

REPORT OF THE BUREAU



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 IDRISI 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 8.2¹ 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.

¹ [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 recognized 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 emphasized 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:

- a. 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 8.22;
- b. 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)".

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

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."

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 finalizing the Memorandum of Understanding with the Secretariat is nearly complete. Hotel arrangements are almost finalized, 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