CALL FOR EXPRESSION OF INTEREST FOR AIRCRAFT SERVICES TO CONDUCT AERIAL SURVEYS FOR CETACEANS, LARGE VERTEBRATES AND BIRDS IN THE MEDITERRANEAN SEA - SUMMER 2026

I. BACKGROUND

To strengthen the scientific foundation for cetaceans' conservation and support evidence-based policymaking, the Agreement on the Conservation of Cetaceans of the Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea and contiguous Atlantic area (ACCOBAMS) developed the **ACCOBAMS Survey Initiative (ASI)**. This initiative aims to establish an integrated and coordinated long-term monitoring system for cetaceans in the region, supporting countries in meeting their national and international obligations, including those under EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD), the Ecosystem Approach of the Barcelona Convention, and fisheries-related policies.

Implemented between 2018 and 2023, the first edition of ASI (**ASI-I**) constituted the first large-scale, coordinated survey covering the Mediterranean and Black Seas. Through a combination of aerial, vessel-based and passive acoustic monitoring, it produced essential data and delivered robust estimates of cetacean abundance and distribution, as well as on other marine megafauna and the human pressures affecting these ecosystems.

Following the positive impact of ASI-I, **ASI-II** was launched in June 2025 and will run until 2028, under the coordination of the ACCOBAMS Secretariat. Building on the achievements and lessons learned from the first phase, ASI-II aims to generate new scientifically robust data on cetaceans and associated species (e.g. sea turtles, seabirds, pelagic fish), while also assessing major anthropogenic pressures such as marine litter through its next regionals synoptic survey planned during the summer 2026.

An essential component of the 2026 campaign is the implementation of **aerial surveys for cetaceans monitoring along predefined transects**, following harmonized protocols to ensure comparability across subregions and enable joint data analysis.

In this context, the ACCOBAMS Secretariat is seeking **companies able to provide suitable aircraft services** for the 2026 Mediterranean survey campaign.

II. PURPOSE AND SELECTION PROCESS

The purpose of this call for Expressions of Interest (EOI) is to identify appropriate aircraft companies that could be invited to submit offers to ACCOBAMS for conducting ASI-II aerial surveys along predefined transects and survey blocks in several Mediterranean sub-areas during summer 2026, as preliminary delineated in the maps and tables presented in Annex I of this document.

Please note that the preliminary survey design is not to be considered final and the number of transects to be covered per block may change according to available funds and specific requirements. The effort foreseen in the Annex I is to be considered the minimum amount of Km and will be adjusted before the second and final step.

Important Notice

This EOI **does not constitute an invitation to tender and does not create any contractual obligation.**

The selection process is detailed in the steps below:

Step 1: Submission of EOI
Interested companies should provide the information requested in this document to demonstrate their qualifications and capacity.

Step 2: Pre-Selection
The ACCOBAMS Secretariat will review all submissions and carry out a comparative assessment based on the requested elements. Pre-selected companies will then be invited to submit a detailed tender.

Step 3: Tender Stage and Final selection
Following the evaluation of detailed tenders, ACCOBAMS will decide whether to proceed with the signature of a **Service Contract** or a **Financial Agreement**. The nature of the agreement will be clarified at that stage.

Survey Packages

For this call for Expressions of Interest, the ACCOBAMS Secretariat invites applicants **to submit proposals for one or both packages detailed below**, based on preliminary ASI-II survey blocks designed for the Mediterranean aerial survey campaign.

- **PACKAGE 1 (**Blocks delineated in Figure2 of Annex I):

    - Applicants expressing interest in Package 1 should note that they will be required to survey all the blocks listed above. Preliminary design of these blocks, planned transects along with the corresponding survey effort required, are provided in Annex 1 of this document.

    - In addition, the **STORMM system will be applied** for the surveying of these blocks and the **planes involved in the effort should therefore be able to embark the system**. For detailed information on the technical specifications required for aircraft surveying blocks included in Package 1, please refer to Annex II – Aircraft Technical Specifications of this document.

- **PACKAGE 2 (**Blocks delineated in Figure 4a, 4b and 4c of Annex I)

    - Applicants expressing interest in Package 2 should indicate in their proposal which of the blocks listed above they propose to survey.

    - Applicants are invited to note that the implementation of this package is **contingent upon securing the necessary funding and obtaining all required permits and authorizations.** In addition, the final allocation of survey blocks may be subject to adjustments, and additional zones could be added depending on available funding. Preliminary design of these blocks, along with the corresponding survey effort required, are provided in Annex I of this document.

    - For detailed information on the technical specifications required for aircraft surveying blocks included in Package 2, please refer to Annex II of this document.

