling Recommendation GFCM/29/2005/1 on the management of certain fisheries exploiting demersal and deepwater species and the establishment of a fisheries restricted area below 1000 metres, adopted by GFCM, which mandates that all contracting parties and cooperating non-contracting parties shall prohibit the use of towed dredges and trawl nets for fishing operations conducted at depths exceeding 1000 metres, in accordance with the precautionary approach to fisheries management and in response to scientific advice indicating the vulnerability of deep-sea ecosystems and the overexploitation of certain stock,

Recalling Resolution GFCM/46/2023/4 on a regional plan of action to monitor and mitigate interactions between fisheries and vulnerable species in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea,

Recalling the existing relevant policy and legislation in the European Union for nature protection and fisheries, such as the Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC), the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (2008/56/EC), the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) and related Regulations, as well as EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030,

Welcoming the European Union’s Action Plan “Protecting and restoring marine ecosystems for sustainable and resilient fisheries” launched by the European Commission in February 2023, which urges European Union Member States to adopt national measures or, where appropriate, propose joint recommendations to prohibit bottom trawling in the marine protected areas (MPAs) that are Natura 2000 sites designated under the Habitats Directive and to ensure that bottom trawling is phased out in all MPAs by 2030,

Noting the additional instruction and requests in the European Union, such as criteria which monitoring programmes should fulfil, such as parameters and areas to be monitored, minimum frequency and necessary coverage of fishing fleet (métiers) by sampling, types of fisheries to be monitored (métiers and regions with highest risk of having bycatch issues), and necessary fishing effort data, in order to provide accurate and reliable bycatch estimates to comply with the relevant provisions of EU Acquis,

Taking into account that certain points of ACCOBAMS Recommendation 14.5 on bycatch have been implemented,

Aware of simulations on multiple, ground truth scenarios, to identify appropriate sampling schemes for protected species bycatch (ICES WKPETSAMP3 2024) including the ‘0.5% scenario’, which is indicated as the minimum appropriate level by the 2019 FAO-GFCM guidelines on monitoring incidental catch in the Mediterranean and Black Seas, run by ICES and its consequent advice to the EU,

Taking into account recommendations of the Joint Bycatch Working Group of ACCOBAMS and ASCOBANS,

Taking into consideration Recommendation 16.7 on “Bycatch and bottom trawling” and 16.8 on “Revision of the FAO Guidelines on monitoring incidental catch of vulnerable species in the Mediterranean and Black Sea” of the Scientific Committee,

1. *Recommends* that Parties:

- a) encourage that monitoring schemes by independent observers are followed in countries with no existing obligations for the fishing methods that have been proven to pose a threat to cetaceans (e.g., bottom-set gillnets targeting turbot in the Black Sea, purse seine fishery and mid-water trawls in the Mediterranean and the Black Seas);
- b) encourage, wherever possible, the retrieval from vessels of dead by-caught animals to perform necropsies by relevant institutions involved in the national strandings networks, and the collection of minimum samples for a wide range of analyses (e.g., teeth for age, skin for genetics, and blubber for physiological status), to understand the status and demographic characteristics of the affected populations;
- c) implement active awareness-raising programmes among fishermen to encourage reporting of bycatch events in order to improve data collection and assess more precisely the extent of the threat;
- d) strengthen the use of PAL pingers in fisheries known to have a high level of bycatch, in particular in turbot fishery in the Black Sea, as an effective measure to mitigate harbour porpoise bycatch in bottom set gillnets according to the best available practices;
- e) consider the use of pingers and/or other mitigation measures in fisheries with high depredation rates by bottlenose dolphin (*Tursiops truncatus*), particularly in the Mediterranean Sea;
- f) encourage further testing and development of bycatch mitigation measures in the ACCOBAMS Area;
- g) ensure alignment of management fisheries activity in Marine Protected Areas with the sites’ conservation objectives in consideration of ACCOBAMS’ management processes, with the goal to phase out bottom

trawling within MPAs, including Natura 2000 sites and Emerald network of areas of special conservation interest, by 2030;

h) strengthen control to prevent IUU (illegal, unreported, unregulated) fishing;

2. *Requests* the Scientific Committee to approach FAO-GFCM/SAC to assess the feasibility for the revision of the 2019 FAO-GFCM Guidelines for bycatch monitoring, noting that while the 0.5% coverage for onboard observation is a recommended minimum, it may not be sufficient to fully understand the extent of cetacean bycatch, and that regional differences and legal frameworks should be taken into account;
3. *Requests* the ACCOBAMS Secretariat:
 - a) to strengthen the collaboration with GFCM in addressing the impacts of several fisheries on cetaceans, their prey, and habitats;
 - b) to strengthen the collaboration with GFCM and ICCAT to address illegal driftnets' continued use in some parts of the ACCOBAMS Area.

RESOLUTION 9.15
ANTHROPOGENIC UNDERWATER NOISE

The Meeting of the Parties to the Agreement on the Conservation of Cetaceans of the Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea and contiguous Atlantic area:

Recalling the Work Plan (version of February 2023) for the Joint Noise Working Group (JNWG) of CMS, ACCOBAMS and ASCOBANS,

Recalling Resolutions 7.13 on “Anthropogenic Noise”, 5.15 on “Addressing the impact of anthropogenic noise”, 6.17 and 8.17 on “Anthropogenic noise”,

Recalling also paragraphs 4 and 5 of Resolution 6.18 on “Implementation of an ACCOBAMS Certification for Highly Qualified Marine Mammals Observers” which encourage:

“[...] Parties to:

- implement the tools ensuring Highly Qualified MMOs/PAM operators in the ACCOBAMS Area;
- give, in priority, permits for activities in their national area, to industrial companies employing Highly Qualified MMOs/PAM operators or at least other internationally agreed certifications;
- whenever possible provide the Permanent Secretariat with a copy of the MMO/PAM report and data.

[...] industrial companies and public entities engaged in noise-producing activities that may have negative impacts on cetaceans to use the “Tools ensuring Highly Qualified MMOs/PAM operators in international associations of oil and gas producers to promote such steps”;

Taking into consideration Recommendation 16.9 of the Scientific Committee on “Anthropogenic Underwater Noise”,

Taking note of the Joint ACCOBAMS-ASCOBANS workshop with navies on underwater noise and cetaceans held in Toulon (26-27 November 2024),

1. *Encourages* ACCOBAMS Parties:

- a) to take into consideration and apply, as appropriate, the Threshold Values for Impulsive and Continuous Noise emissions recently adopted by the European Union in the documents published by the MSFD Technical Group on Noise: “Setting EU threshold values for continuous underwater sound”, and “Setting EU threshold values for impulsive underwater sound” and the relevant tools under the Barcelona Convention;
- b) to support the adoption of “ocean noise pollution” as a Common Indicator under the Integrated Monitoring and Assessment Programme of the Mediterranean Sea and Coast and Related Assessment Criteria (IMAP) in the framework of Barcelona Convention, and that cetacean species be used as indicator species for the application of such Common Indicator;
- c) to apply the IMO Guidelines for the reduction of underwater radiated noise from shipping to address adverse impacts on marine life (IMO/MEPC 1/Circ.906) and participate in the experience building phase, while submitting respective information to the IMO’s Marine Environment Protection Committee;

- d) to participate and contribute, as appropriate, to the global review of marine seismic air gun surveys currently being undertaken by the International Whaling Commission;
 - e) to promote among all stakeholders the training and certification for ACCOBAMS Highly Qualified Marine Mammals Observers and Passive Acoustic Monitoring Operators (ACCOBAMS HQ MMO/PAM training and certification);
 - f) to require the use of certified and qualified MMO/PAM operators, including where possible ACCOBAMS HQ MMO/PAM where relevant activities (e.g. seismic surveys, offshore windfarms) take place in the ACCOBAMS area;
 - g) referring to Resolution 8.17 (Anthropogenic noise), to share, to the possible extent, available information, , on impulsive noise- generating activities to allow a proper assessment of noise emissions in the Agreement Area and their potential impact on cetaceans;
 - h) to provide, to the possible extent, through their relevant national institutions, data on impulsive noise-generating sources and activities from anywhere in the Agreement Area into the existing Regional Noise Registry, managed by ACCOBAMS for publicly available data;
2. *Requests* the ACCOBAMS Secretariat and the Joint CMS/ACCOBAMS/ASCOBANS Noise Working Group (JNWG), to continue supporting the UNEP/MAP in the development of the IMAP EO11 on energy including underwater noise and its related common indicators 26 and 27 as well as in the preparation of the related chapter within the next MED QSR;
3. *Requests* the ACCOBAMS Parties, the Scientific Committee, and the Secretariat to contribute to the development and implementation of the Post-War Plan for Black Sea Cetaceans Resolution 9.10, with particular focus given to the removal of all types of underwater explosives, both floating and sunk, including mines;
4. *Requests* the ACCOBAMS Secretariat to discuss with the Secretariats of CMS and ASCOBANS the organisation of an in-person meeting of the JNWG, including the drafting of the relevant Terms of Reference, the establishment of a Steering Group, and funding;
5. *Encourages* the JNWG to continue its work, including:
- a) the further development of the concept of “quiet zones”, as outlined in Recommendation 10.5 of the ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee;
 - b) the updating of the noise models available in NETCCOBAMS, securing their compliance with evolving guidance from the European Union Technical Group on Underwater Noise under the European Union Marine Strategy Framework Directive;
 - c) the comparison of the results of noise modelling with appropriate in situ anthropogenic noise recordings made throughout the Agreement Area, taking account of the diverse sensitivities of the different cetacean species;
 - d) the continued efforts to monitor anthropogenic activities generating underwater noise;
 - e) the further encouragement of the use of mitigation measures for anthropogenic activities generating underwater noise;
 - f) the further efforts to develop and assess the effectiveness of new mitigation measures; and
 - g) the improved exchange, among the competent authorities, of relevant information related to military activities and exercises, from planning to assessment of impacts.

RESOLUTION 9.16
VESSEL STRIKES

The Meeting of the Parties to the Agreement on the Conservation of Cetaceans of the Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea and contiguous Atlantic area:

Recalling ACCOBAMS Resolutions 7.12 and 8.18 on “Ship strikes” and Resolution 14.5 of the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS) on reducing the risk of vessel strikes for marine megafauna,

Recalling that ACCOBAMS Parties and the International Whaling Commission (IWC) have long recognised the problem of vessel strikes, particularly on large whales, and have worked together to develop a better understanding of the problem and effective mitigation measures, *inter alia*, within the Agreement Area, particularly for fin and sperm whales,

Acknowledging that the Pelagos “Collisions and Shipping” Focus Group (PCSFSG) is working on improvements of the precision surrounding the identification of collisions,

Acknowledging the work undertaken by the Secretariat, Partners and the Scientific Committee in supporting the implementation of the adopted Associated Protective Measures (APMs) within the North-Western Mediterranean Particularly Sensitive Sea Area by offering the adjacent coastal states (Spain, France, Italy, and Monaco) and shipping stakeholders the technical and awareness-raising solutions necessary for their effective implementation,

Acknowledging also ongoing mitigation efforts such as the SaveWhales project in the South Peloponnese, which aims to establish an early warning system to detect large marine mammals and inform ships about their presence in order to slow down speed to avoid colliding with them,

Taking into consideration Recommendation 16.10 of the Scientific Committee on “Ship Strikes”,

1. *Welcomes* the adoption in July 2023 of IMO Resolution MEPC.380(80) establishing the Northwestern Mediterranean Sea as a Particular Sensitive Sea Area at the initiative of four ACCOBAMS Parties (France, Italy, Monaco, and Spain);
2. *Reiterates* its recommendations to Parties to implement, as a matter of urgency, mitigation measures in the following high-risk areas in the ACCOBAMS Area, where vessel strikes with the following species are frequent:
 - Strait of Gibraltar - fin and sperm whales;
 - Balearic Islands - fin and sperm whales;
 - Balearic Basin and Catalan Coast - fin and sperm whales;
 - Eastern Alborán Sea - fin and sperm whales;
 - Pelagos Sanctuary - fin and sperm whales;
 - Hellenic Trench, Greece - sperm whales;

3. *Requests Parties and the Secretariat to:*
- a) promote communication with stakeholders (*e.g.*, navies, port authorities, shipping companies, whale-watching organisations, etc.) on the issue of vessel strikes, including mitigation approaches and reporting to the IWC ship strikes database;
 - b) encourage and support regional data collection and mitigation initiatives and foster the development of incentive systems to shipping companies that adopt appropriate mitigation methods;
 - c) continue to work within IMO and its Marine Environment Protection Committee on relevant initiatives that include mitigation approaches, such as shipping lanes;
 - d) foster and improve collaborative efforts with the Barcelona Convention Secretariat and other bodies working on this issue;
 - e) support efforts to improve access to the temporal and spatial distribution of shipping, particularly merchant vessels steaming at high speed, and vessels that do not transmit Automatic Information System (AIS) data;
 - f) support, when appropriate, activities within the framework of ongoing projects in particular for the definition of criteria for the identification of high-risk areas;
 - g) offer support to the Greek Authorities for reducing the risk of ship strikes in the Hellenic Trench, including strengthening collaboration with the International Hydrographic organisation (IHO) and the Hellenic Hydrographic Office to develop standards and accelerate the process for the updating of nautical charts to locate the area crucial for the protection of marine life;
4. *Asks the Chair of the Scientific Committee to cooperate with the Scientific and Technical Committee of the Pelagos Agreement to create a joint Ship Strikes Working Group with agreed Terms of Reference, including:*
- a) liaison with riparian States, the IWC and other stakeholders to continue and improve the collection of information on cetaceans and vessel traffic, to enable better identification of actual or potential high-risk areas for cetaceans, especially fin and sperm whales, by incorporating information on whale and vessel distribution into risk models;
 - b) incorporating the results of the IWC-IUCN-ACCOBAMS workshop (Messinia, 2019) and work on Important Marine Mammal Areas (IMMAs);
 - c) investigation of ways to support the integration and updating of cetacean risk information (*e.g.*, IMMAs) into Electronic Charts Systems used for maritime navigation;
 - d) improving efforts and approaches to quantifying ship strike occurrence;
 - e) promotion and use of the IWC ship strikes database and appropriate modules within NETCCOBAMS;
 - f) elaboration of improved methods to evaluate the effectiveness of mitigation measures and especially of recent or new PSSAs and associated protective measures;
 - g) review of the results of relevant studies being undertaken in the region;
 - h) review of the results of existing efforts and encouragement of the development of new real time cetacean localization projects, which are designed to be complementary tools in avoiding ship strikes;
 - i) review of the progress on the development of a reward for “best practitioners” (Whale safe certificate) given to identified vessels who follow ACCOBAMS’ best practices to be initially tested in the North-Western Mediterranean Particularly Sensitive Sea Area.

