

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 workshops¹ 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*

¹ 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.