Description of the activities expected from the selected aircraft companies

The selected aircraft companies will be responsible for providing suitable aircraft(s) in accordance with the technical requirements specified for each package (as outlined in Annex II and Annex III) and qualified pilots to conduct aerial surveys within one or more survey blocks, as defined in the packages above and illustrated in the maps and table of Annex I .

The surveys are tentatively scheduled to take place between 1st of June and 31st of July 2026 at a flying altitude of 600 - 750 feet. The survey will be conducted at a constant speed of 100 knots, and it would be optimal to have at least 6 flight hours on duty per day. It is reasonable to take into account adverse weather forecast of 20% of the days (bad weather condition means winds over 3 on the Beaufort scale, or low clouds

at less than 300 m altitude, or heavy rain, which prevents a reliable observation of animals close to the sea surface).

This call for expression of interest is aimed at collecting information to specify the following:

(a) Aircraft companies' availabilities for the considered period and type of aircraft (adequate for aerial spotting, with high wings, two engines and good forward and vertical visibility, mandatory equipped with 2 bubble windows, one on each side) as specified in Annex II;
(b) availability of pilot(s) with provable experience in aerial surveys at sea targeting cetaceans;
(c) the block(s) to be surveyed by the company; (as numbered in Annex I of this document)
(d) a list of airports to be used as operational bases or for refueling between flights, with adequate fuel availability within the chosen package/ block(s)
(e) Budget estimates for the chosen package/ block(s)
(f) Number and type of planes available

Content and submission of the proposal

Interested aircraft companies should submit their proposal before **Friday 16th January 2026**, in French or English, by email to:

- **Ms. Maylis SALIVAS**, ACCOBAMS Executive Secretary
  Email: msalivas@accobams.net

and, in copy, to :

- **Ms. Salomé CALLEY**, ACCOBAMS Project Officer
  E-mail: scalley@accobams.net

- **Ms. Julie BELMONT**, ACCOBAMS Consultant in charge of ASI-II Coordination
  Email : julieroxane@gmail.com

The proposal should include :

a) A technical document containing:
   - An indication of the selected package(s): Package 1, Package 2, or both.
   - If applicants are applying for Package 2, a list of the selected block(s) where the aerial survey could be carried out by the company. For the identification of these block(s), please refer to the maps provided in Annex I of this document.
   - an estimation of the number of flight hours per block taking into consideration the preliminary estimated total track length
   - a list of airports to be used as operational bases or for refueling between flights, with adequate fuel availability within the chosen block(s),
   - an estimation of the maximum number of stand-by days,

- an estimated schedule for servicing of the plane, including number of hours when a service is required and airport where service can take place,
- additional information on administration procedures (permits);

b) A description of the type of aircraft to be used for the survey (see Annex II);
c) The curriculum of the pilot(s), highlighting previous similar work experiences;
d) A description and the curriculum of the company, highlighting previous similar work experiences;
e) A preliminary estimated budget for the aerial survey effort for chosen block(s), including hourly rate for plane, and estimations of the additional relative expenses;
f) The institutional and administrative background of the applying company (e.g.: statutes, type of institution, annual budget, budget control procedures, etc.);
g) A copy of the operating license and authorization (if applicable) and any administrative document (i.e. relevant certificate of insurance), released by the competent public authority, demonstrating that the offering company is authorized to operate the aerial survey.

Proposals that fail to provide the required documentation or information or reject the terms and conditions of the Call for expression of interest may be excluded from consideration.

For additional information, clarification or any communication relating to this call for EOI, applicants may write to the following contacts:

III. CONTACTS

Maylis Salivas ACCOBAMS Executive Secretary 1 Promenade Honoré II MC-98000 MONACO Tel: +377 9898 8010 msalivas@accobams.net
Salomé CALLEY ACCOBAMS Project Officer scalley@accobams.net
Julie BELMONT Consultant – ASI-II Coordination julieroxane@gmail.com

ANNEX I – PRELIMINARY SURVEY DESIGN PER BLOCKS FOR EACH PACKAGE

GENERAL MAP (PACKAGE 1 AND 2)