RESOLUTION 9.17
COMMERCIAL WHALE WATCHING ACTIVITIES IN THE ACCOBAMS AREA

The Meeting of the Parties to the Agreement on the Conservation of Cetaceans of the Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea and contiguous Atlantic area:

Recalling Article II of the Agreement, according to which the Parties shall prohibit and take all necessary measures to eliminate any deliberate taking of cetaceans, including harassing or attempting to engage in such conduct,

Recalling Section 2 of Annex 2 to the Agreement, according to which, when necessary, Parties shall develop guidelines and/or codes of conduct to regulate or manage activities that create direct and indirect interactions between humans and cetaceans, such as tourist activities,

Aware that ACCOBAMS Resolution 4.7 sets forth Guidelines for Commercial Cetacean Watching Activities in the ACCOBAMS Area and that Annex 2 to Resolution 6.20 provides regulations governing use of the collective certification mark “*High Quality Whale-Watching®*” and the Guidelines for acquiring a label for whale-watching operators in the Pelagos/ACCOBAMS Area,

Recognising the 10th anniversary of the “*High Quality Whale-Watching®*” implementation, and noting the efforts of MIRACETI in France and CIMA Foundation in Italy to implement HQWW at the national level,

Aware that there is a need to revise the regulations governing the use of the collective certification mark “*High Quality Whale Watching®*” (HQWW) with the objective of simplifying the implementation at the national level and facilitating replication in other geographical areas,

Recalling that the ACCOBAMS Resolution 8.19 acknowledges the “*Guidelines for the Management of Cetacean Watching Activities in the ACCOBAMS Area*”,

Taking into consideration Recommendation 16.11 of the Scientific Committee on “*Commercial whale watching activities in the ACCOBAMS area*”,

1. *Reiterates* the need for legally enforceable whale watching regulations to be in place and fully implemented by all of the ACCOBAMS Parties, in line with previous ACCOBAMS Resolutions 4.7, 6.20, and 8.19;
2. *Requests* the Secretariat, in collaboration with the Scientific Committee and Sub-Regional Coordination Units, to carry out the analysis of existing national legislation related to whale watching, which should be done in coordination with the Pelagos Working Group “Lois”;
3. *Requests* Parties to encourage, when possible, whale watching operators to continue testing the relevant digital application(s) that incorporate the common procedure for data collection;
4. *Requests* Parties to collect, when possible, detailed information from whale watching operators on their activities;

5. *Requests* the Secretariat to include a new specific section on National Reports;
6. *Encourages* the Secretariat and the Scientific Committee to further collaborate with relevant organisations on issues related to whale watching activities;
7. *Encourages* Parties to implement pilot studies to define the whale watching carrying capacity in geographical areas where commercial whale watching is intensively practised;
8. Takes note of the updated regulations governing the use of the collective certification mark “High Quality Whale Watching®” (HQWW), as provided in the [Annex](#);
9. *Decides* that the present Resolution amends Resolutions 4.7, 6.20 and 8.19.

ANNEX

Regulations for the Use of the Collective Certification Mark High Quality Whale-Watching® by Authorised Operators under the ACCOBAMS and Pelagos Agreements



Created on 1st September 2014
Updated on September 2025

Introduction

Whale-watching activities are increasing worldwide. If well managed, and within a well-defined framework, they are a wonderful vector for environmental education, contribute to the local economy and can promote research on cetaceans and their conservation. However, in the absence of a robust framework, they can grow too fast, increasing pressure on the environment and disturbing animals, and give rise to serious repercussions for the populations concerned.

Since 2004, several studies have shown that such activities are increasing particularly in north-western Mediterranean regions. Aware of these challenges, many whale-watching operators from the Pelagos Sanctuary have come together at the initiative of the Pelagos Agreement and the Agreement on the Conservation of Cetaceans of the Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea and contiguous Atlantic Area (ACCOBAMS), with the support of several Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs). This collaboration has led to the creation of a consultative and voluntary management tool to ensure the sustainability of these activities – a certification for whale-watching operators that are involved in initiatives fostering quality and environmental responsibility.

In addition, it is important to note:

- That ACCOBAMS Resolution 8.19 set out Guidelines for the observation of cetaceans for commercial purposes in the ACCOBAMS area;
- That by virtue of Article II, paragraph 1 of ACCOBAMS, the Parties prohibit and take all necessary measures to eliminate any deliberate taking of cetaceans, including disturbing them or attempting to perform such activities;
- That pursuant to Section 1.c) of Annex 2 to ACCOBAMS, the Parties require that impact assessments be carried out in order to provide a basis for either allowing or prohibiting the continuation or the future development of activities that may affect cetaceans or their habitat in the Agreement area, including tourism and cetacean-watching, as well as establishing the conditions under which such activities may be conducted;
- That Resolution 4.5 of the Pelagos Agreement on the creation of a certification for marine mammal-watching activities for commercial purposes in the Pelagos Sanctuary has been adopted by the State Parties;
- That Article 8 of the Pelagos Agreement on the protection of marine mammals in the Mediterranean provides that "In the Sanctuary, the Parties regulate the watching of marine mammals for the purposes of tourism";
- That the Pelagos Sanctuary provides unique potential for tourists to watch marine mammals and for such watching to become an exceptional awareness-raising and educational tool;
- That cetacean-watching activities for commercial purposes, where properly conducted, should be encouraged since they contribute to educating the general public and raising awareness of cetaceans and their habitat, and also have other potential benefits including economic benefits;
- That such activities, if carried out in an inappropriate way, may lead to detrimental disturbance of marine mammals; and lastly
- That paragraph 130 of the document "The Future We Want", adopted in 2012 by the Rio Conference on sustainable development (Rio +20) highlights the necessity of supporting activities related to the sustainable development of tourism and capacity-building in this regard, which foster knowledge of the environment, preserve and protect the environment, respect wildlife, flora, biodiversity, ecosystems and cultural diversity, and improve living conditions and sources of income for local populations by protecting their economy, as well as the natural environment overall.

Project objectives

In this context, and to meet the requirements of the Parties, ACCOBAMS and Pelagos Agreement wish to promote good practices for cetacean watching for commercial purposes.

The collective certification mark “*High Quality Whale-Watching®*” is voluntary and participative, and acts as an incentive to ensure that good practices and responsible methods are implemented by operators involved in whale watching at sea, as well as their crews.

This initiative is based on the Regulations for the Use of the Collective Certification Mark “*High Quality Whale-Watching®*” by Authorised Operators under the ACCOBAMS and Pelagos Agreements (hereinafter referred to as “Regulations”), and can be adapted to all professional operators organising whale watching at sea for commercial purposes. It is intended to serve as a common reference framework, which may be transposed by each country or territory into their respective “Cahier des charges” or equivalent national implementation document.

Regulatory framework

These Regulations have been prepared using the Intellectual Property Code, which defines the status of a collective mark.

Marine whale-watching operators applying to use the collective certification mark “*High Quality Whale-Watching®*”, hereinafter also referred to as the Mark, undertake to comply with the regulations in force.

The law to be applied to these Regulations is Monegasque law. French is the official language of the Regulations. Any translation of the Regulations that has not been approved by ACCOBAMS has no legal value and may only be considered to be a working document.

Disputes relating to these Regulations will be brought before the competent Monegasque Courts.

Article 1 - Owner

The basic collective certification mark represented by the “*High Quality Whale-Watching®*” logo (designed by *Souffleurs d’Ecume* and offered to ACCOBAMS in a copyright assignment agreement signed on 18/07/2014), reproduced below and described in Article 4.2 is owned by ACCOBAMS, located at Les Jardins d’Apolline – Bât. C 1, Promenade Honoré II, 98000 MONACO:



The Mark has been filed with the Intellectual Property Department (Business Development Agency - 98000 MONACO). Once registered, it is protected for 10 years as from the date at which the application was filed.²³

²³ The “*High Quality Whale-Watching®*” collective trademark has been registered by ACCOBAMS with the International Bureau of the World Intellectual Property Organization in September 2014, renewed in May 2024, valid until September 2034.

Article 2 - Scope

Article 2.1 - Date of implementation

These Regulations enter into force as from their registration on the national brand register.

Article 2.2 - Users of the Mark

The High Quality Whale-Watching project applies to any operator offering trips out of a harbour to watch cetaceans in their natural environment.

Article 3 - Obtaining the Regulations

The Regulations are available free of charge and can be downloaded from the ACCOBAMS website (<https://accobams.org>) and from the Pelagos Agreement website (<https://pelagos-sanctuary.org>).

Article 4 - Conditions of use

Article 4.1 - Conditions for the use of the Mark

A general condition regarding the reproduction of the Mark and applying to all users:



Article 4.2 - House style

Operators authorised to use the collective certification mark “High Quality Whale-Watching®” may reproduce, affix or use the “High Quality Whale-Watching®” logo on any media for advertising or institutional communication.

Use of the logo must comply with the following house style specifications:

- Use of colour:



Pantone colour reference:

Black = 426C

4-colour offset colour references:

Cyan = 100%	Cyan = 54%
Magenta = 100%	Magenta = 50%
Yellow = 100%	Yellow = 45%
Black = 100%	Black = 11%

- **Use of the logo in other colours**

In order to meet users' aesthetic requirements, the logo may be used in the following ways:

	<p>4-colour offset colour references:</p> <p>Cyan = 100% Cyan = 54%</p> <p>Magenta = 100% Magenta = 50%</p> <p>Yellow = 100% Yellow = 45%</p> <p>Black = 100% Black = 11%</p>
	 <p>4-colour offset colour references:</p> <p>Cyan = 76% Cyan = 36%</p> <p>Magenta = 6% Magenta = 3%</p> <p>Yellow = 41% Yellow = 20%</p> <p>Black = 0% Black = 11%</p>

Article 4.3 - Penalties regarding the conditions for the use of the Mark

ACCOBAMS reserves the right to take any necessary measure to guarantee the proper use of the collective certification mark “High Quality Whale-Watching®”.

For whale-watching operators authorised to use the collective certification mark “High Quality Whale-Watching®”, non-compliance with the conditions for use of the Mark and the visual identity guidelines will lead to the withdrawal of the authorisation to use the Mark, once the user has been invited to submit their remarks. Withdrawal of authorisation will lead, *ipso jure*, to the termination of the agreement authorising use of the Mark.

As a reminder, any infringement or wrongful or fraudulent use of the collective certification mark “High Quality Whale-Watching®”, whether the fault of the Mark holder or a third party, will entitle ACCOBAMS to take any legal action deemed appropriate, including brand infringement action, without prejudice to criminal proceedings being initiated.

[Article 5 - Procedures for obtaining authorisation to use the Mark](#)

Article 5.1 - Conditions on access to the Mark and identification

The collective certification mark “High Quality Whale-Watching®” may be requested by any operator offering trips to watch cetaceans in their natural environment. In order to benefit from the Mark, operators must first follow a training programme organised by a Certifying Partner or Certifier recognised by ACCOBAMS, in accordance with the terms of Article 5.2.

Operators also undertake to be up to date with payments of mandatory contributions, confirm that they hold the insurance policies required for their activities, and undertake to provide their services in full compliance with the regulations in force (according to National license regulations), particularly as regards passenger safety.

Article 5.2. - Undergoing training

High-quality whale-watching activities require a considerable level of skill. For this reason, the training of whale-watching operators' management and crew is an essential clause regarding the use of the Mark. This training is aimed at:

- giving added value to the operators' trips;
- promoting high quality service and an ecologically sustainable approach as regards the general public;

- restricting the impacts of activities on cetaceans and helping to protect them;
- ensuring that whale watching has a sustainable future.

The training programme will include topics like marine ecology, marine mammal biology (including description and identification of the marine mammals that can be observed), marine biodiversity (including description and identification of the species that can be observed), anthropogenic pressures, the legislation framework (including ACCOBAMS and Pelagos Agreement), conservation measures (including the Code of Good Conduct), satisfaction questionnaires, promotion and communication of the Mark, and contribution for research and conservation.

In order to complete the training programme and receive a certificate, the candidates must attend the relevant sessions, according to their profile, and pass the final exam.

It is recommended to organise refresher sessions for certified operators at least every five years.

In order to use the collective certification mark “High Quality Whale-Watching®”, the crew of the boat must be composed of personnel (at least one captain and one guide) who have passed the course.

Article 5.3. – Compliance with the Code of Good Conduct

In order to obtain the right to use the collective certification mark “High Quality Whale-Watching®”, **operators under the ACCOBAMS and Pelagos Agreements undertake to comply with the ACCOBAMS-Pelagos Code of Good Conduct**, as presented in [Appendix 1](#).

Article 5.4 - Procedure for trips at sea

Operators are encouraged to organise **nature-oriented trips** rather than excursions focusing solely on cetaceans. The aim is to restrict pressure on the animals whilst ensuring public awareness and satisfaction.

“Big-game” fishing combined with whale watching within a single package is not allowed (the fishing techniques are incompatible with the Code of Good Conduct). To qualify as a mark-holder, entities offering both activities must organise them separately, on different excursions.

Cetacean feeding and swimming with cetaceans are prohibited under the Mark, both for safety reasons and so as not to disturb the animals.

Using detection systems to find cetaceans is forbidden since they can lead to an increase in pressure and an intensification of activities.

Article 5.5 - Raising passengers' awareness

In compliance with the Code of Good Conduct, the operator undertakes to disseminate a high-quality message on board using common content comprising:

- a description and identification of marine mammals and other species that can be observed (including the most recent relevant IUCN Assessment);
- biological and ecological aspects on the cetaceans and ecosystems of the relevant local regions (Adjacent Atlantic, Mediterranean Sea and Black Sea);
- a presentation of ACCOBAMS and, when relevant, local protected sites (MPAs, the Pelagos Sanctuary, Natura2000 sites, PSSAs, etc.) underlying call to actions for conservation;
- the main existing threats to marine mammals and in particular those related to whale watching that do not comply with the Code of Good Conduct;
- the significant role of the certified operators for research and conservation;
- activities that are forbidden by the Mark (art. 5.4).

Operators awarded the Mark also undertake to make available to their passengers awareness-raising documents provided by ACCOBAMS and/or the Pelagos Agreement.

At the end of each trip, a customer satisfaction questionnaire, provided by Certifying Partners, should be visible and available to passengers, in accordance with Article 6.a.

Information collected from satisfaction questionnaires and relating to single operators shall not be disclosed by the Certifier or by members of the National Committee.

Article 5.6. - Participation in research and conservation programmes

Owing to their presence at sea and their knowledge of the marine environment, operators can make a significant contribution to research and conservation, thus helping to protect the environment and the species that are at the core of their business. This collaboration may also be promoted to passengers.

The cooperation takes the form of observation sheets, whose format will be defined by the Certifying Partners, filled in by the operators and intended to enrich scientific databanks. It may also be extended, as part of specific research programmes (joining working groups, hosting scientists on board, etc.).

All forms completed during the year are to be sent, by December each year, by the operator to the Certifier that has granted them the right to use the collective certification mark “*High Quality Whale-Watching*®”.

Information and data collected from observation forms shall be used by the Certifier or by the ACCOBAMS and Pelagos Agreements Secretariats only for scientific purposes consistent with the objectives of the Agreements.

Article 6 - Monitoring and penalties

Compliance with these Regulations by whale watching operators is a guarantee of credibility for the collective certification mark “*High Quality Whale-Watching*®”. In order to assess such compliance, the following will be put in place:

- a) Satisfaction questionnaires for passengers using the operator's service
- b) Visits on board during trips
- c) A National Committee

Satisfaction questionnaires for passengers

Questionnaires, for which a model form will be provided, will be made available to passengers via a QR code, allowing them to express their feedback about their trip and the operator's compliance with the conditions of these Regulations.

Assessment visits and reports

A representative of the Certifier will be mandated to go on board operators' vessels during their trips out to sea, with the aim of assessing compliance with these Regulations (Assessment Visit). A report will be produced after the visit.

The choice of operators to be visited each year will be made partly according to questionnaires returned, partly according to the recommendations of previous National Committees, and partly on a random basis. Each operator will be visited at least once every three years.

National Committee

Each year, a National Committee will meet to assess compliance with the Regulations by operators. The National Committee will thus be the guarantor of the credibility of the collective certification mark “*High Quality Whale-Watching*®” with regard to the general public. Thus, each National Committee will be composed at least of:

- A representative from the Secretariat of ACCOBAMS,
- The National Focal Point of the ACCOBAMS Agreement,

- A representative from the Permanent Secretariat of the Pelagos Agreement, when activities are conducted in the Pelagos Sanctuary,
- The National Focal Point of the Pelagos Agreement, when activities are conducted within the Pelagos Sanctuary,
- Relevant representatives from the Certifying Partners,
- At least one certified operator, identified at random in the country concerned.
- The representative of one or more entities relevant to the area under consideration, if applicable (e.g., associations, coast guard, MPAs managers, etc.).

In issuing its opinion, the National Committee will examine each inspection report produced since the last Committee Meeting (the procedure is anonymised by blanking out the name of the operator concerned). The opinion of the National Committee, noted on said inspection report, will be issued in line with the provisions set out in Article 6.1., by consensus or, failing this, by show of hands.

The National Committee will also define a list of operators to be inspected for the next season, in accordance with the provisions of point b) of this Article. If necessary, the National Committee may recommend an additional inspection visit for one or more operators during the current season, and, if applicable, decide to hold a further meeting.

Article 6.1 - Penalties applied for non-compliance with the Regulations

In the event of non-compliance with the commitments made in this document, sanctions may be applied. The table below summarises the procedure and categorises non-compliance into three levels of severity: minor, moderate, and major violations.

- A **minor violation** refers to a low-impact, unintentional or isolated deviation from the regulations that does not compromise the objectives of the certification system;
- A **moderate violation** is a more significant or repeated misbehaviour that may affect the quality or credibility of the certified whale-watching activity;
- A **major violation** involves serious or intentional non-compliance that clearly undermines the principles and requirements of the certification system.

The specific types of violations and the corresponding sanctions are detailed in the Terms of Reference (“Cahier de Charge”), which may vary slightly between countries to ensure compatibility with national legislation and effective implementation of the certification system. Each National Committee is responsible for defining its own Terms of reference, applicable within its area of competence.

Extent of Violation	Examples of Possible Violations <i>(the following list is non-exhaustive and is provided for illustrative purposes only)</i>	Description of penalty
Minor Violation	Delay in providing requested information to the Certifying Partner or the National Committee; Occasional omission of required reporting forms; Use of outdated educational material during excursions.	Warning by e-mail, plus a reminder of the Regulations, from the Certifying Partner.
Moderate Violation	Absence of trained personnel onboard; Lack of information provided during the briefing; Occasional approach of cetaceans in a way that does not fully comply with the code of conduct; Non-compliance with speed limits around	Recommendation by letter, plus a reminder of the Regulations, from the Certifying Partner. A third minor violation, if committed in consecutive years, will be considered equivalent to a serious violation. A second moderate violation, if

	cetaceans and duration of the sighting; Failure to report trip data.	committed in consecutive years, will be considered equivalent to a serious violation
1st major Violation (serious) or repeated moderate violation	Intentional disturbance or harassment of cetaceans (e.g., chasing or encircling animals, feeding animals, use of detection systems, etc.); Violations in the forbidden zone; A repeated moderate violation .	Warning by certified e-mail or registered letter with acknowledgment of receipt from the Certifying Partner, possibly with a suspension from using the collective certification mark " <i>High Quality Whale-Watching</i> [®] " for a period of 1-2 years according to the seriousness of the violation.
Critical Violation	A particularly serious event to be assessed by the National Committee.	Withdrawal of permission to use the collective certification mark " <i>High Quality Whale-Watching</i> [®] ", possibly with a prohibition from re-applying for a period of one to five years, depending on the seriousness of the violation. The head of the company must undergo a new training course if the company intends to reapply for award of the Mark after the suspension period.

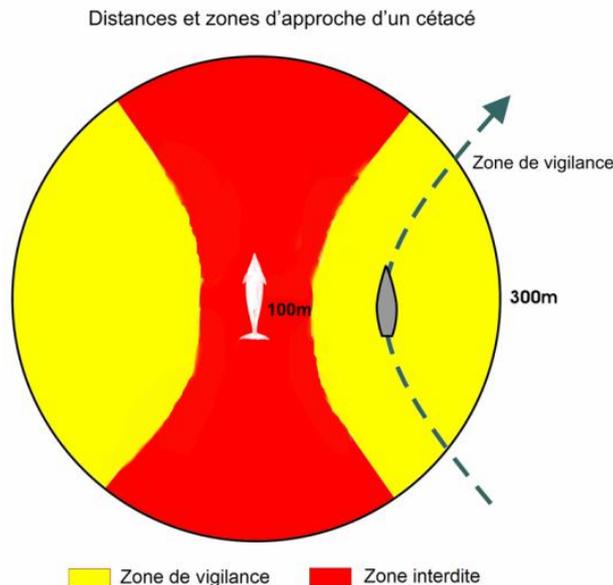
Mark holders for whom no violation has been recorded over the past three years are considered to have never been assessed as having committed a violation.

Appendix 1

Code of Good Conduct of ACCOBAMS/Pelagos for whale watching

Whale-watching can be a source of serious disturbance if badly done. The following rules allow our impacts on the vital behaviour of dolphins and whales (hunting, repose or inter-individual socialisation) to be mitigated. Whether one is an amateur sailor, fisherman, whale watching operator or other user of the marine domain, these rules, set out below, apply equally inside and outside the Pelagos Sanctuary.

The pie chart defines two areas that are essential when approaching cetaceans: the area of vigilance (yellow) and the forbidden area (red).



1. Area of vigilance (yellow)

The area of vigilance (**300 m**) defines the sector in which the disturbance caused by your boat (presence, noise and exhaust fumes) is strongly felt by the animals. When you enter this area, your behaviour must respect strict rules to limit this disturbance:

- the boat's speed must be constant and attuned to the speed of the slowest animal. It must not be more than 5 knots;
- any approach must be made according to a trajectory that gradually draws parallel to the animal's path (green arrow in the pie chart). The boat thus positions itself alongside the cetaceans, moving in the same direction;
- any sudden change of speed or direction is forbidden;
- to mitigate acoustic disturbance, sounders and sonar must be switched off;
- be even more careful, and limit your distance of approach if you remark the presence of new-born animals;
- you must immediately leave the area of vigilance if the animals are disturbed: for example, flight behaviour (acceleration, changing direction, trying to get away from the observer) must be considered as a sign of disturbance;
- observation time is limited to half an hour;
- if many boats are present, only one is tolerated within the area of vigilance. Observation time is then shortened to a quarter of an hour and the other boats have to wait patiently 300 m away. Radio contact between the various boats will enable the watching to be coordinated;

- when the observation is over, the boat must gradually leave the site, taking a path that clearly signals that it is leaving. The speed will remain moderate for a distance that is sufficient to avoid the risk of collision.

2. Forbidden area (red)

The forbidden area defines the sector which your boat must never enter (except when the cetaceans approach the boat of their own accord). This distance is **100 m**. Any nearer than this and the cetaceans will see your presence as a danger or an intrusion into their vital space, and their behaviour will become greatly disturbed by it.

Also, the boat must not enter the sector in front of the animals (reduced field of vision). Neither must it approach them from behind, since the boat may then be seen as a pursuer.

When the boat reaches the outside limit of the forbidden area, its relative speed must be reduced to zero and its engine put into neutral gear.

It is forbidden to enter groups, for this will cause social disturbance.

3. Special case when the animals come to the boat of their own accord

When cetaceans voluntarily approach the boat, the passengers must not try to touch them directly or with an instrument, bathe near them or feed them. Most of the above rules also remain in force, particularly the ban on entering groups, and keeping to a slow, regular pace.

4. Generally speaking...

Once the cetaceans are spotted, or at 1,000 m distance, particular vigilance and a speed limited to 10 knots are compulsory: other animals may be present in the sector and the risk of collision cannot be ruled out. Furthermore, a greater speed would be likely to disturb the animals, even at this greater distance.

Generally speaking, whale watching is not recommended within the 5-mile coastal strip, since the cetaceans there are already greatly disturbed by human activity.

An operator must accompany his trip with an educational talk on cetaceans and the marine environment. This must be given by a qualified, trained guide. He must be able to identify the species encountered, determine their activity phases and notice possible disturbance.

5. In short

- Slow pace and calm, constant advance the moment the cetaceans are spotted, especially within the 300m area;
- No approach closer than 100m;
- Length of observation limited to 30 minutes, 15 minutes if other boats are waiting;
- Only one boat within the 300 m area;
- Never try to touch, feed or swim with a cetacean.

RESOLUTION 9.18
MARINE DEBRIS

The Meeting of the Parties to the Agreement on the Conservation of Cetaceans of the Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea and contiguous Atlantic area:

Recalling the recent work on marine debris promoted by ACCOBAMS Resolution 8.20 on “Marine Litter and Chemical Pollution”,

Recalling the ACCOBAMS workshop convened in Catania on 6-7 April 2024 in collaboration with the University of Padova, with the objective to improve collection of relevant data, especially from stranded cetaceans, with a specific focus on identifying best practice related to monitoring ingested marine litter and entanglement evidence in the Agreement Area,

Taking into consideration that all the recommendations from the above-mentioned workshop were endorsed by the IWC Scientific Committee (Bled, Slovenia, 22 April - 3 May 2024),

Acknowledging the renewed political commitment to end plastic pollution, based on a comprehensive approach that addresses the full lifecycle of plastics, as mandated by UNEA resolution 5/14, in line with the Ministerial Declaration entitled “The Nice wake up call for an ambitious plastics treaty” launched at UNOC3,

Taking into consideration Recommendation 16.12 of the Scientific Committee on “Marine Debris”,

1. *Encourages* ACCOBAMS Parties to create and develop their own tissue banks and facilitate at a regional level, the exchange of tissue samples (from stranded cetaceans, and through the relevant CITES authorities), as appropriate, among scientific entities for joint analyses and retrospective studies;
2. *Invites* the Parties to the Barcelona Convention and the Member States to the European Union, where feasible:
 - a) to consider the inclusion of cetaceans as indicator species within, respectively, the Integrated Monitoring and Assessment Programme of the Mediterranean Sea and Coast and Related Assessment Criteria (IMAP) candidate indicator 24 and relevant criteria of descriptor 10 (D10C3 and D10C4) of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive through the respective review processes;
 - b) to promote the use of cetaceans as indicator species for micro-plastics (i.e., *Balaenoptera physalus*) and macro-litter pollution (i.e., *Physeter macrocephalus* and *Ziphius cavirostris*) in the Agreement Area and to use *Tursiops spp.* as indicators at sub-basin levels;
3. *Requests* the Secretariat and the Scientific Committee to liaise with relevant technical groups on the subject matter and consider sharing data with relevant platforms, such as The Global Plastics Hub of the UNEP Global Partnership on Plastic Pollution and Marine Litter (GPML) and others;

4. *Encourages* the Scientific Committee to:
- a) strengthen coordinated effort to better understand the toxicological effect on cetaceans of macro- and micro-litter ingestion, considering chemical, ecotoxicological, and physical effects;
 - b) prepare a harmonised diagnostic methodology that includes:
 - evaluation of the presence of marine litter in marine mammals' gastro-intestinal tract;
 - categorization and quantification of identified marine litter through the determination of polymers by spectroscopy technique;
 - detection of plastic additives and absorbed contaminants to plastics in organism tissues;
 - development of risk, impact, and mortality indexes;
 - c) continue encouraging joint efforts in the Adriatic Sea to merge data on bottlenose dolphin-human interactions (including set net interactions and marine debris ingestion) and mitigation efforts, as well as the creation of a multi-level and multi-disciplinary model to identify hotspot risks;
 - d) propose:
 - the definition and development of new methods to evaluate the exposure to plastics and plastic additives in free-ranging organisms, including new approaches that could reveal the exposure to a plethora of stressors (micro-plastics, emerging chemicals, legacy chemicals, etc.) and drive the identification of new end-points;
 - the investigation on multiple stressors and the development of new diagnostic techniques to understand the effects of cumulative stressors on cetaceans, on both:
 - stranded organisms, investigating the potential ecotoxicological effects caused by the ingestion of marine litter, and emerging and legacy chemicals, through biomarker identification and analysis of tissues;
 - in vitro experiments, assessing the effects of micro- and nano-plastics (combined with emerging and legacy chemicals) through new technologies applied on cetacean cell lines, organoids and 'organ-on-chip' technology;
5. *Requests* the Secretariat to further collaborate with other organisations such as the International Whaling Commission and the Secretariats of Bonn, Barcelona and Bucharest Conventions, General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean and with the Sub-Regional Coordination Units to provide support for capacity building on monitoring the impact of marine debris on cetaceans.