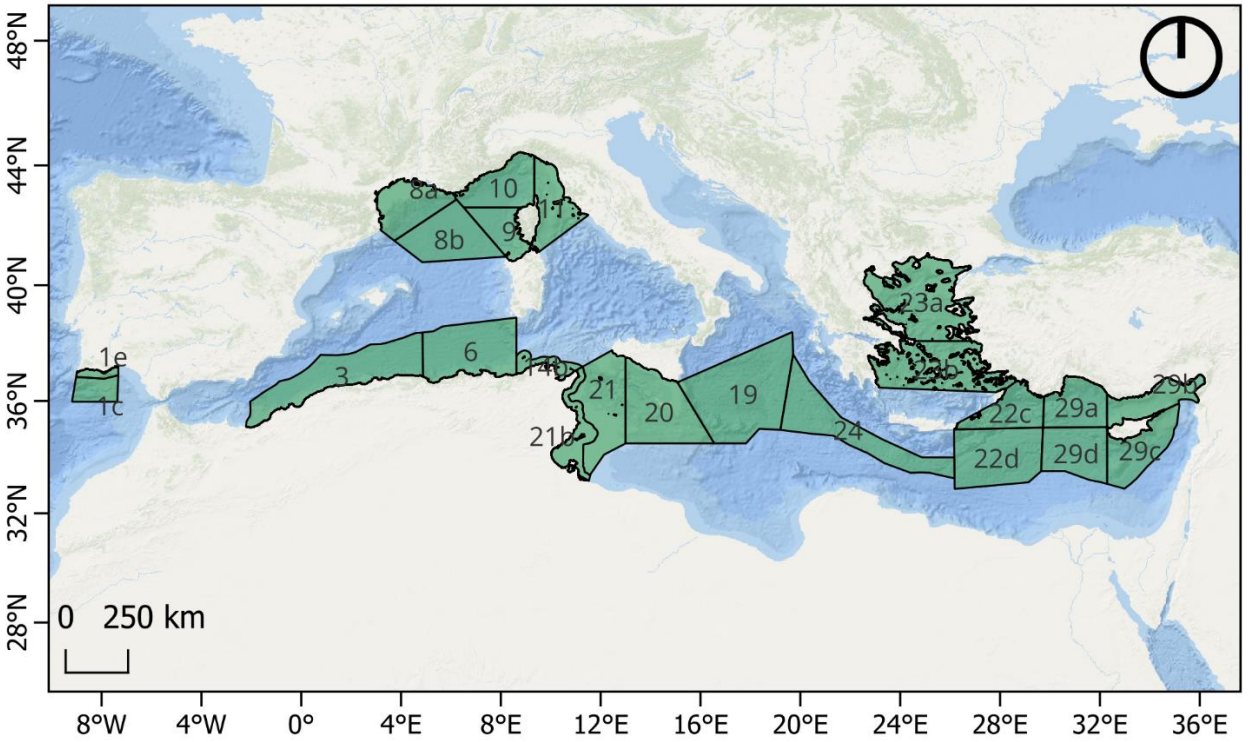

Figure 1. Overall survey blocks for Package 1 and 2

PACKAGE 1 (BLOCKS 8 -11)