RESOLUTION 9.19
CETACEAN PASSPORT AND SEMI-CAPTIVITY GUIDELINES

The Meeting of the Parties to the Agreement on the Conservation of Cetaceans of the Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea and contiguous Atlantic area:

Recalling Resolution 5.14 on live removals of bottlenose dolphins (*Tursiops truncatus*) in the Black Sea, which asked the Black Sea Parties, in coordination with the Permanent Secretariat of the Commission on the Protection of the Black Sea against Pollution, to carry out an assessment and an inventory of all specimens of bottlenose dolphins kept in captivity by means of genetic, morphological and photographic identification methods,

Recalling Resolution 3.20 providing Guidelines for the Release of Cetaceans into the Wild and stressing that particular attention should be paid in relocating captive animals in a wild or semi-wild condition,

Concerned of possible genetic contaminations of local populations in case of escape from semi-enclosed facilities,

Considering the existing international legal frameworks asking for proper identification and internationally recognised system for identifying cetaceans kept by humans in officially accredited facilities,

Recalling Resolution 8.11 on “Cetacean Population Genetics”, as well as ACCOBAMS Best Practices on Cetacean Population Genetics, which provides proper details on cetaceans’ samples for genetic analyses, their preservations and technical approaches,

Taking into consideration Recommendation 16.13 of the Scientific Committee on “Semi-captivity (passport & guidelines)”,

1. *Adopts* the process towards cetacean genetic passport as presented in ACCOBAMS-MOP9/2025/Inf34, especially by mandating the Secretariat, in collaboration with the Scientific Committee, to:
 - identify reference laboratories within the ACCOBAMS Agreement area capable of analysing the proposed genetic markers;
 - collaborate with the European Association of Zoos and Aquaria (EAZA) to exchange and harmonise procedures, protocols, and information on existing captive cetacean populations;
 - establish a genetic reference library using tissue samples already preserved in existing tissue banks, in order to define a baseline set of genetically characterised individuals for comparison in future analyses;
 - create a centralised database with limited access to store genetic information on characterised animals, enabling comparison and validation of future genetic passports;

2. *Recommends* that Parties:
 - adopt and follow the form proposed in [Annex 1](#), which calls for the inclusion of genetic and other relevant individually distinct biological data, and including details on CITES permits, as well as information and laboratory results from genetic analyses, which should be performed for all the specimens to confirm their origin;

- include genetic analysis in the national procedures for the identification of cetaceans kept in aquaria and dolphinaria;
- transmit to the ACCOBAMS Secretariat the above-mentioned form, which shall be kept in a centralised repository with limited access,
- refer to the Guidelines for Best Practices during the Installation and Management of Semi-enclosed Facilities for Cetacean Species in the ACCOBAMS Area ([Annex 2](#)), as well as to the Procedural Steps for Requesting Advice from the ACCOBAMS Advisory Committee on Semi-Enclosed Facilities ([Annex 3](#)), when this kind of initiatives are prospected within their jurisdiction.

ANNEX 1
Genetic Passport Template

Individual information			
1. Name		5. ID Type	
2. Species	<i>Latin name</i>	6. ID number	
	<i>Common name</i>		
3. Sex	<i>M/F</i>	7. Place of birth	<i>Specify complete address</i>
4. Origin	<i>wild/zoo/other</i>	8. Date of birth	
9. Previous facilities	<i>a.</i>	<i>b.</i>	<i>c.</i>
CITES information			
10. Certificate number		11. Date of Issue	
12. Country of origin		13. Permit number*	
14. Date of Issue*		15. Country of import*	
Parents information			
Father ID details**		Mother ID details**	
16. Name		21. Name	
17. Species		22. Species	
18. ID Type		23. ID Type	
19. ID number		24. ID number	
20. Origin		25. Origin	
Physical marks and features			
26. Total length (cm)		27. Total weight (kg)	
28. General picture from the left***			

29. General picture from the right***			
30. General picture from the top***			
31. Picture of the dorsal fin (from the right and from the left)***			
32. Picture of the caudal fin (from the top)***			
33. Morphological peculiarities on the left side****			
a.	b.	c.	d.
e.	f.	g.	h.
34. Morphological peculiarities on the right side****			
a.	b.	c.	d.
e.	f.	g.	h.
35. X-ray for age determination	Y/N		
<i>* If imported</i>		<i>*** include pictures in the form and attached originals</i>	
<i>** Include all documentation for parents</i>		<i>**** Refer with different letter marks on the drawings</i>	
Genotype			
36. Laboratory			
37. ID of the sample in the laboratory		38. Date of analysis	
39. Sample description		40. Sampling details	

41. Species confirmation		42. Targeted genes	
43. Locus details	<i>Fragment Size</i>	<i>Primer Sequence</i>	
<i>a. D08</i>			
<i>b. EV37</i>			
<i>c. KWM2</i>			
<i>d. KWM9</i>			
<i>e. KWM12</i>			
<i>f. MK6</i>			
<i>g. MK8</i>			
<i>h. MK9</i>			
<i>i. Ttr04</i>			
<i>j10. Ttr11</i>			
<i>k. Ttr19</i>			
<i>l.Ttr58</i>			
<i>m. Ttr63</i>			
<i>n. TexVet05</i>			
<i>o. TexVet07</i>			
<i>p.</i>			
<i>q.</i>			
<i>r.</i>			

Explanatory Notes for Genetic Passport Template:

Individual information

1. Name: Official name or identifier of the individual cetacean.
2. Species: Scientific (Latin) and common name of the species.
3. Sex: Indicate Male (M) or Female (F).
4. Origin: Specify if the animal was born in the wild, in a zoo, or other facility.
5. ID Type: Type of identification used (e.g., microchip, tag).
6. ID Number: Unique identifier corresponding to the ID Type.
7. Place of Birth: Full address of the birth location.
8. Date of Birth: Use standard format (DD/MM/YYYY).
9. Previous Facilities: List up the last three facilities where the animal was previously kept in captivity.

CITES information

10. Certificate Number: Number of the CITES certificate for the specimen.
11. Date of Issue: Date when the CITES certificate was issued. Use standard format (DD/MM/YYYY).
12. Country of Origin: Country where the animal originated.
13. Permit Number (if imported): Number of the import permit.
14. Date of Issue (if imported): Date of the import permit. Use standard format (DD/MM/YYYY).
15. Country of Import (if imported): Country where the animal was imported.

Parents information

16. Father's Name: Name of the father.
17. Father's Species: Scientific (Latin) and common name of the species.
18. Father's ID Type: Type of identification used for the father.
19. Father's ID Number: Unique identifier for the father.
20. Father's Origin: Specify if the father was born in the wild, in a zoo, or other facility.
21. Mother's Name: Name of the mother.
22. Mother's Species: Scientific (Latin) and common name of the species.
23. Mother's ID Type: Type of identification used for the mother.
24. Mother's ID Number: Unique identifier for the mother.
25. Mother's Origin: Specify if the mother was born in the wild, in a zoo, or other facility.

Physical marks and features

26. Total Length (cm): Measure in cm from the tip of the rostrum to the central tail.
27. Total Weight (kg): weight in kg.
28. General Picture Left: Provide clear photo from the left view.
29. General Picture Right: Provide clear photo from the right view.
30. General Picture Top: Provide clear photo from the top view.
31. Picture of the dorsal fin: Provide clear photo of the dorsal fin from the right side and from the left side.
32. Picture of the caudal Fin: Provide clear photo of the caudal fin from the top view.
33. Morphological peculiarities on the left side: Describe, and illustrate with photo if relevant, any scars, abnormalities, or injuries on the left side.
34. Morphological peculiarities on the right side: Describe, and illustrate with photo if relevant, any scars, abnormalities, or injuries on the right side.
35. X-ray for age determination: Indicate whether an X-ray was used to estimate the age of the cetacean. Mark **Y** for Yes or **N** for No.

Genotype

36. Accredited laboratory: Name of the lab performing genetic analysis.
37. ID of the sample in the laboratory: Internal lab identifier for the sample.
38. Date of Analysis: Date when the genetic analysis was performed. Use standard format (DD/MM/YYYY).
39. Sample Description: Type of sample (e.g., blood, swab, tissue).
40. Sampling Details: Date of the sampling (use standard format DD/MM/YYYY), method used for sampling, preservation technique, and sampler's name.
41. Species Confirmation: Result of genetic species verification.
42. Targeted Genes: Genes analysed for identification.
43. Locus Details: For each genetic marker (e.g., D08, EV37), provide fragment size and primer sequence. Add other genetic markers if needed.

ANNEX 2**Guidelines for Best Practices During the Installation and Management of Semi-enclosed Facilities for Cetacean Species in the ACCOBAMS Area**

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1. BACKGROUND

Semi-captivity of cetaceans has been an issue considered for several years by ACCOBAMS, which was addressed in particular in two reports: “Taking of cetaceans, dolphinarium and quasi-dolphinarium: a legal analysis relating to ACCOBAMS Parties” (ACCOBAMS-MOP7/2019/Inf 09); and “Scientific perspective on ‘potential marine semi-enclosed facilities’ in the ACCOBAMS Area” (ACCOBAMS-MOP8/2022/Inf52).

Based on the recommendations of the latter, the Eighth Meeting of the Parties to ACCOBAMS (MOP8) agreed that the Scientific Committee should establish an Advisory Committee on semi-enclosed facilities to provide guidance to interested Parties in relation to all questions related to semi-enclosed facilities. At its Fifteenth meeting held on 10-11 May 2023 in Tunis, the ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee adopted Terms of Reference for an ACCOBAMS Advisory Committee on semi-enclosed facilities (ACCOBAMS-SC15/2023/Doc17). The present document, drafted by the members of this Advisory Committee, has been largely adapted from the document *Standards for Cetacean Sanctuaries* adopted by The Global Federation of Animal Sanctuaries (GFAS) and released in June 2023, taking into account the ACCOBAMS framework.

A few initiatives have been made public, which aim at providing increasingly necessary facilities posing an alternative to dolphinarium and marine parks, by creating the so-called cetacean sanctuaries or refuges. In an ACCOBAMS’ context it is suggested to use the latter term *refuge*, to avoid confusion with concepts of marine protected areas. For example, the “Pelagos Sanctuary for Mediterranean whales and dolphins”, a well-known protected area in the Mediterranean, has a completely different nature and goal than dolphin refuges. Hence, tentatively, hereafter Semi-enclosed Facilities for Cetacean Species will be referred as refuge/s.

It must be emphasised that a true refuge intends to approximate a natural cetacean habitat to the fullest extent possible while promoting diverse, natural behaviours and relationships amongst the cetaceans. The welfare of cetaceans takes priority over all other considerations, including visitors, caregivers, scientists and donors. Cetacean refuges, as do traditional dolphinarium and marine parks, must provide human care essential for animal health and safety.

Finally, the recent application should be noted of the EU Directive 2016/429 on transmissible animal diseases and amending and repealing certain acts in the area of animal health, also named ‘Animal Health Law’ (AHL) and the Regulation 2035/2019 supplementing Regulation (EU) 2016/429 of the European Parliament and of the Council as regards rules for establishments keeping terrestrial animals and hatcheries, and the traceability of certain kept terrestrial animals and hatching apply to potential cetacean refuges.

These legal frameworks dealing with diseases transmission in all the animals kept under human care, including terrestrial and aquatic wild animals, should be applied by EU members and candidate Countries. This legal framework provides a well-defined legal classification for all the facilities keeping animals, including those maintaining wild animals in a confined establishment. All the member states will adopt differently the classification of the different establishments and, in case of proposal of a dolphin refuge, this national classification should be considered as a legal reference.

2. CETACEAN HOUSING

2.1. General considerations

The habitat and living conditions consider hygiene and the species' physiological, psychological, and social needs. This includes consideration of outdoor and temporary/short-term indoor space, vertical and horizontal space, and diversity and complexity of space.

Policies and procedures are in place such that personnel can enter and exit enclosures without risk of the animals escaping, and can shift animals as appropriate between and out of enclosures prior to entering the enclosure. Facility design takes into account caregiver-animal safety and ease of maintaining a positive relationship.

Animals are provided access to as many areas of the enclosures as possible at all times, except during facility maintenance activities, unless security or welfare concerns dictate otherwise. All enclosures are constructed without creating 'dead ends' to allow for freedom of movement of subordinate individuals.

Animals are provided with regular access to outdoor space with sufficient room to engage in natural behaviours and designed to promote species-specific wellbeing. Access is ideally given daily, with consideration to weather and animals' individual needs (e.g., animals in quarantine or isolation, or being observed for medical reasons, may be kept indoors), and species-specific risks.

The habitats include an acoustic monitoring system and provide appropriate visual and acoustic barriers and physical distance from the public/human activity, where necessary. Exposure to high-intensity sounds or noises are avoided. Appliances or machines in the vicinity of the enclosure that produce such noise in the animals' hearing range are insulated as much as possible.

The habitat provides security from predators and unauthorized human access. 24-hour systems are in place to minimize the risks of theft, malicious damage or harm to animals. This may include staff on site, security guards, security cameras, alarm systems, etc. Moreover, in addition to the primary permeable perimeter on the ocean side, a secondary permeable barrier should be considered to prevent direct human access and to serve as secondary containment should an animal escape.

Enclosures have enough area (see Housing section below) per animal to accommodate natural individual and group behaviours/activities. Enclosures provide enough area for individuals to be spatially dispersed from one another according to the individual preference or in the event of social conflict.

Quarantine facilities have appropriate housing and design features for treatment of injured or ill animals. Healthy animals admitted to quarantine have as large an enclosure as possible to help maintain natural locomotion and behaviours. Features of the quarantine facilities should comply with EU Zoo Directive 1999/22/CE and EAZA guidelines for marine mammals kept under human care.

Enclosures are designed to allow for safe cleaning. Any products used for cleaning the enclosure and other features (e.g., foot baths, cleaning products for food buckets and enrichment items) should be reviewed by attending veterinarian for use with the species housed.

A regular program of refuge maintenance is in place. Any enclosure in need of repair, or any defect that may cause harm to animals, is immediately repaired or replaced. If that is not an option, the animals are relocated to an alternative secure enclosure.

All gates and walkways are constructed of materials which minimize any injury to the animals due to shape, sharp or rough surfaces and/or those which would create additional noise in the environment.

If enclosures use netting for walls or floors, the netting is appropriate for the species. If enclosures use netting or another form of barrier for “walls” the distance between the top of the wall and any walkway above or adjacent to it is only a few centimetres wide to minimize the possibility that an animal gets entangled or trapped.

2.2. Housing

1. Many factors influence the minimum space required for animals, including natural species-specific behaviours, health needs, and social groupings.
2. For cases where mixed-species housing is foreseen, enclosure dimensions can be adjusted accordingly so that the space reflects that required for multiple species if housed separately.
3. The refuge’s area should be at least equivalent to the average daily swim performed in the wild for the species being housed. Moreover, enclosures should provide enough space to allow the animals to move horizontally in a straight line for at least 10+ tail strokes. The determination of average daily swim distance should be based on the best available science as determined by consultation with experts on conspecifics in the wild and current available scientific literature, at the time the refuge is designed. The process used to determine the average daily swim distance should be documented and verifiable. The latest *Standards and Guidelines for the management of aquatic mammals under human care* by European Association for Aquatic Mammals (EAAM), for bottlenose dolphins, propose a minimum pool surface area of 550 m² and a pool volume of 2,000m³, for 1-6 animals (adding 75 m² and a 300m³ per additional animal. These values should be considered as an absolute minimum. In the context of a modern and newly created dolphin refuge, we should expect facilities considerably larger.
4. The refuge’s depth should be equal to or greater than the typical dive depth in a near- shore environment for the species being housed, for at least one-third of the overall space. If the typical dive depth is not known for the species being housed, then, at a minimum, a depth equal to or greater than 3 times the body length of the resident species should be used. The determination of typical dive depth in a near-shore environment should be based on the best available science. The process of expert consultation and literature review used to determine the typical dive depth of conspecifics in the wild in a near-shore environment should be documented and verifiable.
5. The refuge should contain variable depths and range in natural topography.
6. The water volume provided should allow for the animal(s) to dive and spend the majority of their time below the water surface.
7. Animals requiring treatment for illness or injury are housed in enclosures that allow for appropriate treatment and ease of care.
8. Cetacean Refuge sites must possess the requirements to ensure the well-being of the animals on the basis of their ecology, behaviour and physiology. For example, a potentially feasible site may be either in a sheltered, shallow and semi-enclosed body of marine water such as a small bay or fjord, or in a coastal lagoon, where appropriate enclosures can be fenced.

9. Enclosed areas need to be as protected as possible from severe weather, and have easy access for personnel to care for the animals in all weathers.
10. To ensure that the refuge animals can experience acoustic connectivity to their environment, the refuge should have at least a portion of its perimeter defined by an acoustically permeable barrier (e.g., an enclosed bay may be defined by land on three sides but defined by net at the opening of the bay, thus allowing acoustic connectivity).
11. The shape of the refuge perimeter does not disrupt the swimming pattern of the animals in a harmful way or allow any animals to be cornered.
12. Experts in captive cetacean behaviour should be consulted to ensure that netting or other containment material is designed to minimize risk to the refuge residents. The permeable barrier should include design features that prevent cetaceans from getting trapped under any floating walkways or entangled due to 'bagging' (i.e., slack in a net caused by water movement), in any cables, floats, edges or anchoring systems. The mesh size and gauge for the permeable barrier is appropriate for containing the animals without risk of entanglement, and suitable for excluding wild species or allowing them to pass through without risk of entanglement).
13. A comprehensive list of local species known to be present in the area of the refuge should be compiled and used to inform the decision on mesh size and gauge.
14. Netting should be constructed to maintain its integrity (i.e., mesh size and gauge) throughout the required duration of the enclosure, be able to be effectively cleaned and maintained while in place, and to minimize abrasion or other potential risks to the refuge cetaceans or wild species in the area. Double netting should be considered as a basic measure to prevent dolphin escapes.
15. The anchoring system for the perimeter and any associated structures should be robust enough to withstand normal weather patterns for the region (as determined by marine engineers).
16. The barriers should be inspected and maintained at regular intervals to avoid the accumulation of biological fouling, which could compromise the integrity of the barrier over time by creating significant drag. Maintenance may be preventative and include components such as algae and/or marine debris control booms.
17. Barriers and enclosures are inspected routinely for signs of breach.
18. The refuge staff should have the capacity to repair permeable barriers on-site in an emergency situation and replace them when necessary.
19. The structure that the permeable barrier hangs from should not pose a risk to the animals being housed or wild species and be well marked.
20. A marine vessel 'no-go' zone should be established and clearly marked around the perimeter of the refuge to ensure that the animals cannot be accessed by the public via water.
21. The refuge design should allow for continuous monitoring of the animals throughout the entire refuge, both visually and acoustically to minimize blind spots. This may include a network of underwater and above-water cameras and hydrophones.
22. Maintenance of operational data archives (e.g., video recordings, acoustic recordings) will be necessary.

2.3. Gates

1. Animal holding areas (i.e., separation areas and larger refuge areas) should be equipped with gates to allow for the movement of animals between areas when needed.
2. Gates should be appropriately sized to the species held in the refuge and designed to allow for animals' normal swimming while traveling through. Moreover, caregivers must be able to have a clear view of enclosures and animals while operating the doors.

3. Gates and doors are constructed of appropriate materials and designed to ensure safety of animals and humans and to remain functional under all circumstances.
4. The refuge should have tools available on-site to guide animals to a specific location (e.g., herding and crowding nets).

2.4. Shelter and Shade

1. Ideally, refuges are located where water depth is sufficient to filter the majority of light, to protect residents from overexposure to UV light simply by spending more time at or near the bottom of the enclosure(s). Non-reflective enclosure substrate is encouraged to protect animals from overexposure to UV light.
2. Areas of shelter from the sun should be provided for the animals where water depth may not be sufficient to filter the majority of light, such as with medical or quarantine pools.

2.5. Sanitation

1. The refuge must be designed based on a carefully planned 'carrying capacity', which should be documented in a plan created prior to moving any animals into it. This means that, based on site-specific hydrology and physical features, as well as anticipated waste production per animal (calculated for each individual based on species, surrounding water temperature and daily food intake), there is a limit to how many animals can be housed at the refuge without negatively impacting (nutrient and bacterial loading) the surrounding environment.
2. Once animals are residing in the refuge, impact should be monitored with regular (annual at a minimum, in addition to every time a new animal is introduced) sediment and water column sampling. All sampling records should be archived.
3. Monitoring protocols should be in place for animal feedings so that food waste within the refuge itself is kept to a minimum and not concentrated in a single area (e.g., underwater cameras at the location of remote food deployment devices).
4. Protocols should be in place to remove food not consumed by refuge animals.
5. Each enclosure/separation area has dedicated equipment and tools to prevent cross contamination. When resources restrict the ability to have dedicated tools, tools are disinfected between enclosures to prevent the spread of parasites and disease.
6. Adequate protocols must be in place to dispose of waste, including food waste and human waste/trash so that it does not accumulate on-site in a way that negatively impacts the local environment or area in which the animals are residing.
7. Quarantine facilities must be designed in order to be properly sanitized: surfaces should be easily cleanable and disinfected with round corners, smooth edges and proper water filtration systems.

2.6. Environment

1. The refuge should be located in a climate appropriate to the animals being housed (i.e., seasonal fluctuations, maximum storm cycles, and days of sunshine per year should all be within the normal range for the species in the wild)
2. The temperature should be within an acceptable range for the species housed. Allowance is made to accommodate individual animals unable to tolerate temperatures above or below the usual range of comfort for the species. Housing of geriatric, juvenile, and/or ill animals may not be appropriate for some refuges and will require case- by-case review. In case, proper facilities for these categories should be projected with the capability of controlling temperatures.

3. Water temperature should be within the thermoneutral range for the species. Records of daily water temperature should be maintained along with water quality data.
4. A hydrological study of the area should be obtained prior to construction of the refuge and should be kept on record.
5. The refuge area should have adequate flushing, ensuring that there is not harmful (to the refuge animals or surrounding ecosystem) nutrient accumulation from waste material in the vicinity of the refuge. If natural tidal flushing is not adequate pumps, paddles or sprayers can be used to increase flushing.
6. The water current and dynamics of the site should not be strong enough to threaten the integrity of the netted perimeter, anchoring system, or associated structures.
7. Water quality in the area should have adequate dissolved oxygen, minimum turbidity appropriate for the ecosystem and resident species, minimal contaminant and pollution levels, as well as locally appropriate and resident species appropriate nutrient, pH and salinity levels. Water quality should be monitored for temperature, salinity, pH, pathogens daily, weekly for pollutants, and records of results should be archived. Parameters should comply with any governmental or permitting agency mandates and consistent with bathing water quality regulations.
8. The refuge should be located in an area protected from large sources of acoustic pollution (e.g., not directly next to a shipping lane, not near a military testing site). Low level acoustic pollution (e.g., recreational boaters) should be limited, either by selecting a site that is more remote and thus not exposed to heavy activity, or by creating and enforcing a no-go zone around the refuge that limits acoustic pollution to a level that does not interfere with the animal's daily activity. The impacts of acoustic stimuli should be monitored using passive acoustic monitoring coupled with behavioural observations of the animals.
9. If the refuge overlaps with habitat for sensitive or protected flora or fauna, protocols should be in place to ensure that normal refuge activities do not negatively impact those sensitive species. As stated above, a double fence should prevent any escape or intrusion. Additionally, a contingency plan for any incidental exit or entrance should be prepared.
10. Supplemental lighting is provided as needed to ensure adequate light for caregivers to observe animals, clean enclosures and perform related animal care tasks. Light pollution from artificial lights should be minimized along the shoreline of the refuge.

3. NUTRITION REQUIREMENTS

3.1. Hydration

1. Fresh clean water must be available in sufficient quantity at all times to all individuals via high quality food and supplemental hydration when required.
2. Fish quality and water content are kept at the highest possible level to maintain appropriate water absorption during feeds.
3. If hydration supplementation is deemed necessary, hydration should be achieved via established methods, utilizing the least invasive methods whenever possible, under the supervision and direction of the attending veterinarian.
4. Hydration should be monitored utilizing regular voluntary blood sampling, examination of eyes, mucous membranes and skin.
5. Water used for hydration should be at room temperature (temperature of the food prep area or comfortable indoor temperature) when administered (unless providing ice cubes is the method utilized).

6. Potable water sources should be tested for quality and contaminants annually at a minimum (more frequently in location with annual variations in water quality) and whenever there is a change to the water system or reason for concern (such as an animal exhibiting a medical concern for an unknown reason).

3.2. Diet

1. A balanced and healthy diet is provided appropriately based on the needs of each animal, following veterinary instructions for special needs.
2. A veterinarian or qualified veterinary nutritionist periodically reviews all aspects of the animals' diets at the refuge and makes adjustments to individual diets with consideration of species, age, life stage, size and condition. The calories in foods used as enrichment are considered when planning the overall diet.
3. Diets of individual animals (including vitamin supplementation) are of a quality, quantity and variety to match the physiological and psychological state of the individual as it changes over time, with consideration for the age, life stage, species, condition, size and health of the individual.
4. The refuge utilizes a feeding procedure that ensures each individual receives adequate nutrition regardless of status in social groups, such as routine observation of feeding activity. Each animal's daily dietary needs are available to animal care staff.
5. Daily food consumption and other behaviours are monitored and, if any changes are detected, immediately reported.
6. Feed types should remain varied as appropriate for each species to ensure that the animals are able to easily adapt to changes in food availability.
7. Protocol should be implemented for testing the quality of each lot of food. Food quality is continually monitored. Food safety and quality should meet criteria for human consumption included in current national regulations. If not already adopted by the food suppliers, who should provide detailed information, protocols should include analysis of calories, nutritional components, lipid oxidation, histamines and peroxides, contamination, and microbiology sampling such as enterobacteria, salmonella, and mesophilic aerobes.
8. Social status must not negatively impact food quantity for any individual animal (e.g., dominant animals taking more food than subordinate animals and thus certain animals not receiving their required daily intake).
9. If animals are believed to be consuming live food items from the habitat, similar food items should be collected and sampled to assess nutritional content, as well as screened for contaminants and toxicity.
10. Prior to offering vitamins or other supplements, the individual animal's health and condition, as well as the diet, are reviewed by the veterinarian or a nutritionist experienced in the species' care.
11. Species-appropriate supplements should be utilized to support each animal's nutritional needs and compensate for the nutrient loss due to the feed freezing and thawing process.
12. To the extent possible, food should be sourced from local fisheries using environmentally friendly and sustainable methods (but this effort should not compromise the nutritional needs of the animals by dictating type or quantity of feed). A dedicated program involving local fishermen could be implemented considering local fish species, in order to adapt the dolphins to more natural conditions.
13. Any diet changes, based on weight and condition of the animal, food consumption, activity level and other medical or behavioural considerations, should be made or approved by the veterinarian or other qualified personnel, with any adjustments made to the entire diet to ensure continued nutritional balance.

3.3. Food Presentation and Feeding Techniques

1. The feeding schedule should make every effort possible to mimic the frequency and timing of feeding patterns in the wild for each species.
2. Records for each feed, including the type of food, amount consumed, supplements and medications given, and behaviors' during feeding should be kept.
3. Feeding in multiple locations can encourage wider utilization of the refuge area and helps to ensure that low-ranking individuals have adequate access to food.
4. Feeding stations are able to be monitored effectively both above and below the water, so that food intake can be monitored and uneaten food does not accumulate in any location
5. A variety of feeding techniques and locations should be offered to encourage more diverse feeding behaviours (e.g., remote feeders, enrichment devices, and, when appropriate, live food)
6. All methods used to encourage engagement with enriching feeding methods should be based on positive reinforcement.

3.4. Food Storage and Handling

1. Food processing and storage should be done in dedicated kitchen and rooms build according the national regulation for human consumptions: walls and floors should be easily cleanable with round edges and corners; the surface materials have to be easily cleaned with water and routine disinfectants at the working surface; the room should have enough light to ensure proper evaluation of the food and dirty areas; the working areas should have proper drinkable water supply and drainage for cleaning; windows and doors should be equipped with mosquito nets to avoid entrance of flies and other insects; a pest control and cleaning programs should be adopted and routinely implemented.
2. Food is stored, handled and prepared in an appropriate manner to retain nutritional value, freshness, and prevent its deterioration, invasive species or other forms of contamination.
3. Frozen fish or other frozen food should be stored in freezers that are maintained at a maximum temperature of -18°C. A recording system for temperature control should be adopted.
4. Items frozen for use are dated and labelled, and no frozen items are thawed and refrozen. A freezer register should be adopted.
5. Frozen food items should be stored in a sanitary freezer, away from the walls, elevated off the floors and away from the condenser/fans of the freezer to allow for proper air circulation within the freezer.
6. Thawed fish/food should be stored in a refrigerator or kept on ice to maintain a temperature no greater than 4°C, used within 12 hours of thawing to minimize bacterial overgrowth, and clearly labelled with the time of thawing.
7. Food items requiring refrigeration are stored in a clean, dry refrigerator, and/or ordered at regular intervals in amounts that can be used prior to spoilage.
8. Products are dated and expired food as well as bags damaged by pests are discarded.
9. Two to three months' worth of food availability should be ensured at all times.
10. During its handling, food is protected against deterioration, mold, and/or contamination by insects, birds, rodents or other animals.
11. Food preparation surfaces are thoroughly cleaned and disinfected between uses and personnel wash hands thoroughly prior to handling food. Wearing gloves during food preparation is recommended.
12. Staff should avoid handling food while sick.