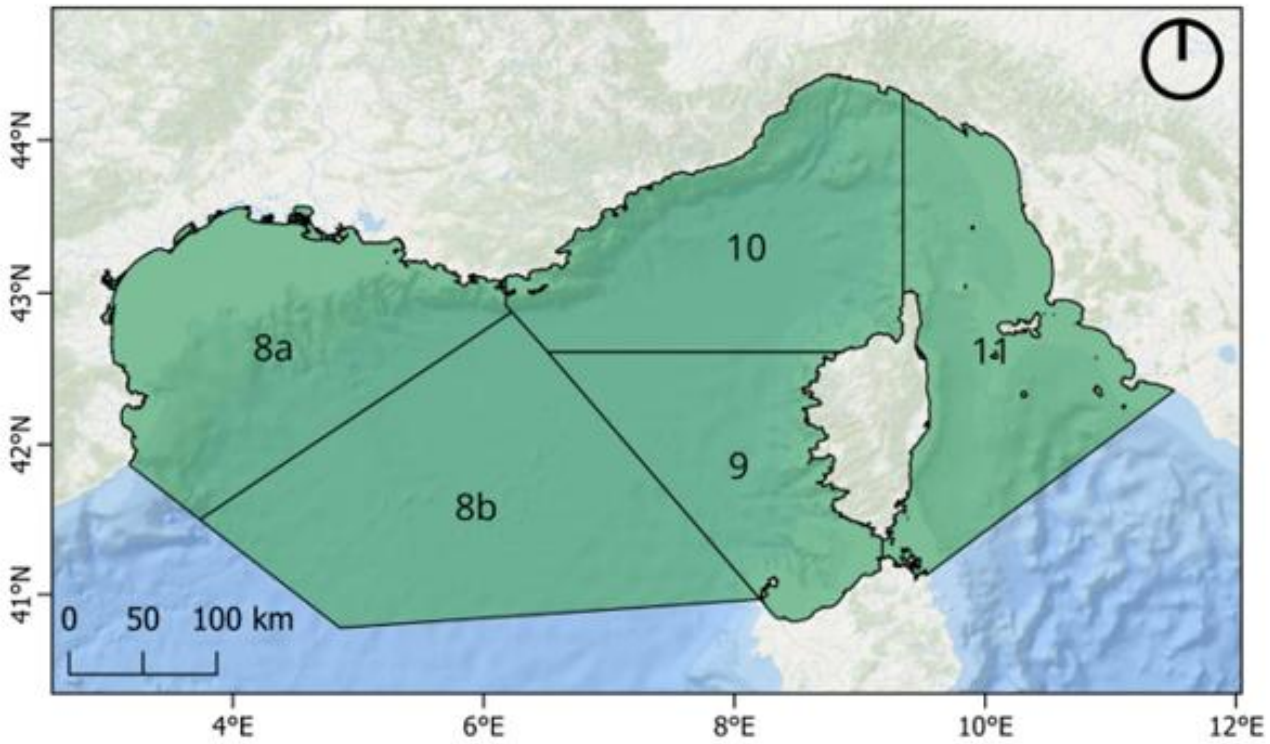

Figure 2. Survey Blocks for Package 1

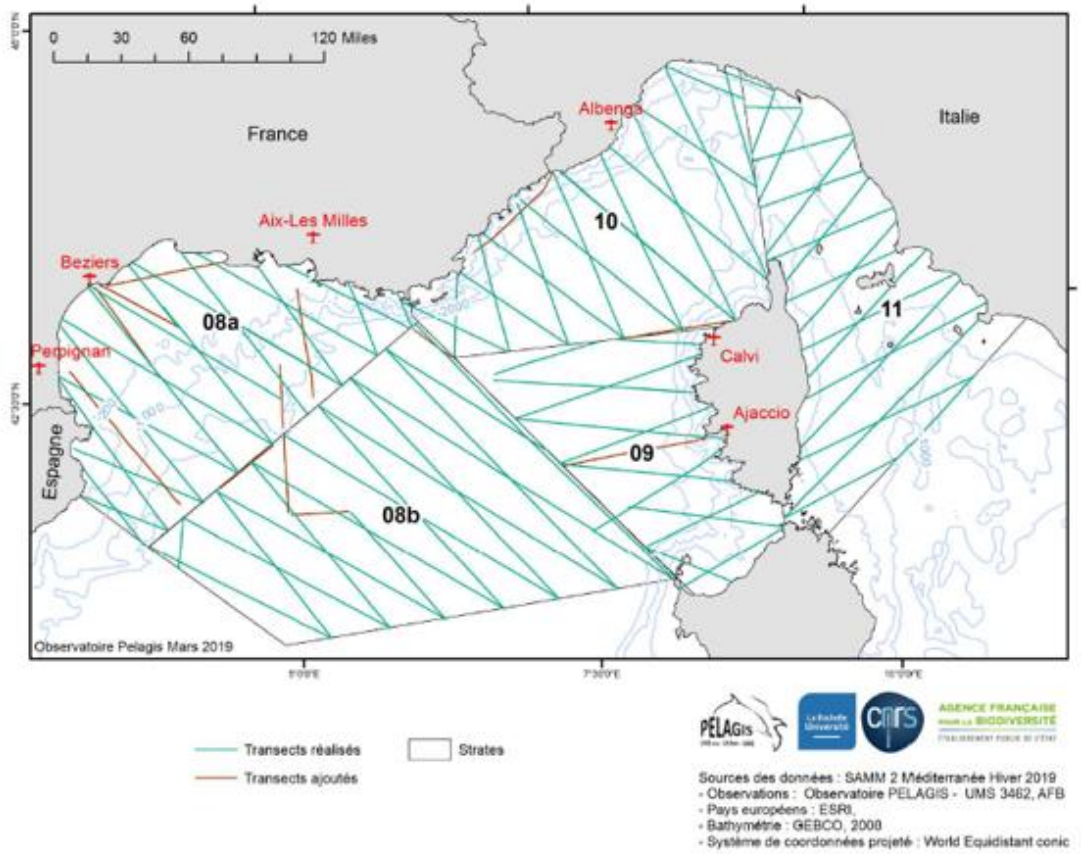

Figure 3. Survey blocks and transects for Package 1

Sector	Block ID	Strata	Area km²	Expected Effort	Expected Transit	Expected Flight Hours	Min. Expected effort (km)
Gulf of Lion	8a	Shelf	34 718	16	10	26	1 749
	8b	Deep	46 952	19	15	34	2 658
Pelagos Sanctuary	9	Pelagos SW	22 642	8	7	15	1 046
	10	Pelagos NW	34 093	13	9	22	1 565
	11	Pelagos E	31 064	11	9	20	1432
TOTAL				**67**	**50**	**117**	**8 450**
Formation STORMM				**3**	10	10	
TOTAL				**70**	**60**	**127**	**8 450**