13. Thawing should take place in a refrigerator. If this is not possible or food is still frozen, clean, cold, running salt water can be used. If salt water is not available, thawing with potable, running fresh water may be considered, assuming the area/water is clean and post-thaw refrigeration remains prompt.
14. Food handling protocols should be plainly visible in the food preparation and storage areas.

4. VETERINARY CARE

4.1. Veterinary Program Personnel

1. The refuge's veterinary medical program is developed and carried out under the supervision of a licensed and experienced cetacean veterinarian and with adequate support personnel.
2. Refuges unable to maintain a full-time veterinarian have access to a part-time veterinarian with suitable training and experience for the animals housed.
3. The refuge has properly trained and qualified professional and supporting personnel as necessary to implement: (1) husbandry (caregivers) and (2) technical support (veterinary technicians, or individuals trained at the refuge).
4. One or more personnel is trained and designated to deal with emergencies until a veterinarian arrives or is reached. According to national legislation and under the direction of the veterinarian, he or she should be able to, perform basic first aid, assess animals, administer prescribed medications and treatments, be responsible for administration of post-surgical care, and be skilled in maintaining appropriate medical records.
5. Refuges have the appropriate number of personnel, including veterinarians and veterinary technicians or assistants, to meet these standards for all animals in their care 24/7, with consideration given to the number of animals, number of enclosures and/or social groups, and individual medical conditions or needs (e.g., a large number of geriatric or elderly animals, known disabilities or conditions, etc.).
6. The attending veterinarian(s) must be comfortable conferring with other marine mammal veterinarians/specialists as needed for complex cases.

4.2. Veterinary on-site Capabilities (laboratory & diagnostics)

1. The refuge has on-site and/or off-site capabilities for pathology, surgery, and other veterinary procedures and treatments, and any on-site facilities are appropriately maintained. If it does not have an on-site veterinary facility, or only a partially outfitted facility, it has an arrangement with a nearby veterinary practice for off-site treatment as needed.
2. On-site and/or off-site facilities and services include the following:
3. Diagnostic capabilities including cytology, microbiology, parasitology, complete blood count, blood chemistry, urinalysis, serology, radiology, ultrasound, endoscopy and other appropriate laboratory procedures.
4. Necropsy capabilities include capacity for collection of tissues for histopathology.
5. Medical treatment facilities that are clean, have adequate lighting and ventilation, can be easily cleaned and disinfected, and with access to appropriate anaesthetic and emergency equipment.
6. Drugs should be acquired managed and stored according to existing legal framework.
7. Medical treatment equipment is maintained in good working order and is on a program of routine preventive maintenance.
8. Only a licensed veterinarian or veterinary nurse can perform all medical procedures using best practices and protocols for the species.

9. Protocols, guidelines and best practices should be recognised as international standard and they should be approved by a scientific and ethical committee.
10. Veterinarians and support personnel are compassionate and knowledgeable about the humane aspects of animal treatment, including the proper use of anaesthetics, analgesics, and tranquilizers.
11. Basic physical capture and restraint equipment to facilitate medical treatment is available at the refuge and there is the possibility to rapidly isolate an animal in a way that allows veterinary or care staff to access an animal in the event it is medically or otherwise necessary (slide outs are acceptable in most situations, but the refuge should be equipped with a medical lift or medical pool area with hydraulic lift floor that can facilitate safe access to an animal unable to or unwilling to slide out).
12. Medical lifts should be appropriately sized to the species held, designed to remain functional under all circumstances (e.g., be easily connected to a back-up power sources in the event of a power outage), and maintained in good working order.
13. The ability to weigh each animal should be incorporated into the design of the refuge so that every cetacean resident can be effectively weighed (including those in quarantine).
14. Necropsies on any deceased animals, will be done at a separate facility. If on-site, this area should be physically separated from live animal holding areas and daily care facilities such as food storage, as well as from other medical areas used to treat live animals.
15. Removal of cetacean remains from the refuge should follow all applicable levels of regulations.
16. A detailed report of necropsy results must be archived at the facility. Cause of death and contributing factors for each animal that dies at the facility should be reviewed. Any appropriate changes to husbandry protocols, facilities, and/or medical care should be diligently incorporated based on the findings.

4.3. Preventative Medicine Program

1. The veterinary medical program includes long term preventative medical protocols and disease surveillance and containment procedures and is developed and carried out under the supervision of a licensed veterinarian with training or experience in providing medical care for the species housed at the refuge, and who is aware of any specific health issues of the individual animals.
2. Preventive medicine protocol will address the following:
 - regularly scheduled physical examinations/health assessments and blood analysis
 - behavioural assessments
 - quarantine procedures
 - parasite surveillance and control
 - immunization
 - contraception if not regulated with social group management
 - infectious disease screening
 - dental prophylaxis
 - periodic reviews of diets and monitoring of feed intake
 - applicable species-specific husbandry needs
 - routine water quality screening
3. Daily health checks of each animal should include (but are not limited to):
 - Observing physical appearance
 - Assessing activity level
 - Monitoring behaviour and eating habits
 - Nature and frequency of respirations

4. Animals are immunized as recommended by the attending veterinarian, using currently recommended procedures and products as appropriate for the country, species and individual. When animals are immunized on-site by refuge personnel, the type, serial number, and source of the product are recorded in the individual animal's medical record.
5. Each animal should receive at least one comprehensive medical exam annually. This is a minimum standard for preventative medicine and should be exceeded when conditions warrant.
6. A comprehensive medical exam should include:
 - Morphometrics (including body build index and/or weight)
 - Body condition exam consistent with any applicable scoring system (including skin, eyes, teeth, genital opening, anus, blowhole, mentation and responsiveness, buoyancy, overall symmetry, etc.)
 - Dental examination
 - Blood sampling (routine haematology and serum chemistry, hormone and additional analysis as indicated)
 - Blowhole cytology and microbiology, including antibiotic resistance, and evaluation of respiratory system health
 - Endoscopy or gastric wash and collection of gut microbiome data
 - Fecal sampling (cytology, parasitology, and bacterial culture, possibly including microbiomics, proteomics and metabolomics)
 - Pathogen screening (tailored to the specific pathogens of concern for the region, species, and individual history)
 - Diagnostic sonography
7. Each animal is weighed annually at a minimum, either during a routine physical or through the use of a built-in scale integrated into slide-outs, to monitor for signs of illness and to determine dosages for pharmaceuticals and chemical anaesthetics.

4.4. Quarantine and Isolation Care and Facilities

1. The refuge should have separation areas for separation of animals not in need of full medical quarantine (e.g., animals in need of separation due to behavioural considerations, separating females from males during fertile periods, or animals being isolated prior to introduction to the larger refuge area). A separation area may have shared water with the larger refuge area (simple netted separation).
2. The refuge should have a medical quarantine facility with adequate capacity to prevent pathogen transmission between hosted cetaceans, and between refuge cetaceans and wild populations (e.g., double netting).
3. Quarantine areas may be shaded or indoors if deemed necessary for animal care or necessary to meet applicable regulation requirements.
4. A medical quarantine facility must have the ability to do full examination and treatment of the animals under care: the quarantine pool should have the physical features as suggested by EAZA and EU Directive 1999/22/CE including easily cleanable surface with round edges and corners; controlled water supply and management with a disinfectant dosage system; a pump system able to change rapidly the entire water body; the ability to manage rapidly water depth through a lifting floor or by a rapid draining system which allow a rapid intervention on the animal
5. All utensils, equipment, supplies, and outer clothing used in quarantine are restricted to that area. Where this is not possible, items that the refuge does not have duplicates of and which cannot be restricted to quarantine areas must be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected prior to being moved to or from quarantine areas, and movement between areas should be minimized.

6. Protective clothing, boots and footbaths are used by all staff entering the quarantine area or areas containing quarantined animals. Quarantine clothing is not removed from the quarantine area, except in a sealed container for cleaning. Footbaths are changed regularly.
7. Caregivers are equipped with appropriate personal protective equipment such as masks, face shields, disposable examination gloves, boots, Tyvek-type suits or sleeves, when cleaning or handling anything with which the quarantine animals come into contact.
8. Water from the medical quarantine area should be filtered or treated and disposed of in a safe area away from the habitats of the other refuge animals.
9. Waste or biological material from medically quarantined animals should be treated as biologically hazardous material and disposed of accordingly.
10. Clearly visible signs indicating areas of quarantine are displayed as needed, with particular consideration for placement at entry/access points.
11. A detailed risk assessment must be completed for each new animal introduced to the refuge. The risk assessment should identify any potential threats to the health of the current refuge animals, new animals, and the local ecosystem, as well as outline planned steps to mitigate those threats. The likelihood and consequences for each identified threat should be considered.
12. All new arrivals to the refuge from captive facilities should undergo a health evaluation and be pre-screened for transmissible pathogens, including serological examinations, prior to transport and kept isolated after pre-screening from those that are not being transferred to the refuge.
13. Prolonged isolation of an animal either in a medical quarantine area or a separation area should be avoided (see Well-being and Handling of Cetaceans section).
14. During quarantine of incoming animals, the following procedures should be performed as applicable: examination, vaccination as appropriate, clinical and laboratory tests, treatment for external and internal parasites as needed, evaluation of psychological well-being, verification of identification.
15. An enrichment program is in place for quarantined animals.
16. Animals that die in quarantine receive a complete post-mortem examination including histopathology.

4.5. Breeding Policy and Contraception (no intentional breeding of animals in lifetime care)

1. Group management rather than medical contraception should be preferred to prevent breeding and avoid reproduction.
2. In case it is not possible, contraception programs are appropriate for the species and, as determined by the veterinarian, prioritise the most effective and minimally invasive methods.
3. Moving pregnant females should be avoided. In the event that a pregnant individual is brought to the refuge, appropriate habitat for birthing and caring for an unweaned calf should be provided to the mother-calf pair.
4. If animals arrive at the facility pregnant, the refuge provides necessary care as determined by the veterinarian. Neonates are only removed from the mother for hand-rearing if there is a threat to the life of the new-born or mother.
5. Males should not be housed with pregnant females, prepartum or postpartum females.

4.6. Zoonotic Disease Control Program

1. The personnel and refuge veterinarian are knowledgeable about zoonotic diseases that may affect animals at the refuge, and implement appropriate policies and procedures as needed to mitigate risk and deal with any exposures that occur.

2. The refuge has emergency procedures and a defined process to avoid transmission of all potential or emerging diseases through bites, scratches, body fluids, direct contact with animals and other means.
3. Personnel have adequate training to understand the potential risk of disease transmission, including potential sources of disease, modes of disease transmission, and clinical signs associated with disease, and are encouraged to contact their own health care provider if they experience any unusual symptoms after working with cetaceans. All personnel are informed when a zoonotic disease occurs at the refuge and relevant personnel are trained in how to safely care for animals with disease.
4. Personnel should periodically be checked according to the national worker safety legislation. They should declare any contact with domestic, wild or livestock animals in order to prevent any contact and implement proper screenings.
5. When a reportable disease is identified, all local, state/province, and national regulatory officials are contacted, as required.
6. A complete necropsy, including histopathology and microbiology, has to be performed on deceased animals known or suspected to carry zoonotic disease within 24 hours of death.
7. All areas in which personnel have direct contact with animals have hand-washing facilities available in the immediate vicinity (or an equivalent; e.g., bactericidal hand wipes).
8. Food consumption by personnel does not occur in the immediate area of animal contact.

4.7. Euthanasia

1. The veterinarian is the only person responsible for recommending and performing humane euthanasia, according to the national existing laws. Euthanasia is in the best interest of the individual animal and is only used as a final option, and is not used as a management tool (such as a means to create space for more animals).
2. Acceptable reasons for euthanasia include:
 - incurable medical/behavioural health status that is likely to cause unmanageable pain or suffering;
 - medical/behavioural health status where available treatment will cause unmanageable pain/suffering, or it will not be effective in restoring the animal to an acceptable quality of life;
 - medical/behavioural health where treatment is beyond the normal community standards of monetary expenditure and would cause an excessive burden on the refuge resources, and no other facility/placement provides a reasonable alternative option;
 - the process of aging has resulted in an unacceptable quality of life;
 - in the event of presenting an infectious disease risk to some or all of the residents;
 - in the event of presenting a high risk of harming themselves, other animals and/or humans.
 - Euthanasia should be adopted after the evaluation of an ethical committee.
3. The decision whether or not to separate (both visually and acoustically) the animal being euthanized from the other animals should be made by the attending veterinarian and the animal care staff.
4. A complete post-mortem examination including histopathology should be performed to confirm the underlying medical reason for euthanasia.

4.8. Biosafety and biosecurity

1. A refuge may be also dedicated to wild animal rehabilitation. If that is the case, any rehabilitation area should be physically separated and different personnel and equipment should be used.

2. Any wild animals entering the refuge deemed to be non-releasable, should undergo a strict quarantine and health check including all the known diseases listed for cetaceans (virological, microbiological, parasitological and mycological) including serological evaluation. Exams should include investigations of blood, serum, blow, mouth scrubs, faeces and should be performed using both cultural and the more advanced techniques as virome and microbiome approach. Antimicrobial resistance should be tested.
3. A complete and throughout plan considering biosafety should be implemented. The plan should include the hazard analysis, critical control point management and a contingency plan in order to identify possible risks, the severity of risks and possible mitigations to prevent or solution to be adopted.
4. The plan should include the evaluation of pathogens entrance considering water and food supplies, pests' control, personnel and equipment contamination, wild or domestic animals' entrance, animals' admittance and medical controls, quarantine procedures. Additionally, the plan should consider the data coming from the epidemiological situation in the area for all relevant and reportable diseases.
5. The plan should also consider waste and food remains management; water output monitoring including viruses, bacteria and protozoa; procedures for water output treatment.
6. The plan should include all the programs implemented for monitoring animals' and personnel health, water quality and food safety, disinfection and cleaning process for different areas and facilities, water output management and treatment; integrity of fences, gates and separation. The plan should also state all technologies implemented and frequency of the procedures to ensure its regular and consistent implementation.
7. Biosafety measures include also the contingency plans to avoid any incidental entrance of wild animals, incidental exit of the kept animals and entrance of external person or monitor of volunteer damages.
8. The plans should include checklists forms, reporting systems and traceability of all the processes.