Table 1. Track length and expected effort per block for Package 1

PACKAGE 2

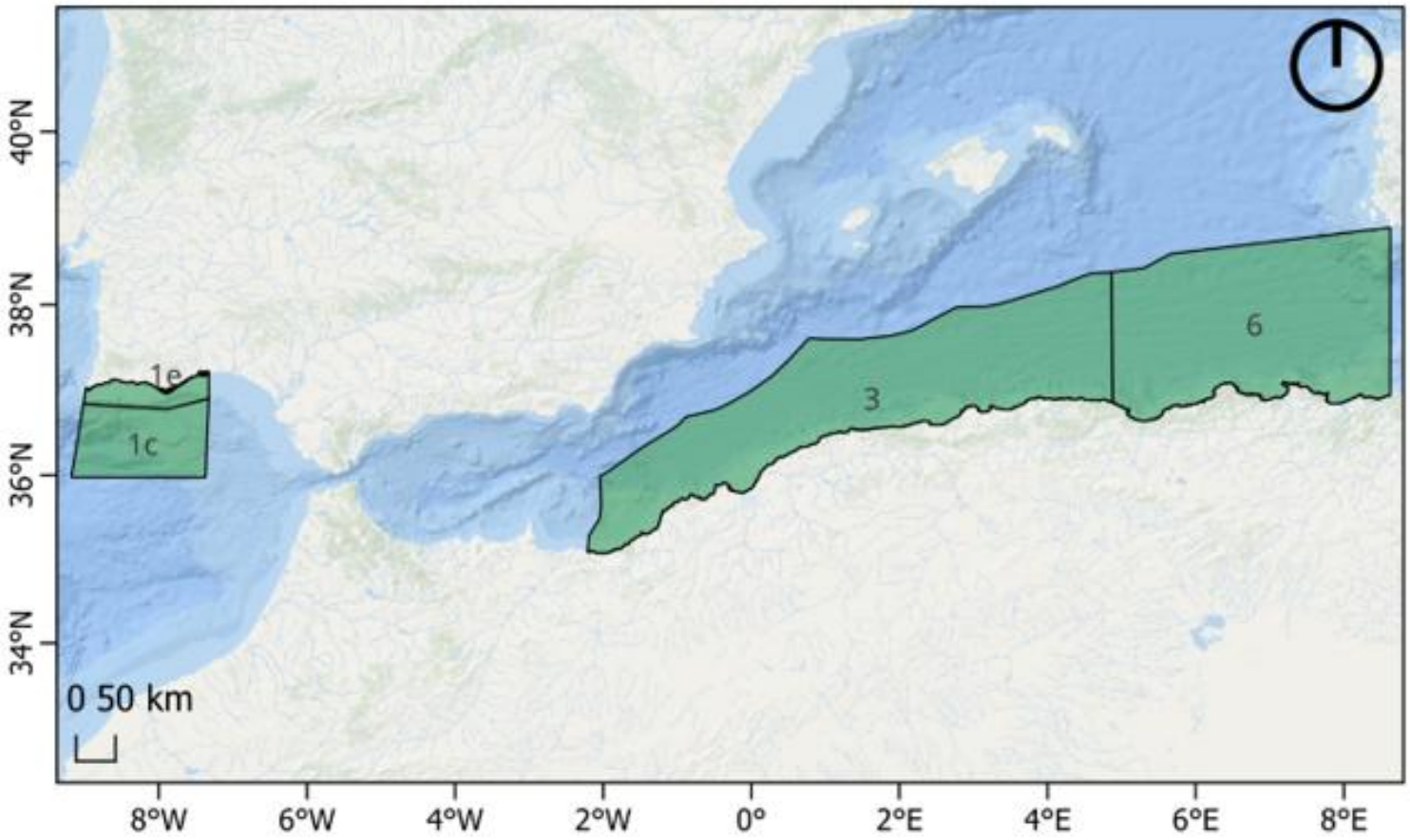

Figure 4.a. Survey Block for Package 2 (blocks 1e, 1c, 3 and 6)

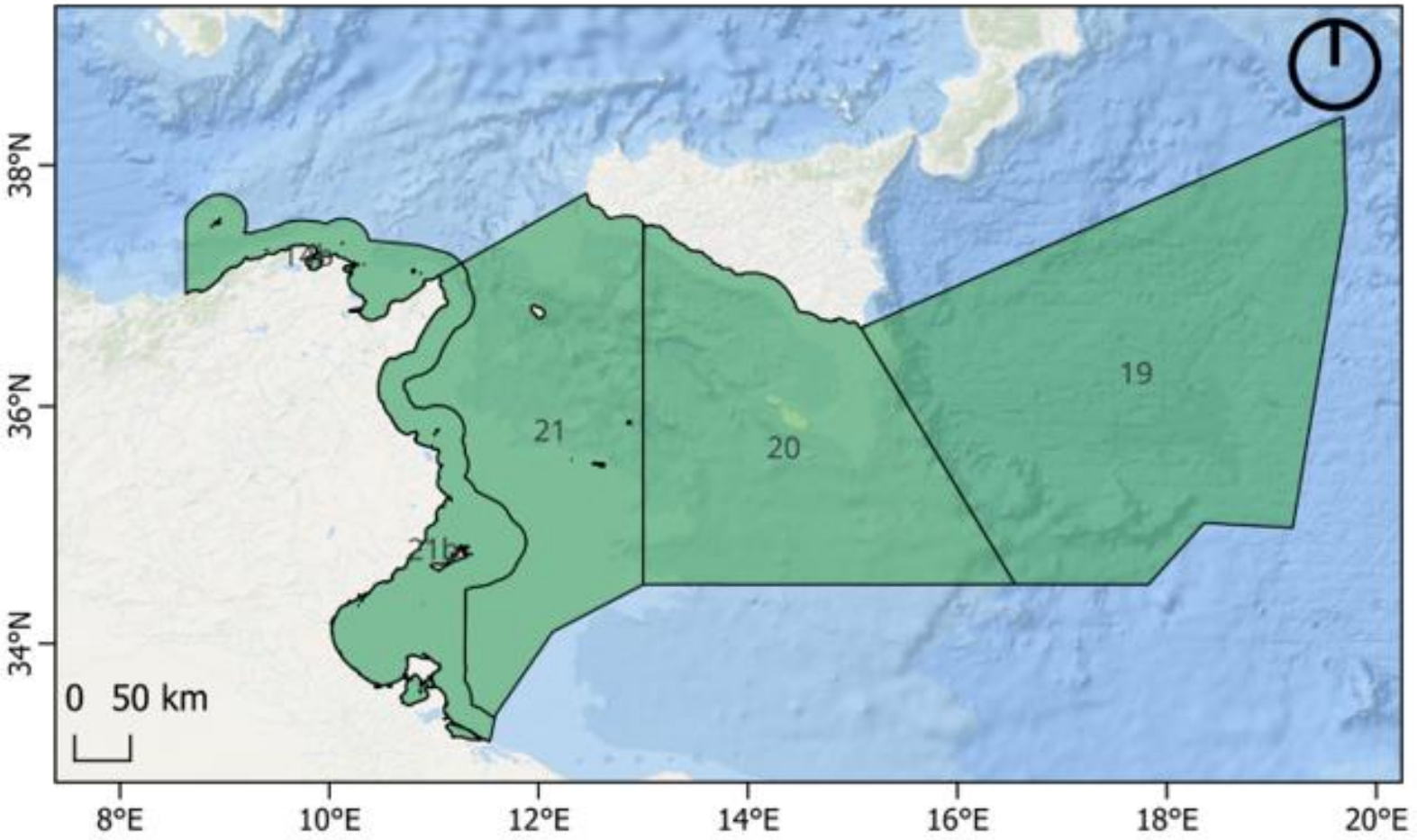

Figure 4 b. Survey Block for Package 2 (blocks 14b, 19, 20, 21, 21b)