5. WELFARE AND HANDLING OF ANIMALS

5.1. Physical Welfare

1. Animals should be routinely monitored by qualified personnel to ensure their physical well-being (i.e., nutritional, physical and social conditions) and any unusual activity should be reported and recorded, with appropriate timely response.
2. The physical environment of the refuge should allow for a wide range of behaviours, including those related to the majority of cetacean species daily activity in the wild (see Cetacean Housing section). The refuge should allow for the animals to spend the majority of their time oriented to the underwater environment, while allowing for the animals to rest (stationary or swimming), interact with a stimulating natural environment, and to interact with any objects provisioned for enrichment. If possible, with consideration for provisioned food, animals should be allowed to forage for prey.
3. Animals should be able to visually and physically distance themselves from one another, as well as humans such as care staff outside of interactions necessary to provide for the health and well-being of the animals.
4. Physical abuse, deprivation of food, and other forms of negative reinforcement or punishment-based training are never used to train, shift or otherwise care for animals and will be considered as animal abuse according to the national legislation.

5.2. Social Housing and Group Management

1. Animals are grouped so that they are compatible, with consideration to their natural social groupings and individual history, and with the safety of animals and refuge personnel in mind.
2. Animals are housed so that:
 - those in the same enclosure are compatible;
 - they are not housed near animals that interfere with their health or cause them physical or psychological discomfort;
 - there is appropriate space between individuals within and between social groupings and to allow for temporary voluntary isolation from others;
 - no individual endures constant harassment or suffers physical injury, nor do social behaviour prevent any individual from maintaining proper nutrition and hydration.
3. Solitary housing is generally reserved for situations including but not limited to: quarantine; medical assessment and/or care; lack of appropriate social partners or social tension resulting in disruption to the social group, physical aggression leading to injuries, and anticipated birth. Ideally and when appropriate, individuals in solitary housing should have access to visual and auditory access to conspecifics as well as regular caregiver interaction.
4. Staff have an understanding of the natural history and normal behaviour of the species in the wild and are regularly assessing compatibility among individuals through ongoing behavioural and health monitoring and assessments.
5. If multiple species (not recommended) are present at the refuge, species are integrated or separated based on the well-being of the animals (e.g., no direct mixing of predator and prey species).
6. If applicable and appropriate for the species, every effort should be made to keep mother- calf pairs in the same groupings.
7. Introduction of any new animal to a social group is done safely and according to techniques appropriate for each species, under the direction of designated personnel.

5.3. Behavioural/Psychological Well-Being

1. Schedules should be structured around the needs of the animals and, accordingly, individualized welfare plans prepared and approved jointly by veterinarian and animal care staff, are in place to enhance well-being. Their implementation is documented and archived.
2. The behavioural choices of the animals should be monitored through non-invasive methods, documented and archived to ensure that the monitoring and review of long-term data of each individual is informing decisions impacting their well-being.
3. The animal care staff should be trained to identify, address and minimize stereotypic or harmful behaviours (including the ability to interpret data).
4. Individualized protocols to reduce/eliminate stereotypic or harmful behaviours should be developed and approved jointly by the veterinarian and animal care staff, and results documented and archived.
5. There should be a positive reinforcement training program in place to maintain voluntary participation in animal care and veterinary procedures that support health and welfare goals. The animal care staff should be provided the tools and resources needed to safely and successfully implement the positive reinforcement training protocols.
6. The refuge should provide staff with training on animal welfare and assessment methods. This training should be regularly updated to incorporate currently available information.

7. Animal welfare should be assessed at a regularly established interval, and additionally as needed, including when significant changes occur, such as the addition (or removal) of animals, major environmental changes (e.g., weather events), and location changes. Results from welfare assessments should be documented, archived, available for review and should directly inform action plans created by animal care staff.
8. Although the refuge environment should provide the appropriate physical and mental stimulation for the animals, there may be situations that necessitate additional opportunities, which are to be provided by staff. Whenever possible, engagement with the natural environment as a source of enrichment should be encouraged over artificial enrichment techniques.
9. All enrichment opportunities should be evaluated and adjusted as necessary for each animal's well-being and should be safe for both the resident animals and any wild flora or fauna that may be exposed.
10. If enrichment sources include human interaction with trained staff, the interaction should be limited by the interest level of the animals and should be non-disruptive to other animals in the vicinity.
11. Emphasis should be placed on underwater enrichment sources rather than surface-level enrichment sources to encourage behavioural patterns normally seen in the wild.
12. The refuge has an enrichment program that promotes species-appropriate behavioural opportunities at all times (including periods of quarantine and isolation) and ensures the animals' psychological well-being. An appropriate program may include the following:
 - Structural enrichment - Enclosure design and furniture that add complexity to the environment and promote species-specific behaviour.
 - Object enrichment - Objects that encourage inspection and manipulation and promote species-specific behaviour.
 - Food enrichment - Varying food choices and food presentation, including the use of puzzles that increase food procurement time.
 - Social enrichment - Affiliative interactions between caregivers and animals may be appropriate in some instances.
13. All animal care personnel are trained to recognise species-specific behaviour, abnormal behaviour and clinical signs of illness, and a plan to address the concerns is developed.

5.4. Animal-Caregiver Relationships

1. Positive relationships between animals and caregivers must be maintained. However, to the extent possible, the most important relationships for each cetacean should be relationships with other cetaceans. Relationships between cetaceans and staff should be encouraged to be secondary and exist in support of meeting the animal's social and health needs in more species appropriate ways (i.e., cetacean to cetacean).
2. Where possible, new caregivers accompany a trusted caregiver until the animal becomes comfortable with the new individual.
3. Where possible and appropriate, animals become familiar with the veterinary staff, allowing close observation.
4. Relationships between staff and the animals are evaluated at a pre-established regular interval and additionally when needed. Accordingly, changes are made to staff assignments when staff and animal relationships are found to be disruptive to the animals.

5.5. Handling and Restraint

1. Any necessary handling and restraint must be done safely and appropriately, with minimal distress to animals, and personnel are trained in species-specific safe handling techniques/practices.
2. Protocols for species-appropriate handling and restraint methods should be developed, while tools and resources needed for safe handling and restraint should be available on-site and maintained in good working order. These will include, at least, appropriately sized stretchers, medical lift(s) and netting.
3. There should be protocols in place for managing animals should they not be near an area designed for handling and restraint in the event of an emergency (e.g., a cetacean in deep water a distance away from a medical lift or a netted bottom).
4. Animals being handled or restrained should be closely monitored by qualified staff (cetacean veterinarians and/or highly trained animal care staff) for signs of stress both during and after the handling or restraint.
5. Handling for veterinary care is done as expeditiously and carefully as possible in a manner that does not cause trauma, overheating, excessive cooling, physical harm, or unnecessary discomfort, and minimizes physical and psychological stress as much as possible.
6. Chemical capture is performed only by a licensed veterinarian and only when other methods are not possible due to the significant risks of sedating free-swimming cetaceans. Specific anaesthetic protocols, including record-keeping, are followed. Emergency resuscitation drugs and equipment (oxygen, on-demand PPV, etc.) must be on-hand during any sedation event.
7. Chemical capture is not used when multiple animals are in an enclosure except in an emergency situation. In such cases, all possible precautions are taken to prevent danger to personnel, all animals in the enclosure, and the animal being sedated.

5.6. Cetacean Transport (conducted only when strictly necessary – being transported to the refuge)

1. Ideally, the refuge location should be easily accessible and well connected. Reaching the site should be easy through roads in good conditions to facilitate the arrival of heavy vehicles delivering materials, animals and, occasional visitors. The presence of an airport within a <100 km radius will also be an asset. In any case, cetacean transport should be conducted only when necessary (e.g., being transported to the refuge).
2. A comprehensive plan that addresses every process step is established and communicated to all involved parties prior to any transport. Authority, roles and responsibilities are clear to all.
3. Health examinations are conducted prior to an animal's arrival at the refuge or prior to transfer to another facility. These examinations may include a complete physical exam with attention to parasite checks, necessary vaccinations, and completion of any tests required by regulations of the receiving state/province or country.
4. Candidates for transport should be medically and behaviourally evaluated prior to transport, and criteria should be established on an individual basis to ensure that the animal being transported is fit for transport (mentally, emotionally, and physically) and in appropriate condition for the receiving location (e.g., free from uncontrolled transmissible pathogens).
5. Health certificates and any required transport permits accompany the animal when being transported interstate or internationally.
6. Capture, restraint, and transportation methods consider the animal's temperament and behaviour in order to minimize injury and distress.

7. Equipment suitable for lifting, cradling (where applicable) and transportation of animals kept within the refuge is maintained in good condition and readily available. Transport containers and vehicles are cleaned after use.
8. All transport equipment should be appropriately fitted to the animal being transported and maintained in excellent condition and meet appropriate animal welfare standards. This equipment includes but is not limited to:
 - Stretchers
 - Cradles
 - Emergency medical/veterinary equipment
 - Monitoring equipment
 - Care equipment (e.g., spray bottles, sheets, A&D ointment)
 - Lifting equipment (e.g., cranes, lifting cables, taglines)
 - Communication equipment
9. When possible, animals should be conditioned to the possible stressors of transport, such as stretcher and cradle training.
10. All transport team must include members who have previous cetacean transport experience and all members should be trained on the transport procedure and aware of their individual roles within it
11. Transport routes should be predetermined and secured (e.g., security escort agreements in place, local municipalities informed) prior to transport.
12. Contingencies should be established for all parts of the transport and alternative arrangements should be available on standby during the transport.
13. The transportation route should be selected based on the welfare of the animal being transported, taking into consideration duration, method of transport, and safety.
14. The cetacean should be carefully monitored (respirations, heart rate, temperature, signs of distress or agitation) throughout the transport by trained staff.
15. Sources of physiological and psychological stress should be mitigated. Methods should be employed to: maintain optimal temperature (cooling/warming), mitigate positional stress (padding, positioners), minimize noise, bright light and movement around the animal, and keep individuals with familiar cohorts.
16. If the transport method uses a water-filled transport box, water temperature should be maintained in a species-appropriate range throughout transport.
17. An appropriate supply of emergency food (based on species, individual eating habits, and routine duration/logistics) should be transported with the cetacean.
18. A qualified cetacean veterinarian must be present throughout the transport.
19. All animals taken outside the refuge are kept securely at all times and managed in such a way that the animal is under control and not likely to suffer distress, cause injury or transmit or contract disease.

6. ECONOMICS; CONSIDERATIONS ON LONG-TERM SUSTAINABILITY AND OPERATIONAL COSTS

1. The refuge will host cetacean primarily originating from the captivity industry and, whenever needed and possible, dolphins that have been rescued after stranding. Therefore, a cetacean refuge should be considered a permanent accommodation for all animals deemed to be unfit for release. Since these will be long-lived marine mammals, in many cases needing housing for a few decades, the long-term economic sustainability of this facility must be assured to every possible extent. A business plan should be developed and proposed considering all the costs and revenues.

2. In this document it is not possible to tailor a generic economic sustainability plan for a cetacean refuge model because this plan may vary largely depending on a number of variables (e.g., country, authorities involved, geography). In any case, commitment of long-term support from local, national, regional and international authorities is essential.
3. Additional possible sources of funding may include and are not limited to, among others, the following:
 - Private Donations from individuals, NGOs and foundations interested in marine conservation and animal welfare.
 - Corporate Sponsorships through partnerships with businesses interested in marine conservation and animal welfare.
 - Admission Charges from visitors and educational groups. Specialized tours focusing on education and conservation may be also an option.
 - Membership Programs: Annual memberships offering benefits to regular supporters.
 - Merchandising and educational materials (can be extended through an online store).
 - Collaborative Programs: Joint initiatives with universities, research institutions, and NGOs.
 - Application to different funding programs and calls
4. Considering the variability of funding, a clear document stating the organisation of the management of the refuge, including the different institutional bodies involved, should be clarified.

7. EDUCATION & OUTREACH

An effective educational program and outreach strategy can significantly enhance the impact a of a cetacean refuge. By engaging the public, raising awareness, and fostering a connection between people and marine life, the refuge can build strong support for its conservation efforts and ensure long-term sustainability.

7.1. Education and research program development

1. Potential for an education/interpretation centre with multimedia resources providing information on the biology of the animals, their conservation needs as well as the rationale dictating the need for cetacean refuges.
2. Well-defined research proposals for non-invasive and unobtrusive respectful scientific research should be considered. These should be carefully reviewed by both, a scientific and an ethics committee, in collaboration with the refuge team. Priority should be given to the welfare of the animals hosted in the refuge and all proposals should include a protocol for the monitoring of the animals before, during and after the study/experiment is conducted. If any animal shows signs of distress when exposed to the research-related activities (directly or indirectly) the activity must be immediately interrupted.
3. Research and educational programs should be aimed to enhance conservation and welfare of the animals in the wild.

7.2. Public engagement

1. The refuge may allow, under certain conditions, the presence of visitors (see economics section). Dolphin observation will be encouraged by using remote technologies (e.g., webcams, advantaged land-observation points). Educational programs will be conducted to inform the public about the implications and

consequences of captivity as well as promoting research programs on the rehabilitation and, when possible, the release of dolphins at sea.

2. Volunteer Programs and Paid volunteer opportunities may be considered for individuals interested in contributing to and working at the refuge.

7.3. Communication channels

1. By developing and implementing a well-rounded communication strategy, a cetacean refuge will be able to effectively promote its mission, engage with the community, and provide new opportunities for funding and collaborations (not only with potential sponsors but also, for instance, with research and conservation organisations). Key messages at the epicentre of the communication strategy must be very clear. Some to be considered may be:
 - Cetacean behaviour and ecology
 - Importance of Cetaceans (e.g., ecological, cultural, and economic significance)
 - Refuge's role
 - Cetacean conservation (threats, conservation strategies...)
 - How to help: steps for people to support the sanctuary (donations, volunteering, citizen science...).
2. Some communication channels to be considered are:
 - Website: Create a dedicated website with regular updates, articles, and educational resources.
 - Social media: Use platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube to share engaging content, such as videos, infographics, and stories.
 - Email Newsletters: Send regular updates to subscribers about news, events, and ways to get involved. Share compelling stories of individual cetaceans, success stories from the refuge, as well as profiles and/or testimonials of volunteers and staff.
 - Press Releases: Distribute press releases to media outlets to announce important news and events.
 - Community Events: Host events such as beach clean-ups, educational workshops, and guided tours of the refuge.
 - Partnerships: Collaborate with schools, universities, and other organisations to reach broader audiences.
 - Key metrics such as website traffic, social media engagement, email open rates, event attendance, and media coverage should be regularly evaluated (quarterly?) to get feedback on communication initiatives and their success.
 - Feedback from visitors, volunteers, and partners also important to assess the effectiveness of communication efforts.
 - Act accordingly and make adjustments to the strategy to improve outreach and engagement, as necessary.