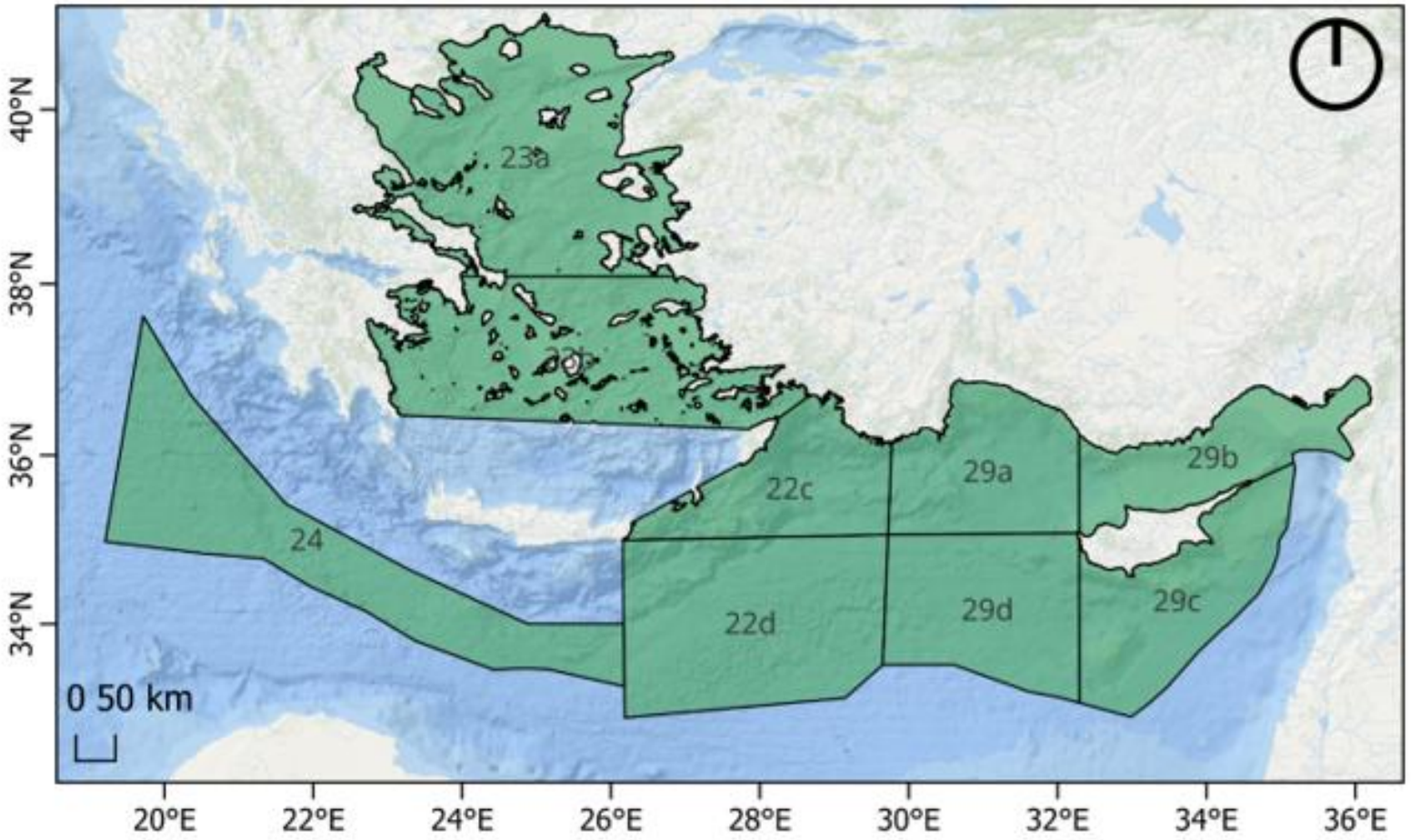

Figure 4.c. Survey Block for Package 2 (blocks 22c, 22d, 23a, 23b, 24, 29a, 29b, 29c, 29d)

Block ID	Block	Area (km²)	Min. Expected Effort (km)	Expected flight hours
1c	Gulf of Cadiz N-half-offshore	20 981	943	5.1
1e	Gulf of Cadiz N-shelf-West	4 327	186	1.0
3	AlgeriaWest complete	110 147	5 258	28.0
6	AlgeriaEast complete	67 045	3 195	17.0
14b	Tunisia 12nm North	10 553	511	3.0
19	IonianS	110 086	5 244	28.0
20	SicilySouth	75 056	3 676	20.0
21	Tunisia Offhsore	47 107	2 445	13.0
21b	Tunisia 12nm East	24 568	1 146	6.0
22c	HellenicTrench East	113 970	5 174	28.0
22d	22d-SECrete	34 127	3 326	18.0
23a	AegeanN	69 452	3 244	18.0
23b	AegeanS	63 895	2 976	16.0
24	IonianSE	63 467	3 236	17.0
29a	CyprusWest	33 631	1 610	9.0
29b	CyprusNEast	31 598	1 461	8.0
29c	CyprusSEast	43 368	2 143	12.0
29d	CyprusSWest	40 798	1 961	11.0

Table 2. Track length and expected minimum effort per block for Package 2

The following map shows a sampling design for illustrative purposes only. The transects and study areas shown are purely examples based on the sampling design employed during the ASI-I survey. These areas and the sampling framework are provisional and will be revised for the ASI-II survey.

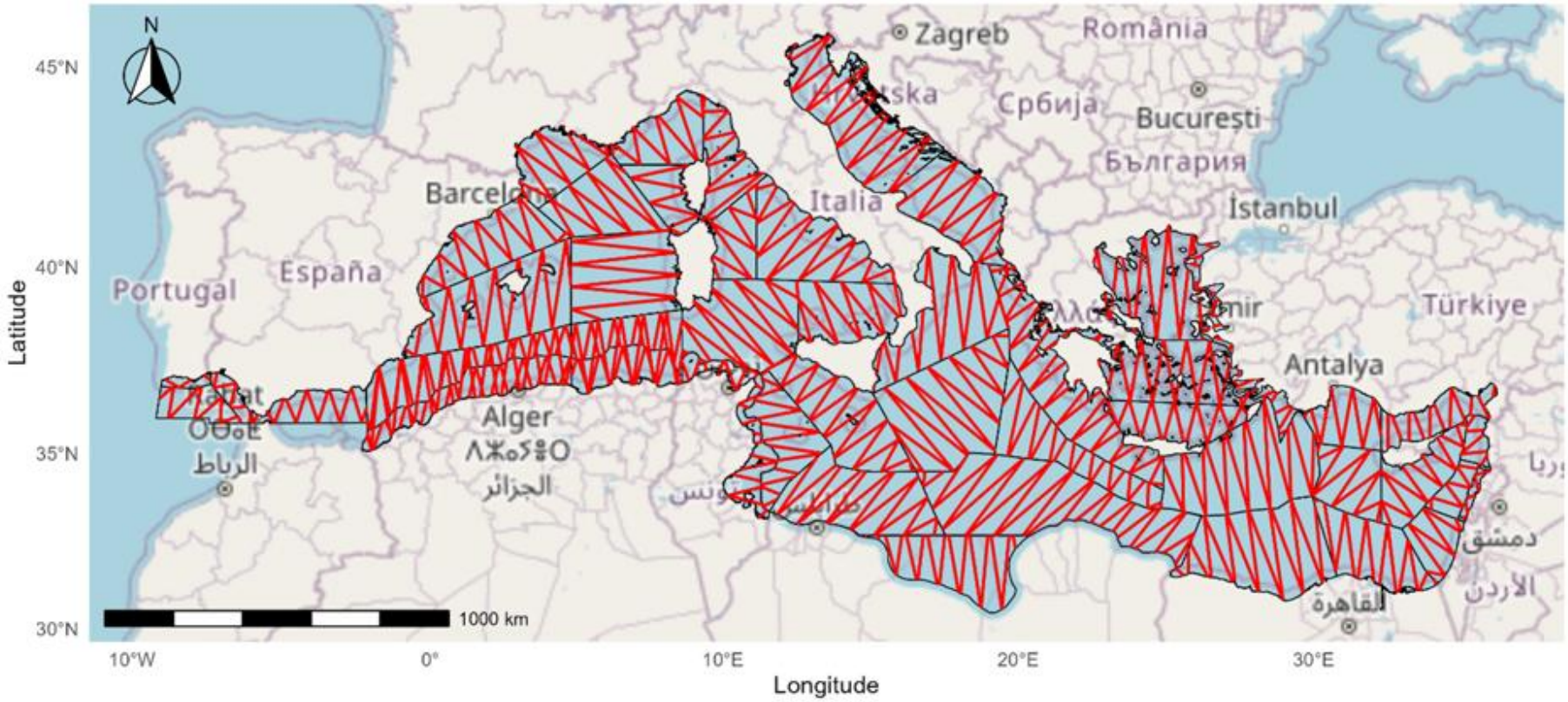

Figure 5. Overall survey blocks and transects for illustrative purpose only from the ASI-I Survey (2018)

This map is provided solely for illustrative purposes, offering applicants a general overview of the surveys conducted during the first edition of the ACCOBAMS initiative (ASI-I).

ANNEX II - AIRCRAFT TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

The aircraft must meet the following requirements:

Certification and Safety

- Hold valid certification and appropriate insurance.
- Comply with current aviation safety regulations and be equipped with:
    - An emergency rescue boat.
    - Marine life vests with manual release.
    - Two emergency satellite locator transmitters (one fixed in the aircraft, one portable).
- Pilots of all survey aircraft should have relevant experience of survey flying (20-30 hours), especially at low altitudes over water.

Aircraft Specifications

- Two-engine configuration (symmetrical).
- MTOW greater than or equal to 2 tonnes.
- Capable of maintaining a ground speed between **80 and 100 knots** at an altitude of approximately **600–750 feet** during survey operations.
- High-wing design to ensure unobstructed downward visibility from the bubble windows.
- Bubble windows on both sides for two observers, plus good forward visibility for the navigator in the front seat.
- No structural elements obstructing the view of the sea beneath the aircraft (e.g., landing gear or jamb between wings and fuselage should not block the sea view under the plane).
- Seats located parallel to or facing the windows to allow the seating to be as comfortable as possible, with an option to darken the upper part of the bubble windows to reduce reflection on the window.

Navigation and Equipment

- Equipped with GPS and radar altimeter.
- Ability to follow pre-defined GPS tracks with start and end points.
- Minimum endurance of **5–6 hours** (fuel capacity) and 4 passengers with luggage.
- Intercom system enabling clear communication among all observers and the pilot, with an option to mute the pilot if necessary.
- Three active noise-cancelling headsets.
- DC power supply (12V or 24V) for laptop and GPS connection.

Additional requirements (only for Package 1):

- Standard airplane photo hatch (STORMM, digital camera set up)

Fig. 5. Partenavia P-68 aircraft.

Fig. 6. Partenavia P-68 with bubble windows.

Fig. 7. BN2 Plane used during ASI-I