ANNEX 3

Note on Procedural Steps for Requesting Advice from the ACCOBAMS Advisory Committee on Semi-Enclosed Facilities

The following procedure should help in refining future advisory processes and ensure alignment with conservation common objectives.

Step 1. The ACCOBAMS Party seeking advice on issues related to semi-enclosed facilities for cetacean species in the ACCOBAMS Area is invited to firstly read carefully the Guidelines for Best Practices During the Installation and Management of Semi-enclosed Facilities for Cetacean Species in the ACCOBAMS Area.

If after reading those guidelines the ACCOBAMS Party feels the need to ask for further advise, it is requested that it produces a concept note to present the initiative/project for which advise is being requested (e.g., dolphin refuge).

The concept note should include:

Background and context.

Specific questions or guidance sought.

Relevant supporting documents, including national legal background and scientific data.

Step 2. Submission of the concept note to the ACCOBAMS Secretariat by e-mail.

Step 3. The ACCOBAMS Secretariat will review the request for completeness and relevance, will acknowledge receiving the above-mentioned message (Step 2) and, if duly completed, will forward it to the Advisory Committee on semi-enclosed facilities (AC).

Step 4. The Chairman of the AC receives the e-mail with the concept note and, after confirming that at this stage no other information is needed, this concept note will be shared with the rest of the AC members and convene a meeting, if needed, depending on urgency.

Step 5. The AC, after internal consultation, will share its opinion with ACCOBAMS SC. It may also be the case that additional information or clarification from the submitting Party is requested by either AC or SC.

Step 6. Once a response has been formulated, it is sent to the requesting Party, via the Secretariat.

Step 7. The Party will implement recommendations and/or seek further clarification, if needed.

Step 8. Within one month after receiving a response from the Secretariat, the Party seeking advice should provide feedback to AC on how the advice is meant to be implemented and establish a calendar for providing a brief report on it.

RESOLUTION 9.20
AREA-BASED MEASURES FOR CETACEAN CONSERVATION

The Meeting of the Parties to the Agreement on the Conservation of Cetaceans of the Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea and contiguous Atlantic area:

Recalling that according to Article II, paragraph 1, of the Agreement, the Parties “shall co-operate to create and maintain a network of specially protected areas to conserve cetaceans”, and that, under the ACCOBAMS Conservation Plan (Annex 2 to the Agreement), paragraph 3, the Parties “shall endeavour to establish and manage specially protected areas for cetaceans corresponding to the areas which serve as habitats for cetaceans and/or which provide important food resources for them. Such specially protected areas should be established within the framework of the Regional Seas Conventions (OSPAR, Barcelona and Bucharest Conventions), or within the framework of other appropriate instruments”,

Recalling that in 2010 the ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee started a preliminary identification of areas of special importance for cetaceans in the Agreement Area known as cetacean critical habitats (CCH), and that, due to the ACCOBAMS efforts, including the recent ACCOBAMS Survey Initiative (ASI), knowledge of cetacean species and work in mapping have greatly improved,

Noting that it is appropriate to continue identifying such areas taking into account the already existing mechanisms and tools related to area-based cetacean conservation (e.g. Important Marine Mammal Areas, Marine Protected Areas, Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures, Maritime Spatial Planning, etc.),

Recognising that using both the IMMA and CCH concept in the ACCOBAMS region will have significant added value, since these two concepts reinforce each other (Scientific Committee Recommendation 12.8 on the value of the designation of IMMAs and CCH to achieving ACCOBAMS objectives),

Recalling Resolution GFCM/43/2019/2 on enhancing the conservation of cetaceans in the GFCM area of application and Recommendation GFCM/44/2021/15 on the mitigation of fisheries impacts for the conservation of cetaceans;

Reaffirming the value of Specially Protected Areas of Mediterranean Importance (SPAMIs) designated under the Barcelona Convention as key instruments for the conservation of marine biodiversity, including cetaceans, in the Mediterranean region,

Acknowledging the relevance of the Ecologically or Biologically Significant Marine Areas (EBSAs) process under the Convention on Biological Diversity, and its contribution to describing areas important for marine biodiversity, including cetaceans,

Recognising the importance of the Natura 2000 network and the designation of Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) under the EU Habitats Directive, which contribute to the protection of cetacean habitats in European waters,

Recalling the work of the Scientific Committee on “Area-based measures for cetacean conservation” and the recommendations on this subject-matter by workshops held in 2022 and 2024,

Aware of the need for care and sensitivity when producing official maps which, while providing a powerful communication tool, also have a potential capacity for misuse and misinterpretation,

Aware of the difficulties of appropriately combining overlapping maps created in different ways and from datasets of different spatial and temporal scales,

Recognising that the process of identification of Important Marine Mammal Areas (IMMAs) by the Joint IUCN SSC/WCPA Task Force on Marine Mammal Protected Areas (the “Task Force”) in application of agreed criteria has been acknowledged by the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention on Migratory Species (Resolution 12.13 of 2017), which, *inter alia*, requested the Parties and invited the Range States to identify specific areas where IMMAs could be beneficial,

Recalling the Joint IUCN MMPA Task Force/ACCOBAMS Workshop, which identified IMMAs in the Mediterranean Sea (October 2016) and in the Black Sea (January 2021),

Recalling the Post-2020 Regional Strategy for Marine and Coastal Protected Areas and Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures in the Mediterranean, adopted by the Parties to the Barcelona Convention at their 22nd Meeting (Antalya, Türkiye, 7-10 December 2021),

Recalling also the Post-2020 Strategic Action Programme for the Conservation of Biological Diversity in the Mediterranean Region (Post-SAPBio), which provides a comprehensive framework for biodiversity conservation and sustainable use, and supports the implementation of area-based measures for the protection of cetaceans and their habitats,

Taking into account Recommendation 16.14 of the Scientific Committee on “Area-based measures for cetacean conservation”,

1. *Agrees on* the terminology and process agreed at the 2022 and 2024 workshops²⁴ and, in particular, on replacing the term “Cetacean Critical Habitat” with “areas of Cetacean Co-occurrence with Human activities”, while keeping CCH acronym;
2. *Requests* the Scientific Committee to:
 - a) continue to identify CCH taking into account the recommendations of the relevant workshops, as well as existing mechanisms and tools related to area-based cetacean conservation presented in the Annex to the relevant workshop’s report;
 - b) further explore with relevant experts the appropriate consideration and mapping of uncertainty and the integration of data on cetacean and human activities;
3. *Requests* the Secretariat to:
 - a) liaise with the Information and Communication Regional Activity Center (INFO/RAC), the Priority Actions Programme Regional Activity Center (PAP/RAC), the Knowledge Management Platform (KMaP) and the

²⁴ SC16.Doc23_Report on area-based measures for cetacean conservation by the Task Group & SC16.Inf20_Report of the ACCOBAMS Workshop Mapping human activity data in the ACCOBAMS area.

GFCM Regional Platform on Selectivity, Vulnerable Species and Decarbonization as well as continue exploration of the facilities of the NETCCOBAMS network;

- b) actively participate in the “Strategical Alliance among the Secretariats of ACCOBAMS, GFCM, IUCN-Med, UNEP/MAP through SPA/RAC and in collaboration with MedPAN” and the Pelagos Agreement, concerning spatial-based protection and management measures for marine biodiversity;
 - c) actively participate to the Ad hoc Group of Experts for Marine Protected Areas in the Mediterranean (AGEM) and to the implementation of its Programme of Work and key priorities to be tackled and covered during the next biennium 2026-2027, where appropriate;
4. *Strongly encourages* the IUCN Joint SSC/WCPA Marine Mammal Protected Areas Task Force, in collaboration with the ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee, to undertake a re-assessment of the Mediterranean region for the identification of Important Marine Mammal Areas (IMMAs) which is a priority action for the 2026-2028 triennium;
 5. *Encourages* integration of national marine habitat mapping efforts, and the development of conservation measures for Natura 2000 sites, where relevant, into a broader regional framework for marine spatial planning;
 6. *Decides* that the present Resolution replaces Resolutions 3.22 and 4.15.

RESOLUTION 9.21
DATE AND VENUE OF THE TENTH SESSION OF THE MEETING OF THE PARTIES

The Meeting of the Parties to the Agreement on the Conservation of Cetaceans of the Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea and contiguous Atlantic area:

Recalling Article III, paragraph 2, of the Agreement, which states that the Agreement Secretariat shall convene, in consultation with the Convention Secretariat, ordinary sessions of the Meeting of the Parties at intervals of not more than three years, unless the Meeting of the Parties decides otherwise,

Noting that the Ninth session of the Meeting of the Parties was hosted by the Government of Cyprus, from 18th to 21st November 2025,

Aware of the benefits of hosting the sessions of the Meeting of the Parties in different regions of the Agreement area, for the Agreement and Parties, particularly for developing countries and those with economies in transition,

1. *Decides* that the Tenth session of the Meeting of the Parties shall take place at the end of 2028.

RESOLUTION 9.22
TRIBUTE TO ORGANISERS

The Meeting of the Parties to the Agreement on the Conservation of Cetaceans of the Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea and contiguous Atlantic area:

Recalling the offer of the Government of Cyprus to host the Ninth session of the Meeting of the Parties,

Commending the action undertaken by the Government of Cyprus in the organisation of this session of the Meeting of the Parties and its financial support to facilitate its preparation,

Aware of the significant efforts required in preparing and organising the present session of the Meeting of the Parties,

1. *Expresses* its deep gratitude for the invaluable support from the Government of Cyprus in providing an excellent venue and facilities for the Ninth session of the Meeting of the Parties; and for the relentless help and prompt assistance received from the Cypriot National Focal Point and the Marine Environment Division during the organisation process of the present Meeting;
2. *Congratulates* the ACCOBAMS Secretariat for the preparation of the present session of the Meeting of the Parties;
3. *Expresses* its appreciation for the support provided by the members of the Extended Bureau, the Sub Regional Coordination Units and the Scientific Committee, who contributed decisively to the preparation of the present session of the Meeting of the Parties.

ANNEX XV - DECLARATION BY GREECE

HELLENIC TRENCH

We take note of the comments submitted by Türkiye regarding draft decision 9.21, paragraph 6, page 3. We also note the reference to the forthcoming entry into force of the Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ Agreement), a global instrument that includes provisions on marine protected areas.

In this regard, we acknowledge the proposal to insert the following additional preambular paragraph in draft decision 9.21, immediately after the third recital (“Recalling that in 2010 the ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee started a preliminary identification [...] have greatly improved,”):

“Stressing the fundamental importance of the Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction that will enter into force on 17 January 2026,”.

Regarding the comments related to draft decision 9.5, we take note of Greece’s preference that paragraph 4 of the Preamble remain unchanged.

We wish to inform you that the deletion of paragraph 6 of draft decision 9.21 is deemed advisable, as it is logically necessary for the investigations provided for in the draft under discussion—aimed at updating the relevant map—to be completed prior to any decision being taken regarding the need to replace Decision 4.15. Consequently (and given that Decision 4.15 remains in force), the Turkish comment concerning Marine Protected Areas 9 and 10 is rendered unfounded.

Furthermore, for reasons of legal and political correctness, it is considered necessary, within the scope of our competence, to submit the following Greek Statement regarding the Turkish comments on the naming of the Straits and the maritime boundaries in the Aegean:

With reference to Türkiye’s comments on the Draft Resolution 9.21, para 6, we would like to reiterate that the official name of the Straits, according to the Montreux Convention of 20 July 1936, is “the Straits of Dardanelles, the Sea of Marmara and the Bosphorus” and not “the Istanbul Strait, the Sea of Marmara and the Çanakkale Strait” as inaccurately alleged by Türkiye.

Furthermore, regarding the maritime area depicted as number 10, it should be recalled that the maritime boundaries between Greece and Türkiye in the Dodecanese area are defined in accordance with the Agreements signed between Italy and Türkiye on 4 January 1932 and 28 December 1932, to which Greece has succeeded pursuant to the Paris Peace Treaty of 1947.

As for the maritime area depicted as number 9, it should be recalled that the maritime borders between Greece and Türkiye are defined, to a point of 3 n.m. from the estuary of the Evros River, by the Lausanne Peace Treaty of 1923 and the Athens Protocol of 1926; beyond this point, the border continues until it reaches the 6 n.m. limit, at a point which is equidistant from the nearest points on the baselines from which the breadth of the territorial sea of Greece and Türkiye is measured, in accordance with the principle of equidistance, as reflected in Article 15 of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea which embodies customary international law”

ANNEX XVI - DECLARATION BY UKRAINE

The situation of Leonid Pshenichnov is of grave concern. Leonid Pshenichnov, 70, is a Ukrainian marine biologist, an expert on marine biota and marine living resources of the Antarctic region.

In particular, for decades he has provided assessments for the Antarctic krill stocks for management purposes and expert advice for the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR), which could serve as the scientific background for establishing marine protected areas.

In September 2025, while in Crimea, he has been arrested and detained by the Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation. It is stated in the document presumably provided to Leonid Pshenichnov's lawyer that he has been accused of high treason based on his research expertise and expert activity on developing marine protected areas.

As it has been stated, Ukrainian delegation pursued initiatives to create in the Antarctic region a network of marine protected areas with prohibition of any fishing and other economic activity in them. The implementation of these initiatives allows foreign states to restrict the activities of the Russian Federation in prospective areas of industrial fishing, establish control over a strategically important sector of the World Ocean and will lead to the loss of Russia's ability to develop hydrocarbon production on the continental shelf of Antarctica.

The proposals prepared by Leonid Pshenichnov in case of their adoption by the CCAMLR Commission, could have led to negative consequences for the security of the Russian Federation by causing damage in the economic and scientific and technological spheres.

Possibly, this is the first case in human history when a marine researcher has been detained directly for his conservation research opinion. Such an action undermines the global effort in and global architecture of marine conservation, and it creates a gravely dangerous precedent whereby any expert in marine biological conservation may be accused on the same ground.

Therefore, the Parties and professional communities are asked to raise their voice and urgently demand freedom for Leonid Pshenichnov.