

TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR AN ACCOBAMS EXPERT WORKSHOP ON THE POST-WAR PLAN FOR BLACK SEA CETACEANS

Aim: Development of a Post-war Plan for the Black Sea region towards the mitigation of warfare consequences on cetaceans, their habitat and their prey

1. BACKGROUND

1.1. Policy Framework

The ACCOBAMS Resolution 9.10 “*Post-war Plan for Black Sea Cetaceans*,” adopted at the Ninth Meeting of the Parties (MOP9), mandates the Secretariat to organize dedicated regional workshops in collaboration with the Black Sea Sub-Regional Coordination Unit to elaborate a road map for the Post-war Plan for the Black Sea region.

This resolution builds upon:

- Resolutions 8.17 on “*Anthropogenic noise*” and 9.15 on “*Anthropogenic underwater noise*” which requested the Scientific Committee to develop a post-war Plan for the Black Sea region and requested the Parties to implement it;
- The Agreement on the Conservation of Cetaceans of the Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea and contiguous Atlantic area (ACCOBAMS Agreement), particularly Article II and Annex 2 (Conservation Plan);
- ACCOBAMS Strategy for achieving favorable conservation status for cetacean populations;
- Recommendation 16.1 of the Scientific Committee on “*Post-war Plan for Black Sea cetaceans*”;
- Outcomes of the Joint ACCOBAMS – Black Sea Commission Meeting (March 2024, Istanbul, Türkiye);
- The “*Trilateral Initiative*” launched in 2024 between the naval forces of Bulgaria, Romania and Türkiye, with its Memorandum of Understanding signed in Istanbul on 11 January 2024.

1.2. Context

The war in the Black Sea region has adversely impacted all riparian countries to varying degrees. The impacts extend beyond direct combat activities and include:

- Underwater noise from warfare activities and construction works;
- Marine pollution and eutrophication;
- Increased risk of infections and bio-invasions of alien (non-indigenous) species;
- Damage to cetacean habitat and prey populations;
- Changes in shipping routes;
- Presence of naval mines and underwater explosives;
- Alterations to the seascape;
- Disruption of cetacean distribution, feeding, breeding, and migration patterns.

The Post-war Plan aims to address these consequences through a comprehensive, scientifically-based approach to assess damage, guide mitigation measures, and support the recovery of Black Sea cetacean populations and their ecosystems.

2. OBJECTIVES OF THE WORKSHOP

The overall objective of the workshop is to develop a comprehensive road map for the Post-war Plan for the Black Sea region towards the mitigation of warfare consequences on cetaceans, their habitat and their prey.

Specific objectives include:

2.1. Assessment Framework Development

- Review existing data and methodologies for assessing warfare impacts on cetaceans, their habitat, and prey species;

*Participants are kindly invited to bring their own documents to the Meeting.
This document will be available only in electronic format during the Meeting.*

- Identify data gaps and priorities for monitoring and assessment programs;
- Develop or recommend protocols for monitoring of underwater noise, chemical pollution, marine debris, and biological indicators of stress;
- Establish or recommend guidelines for postmortem studies, pathology investigations, and sample collection/archiving;
- Suggest approaches for assessing shifts in distribution and abundance of cetacean prey species.

2.2. Action Planning

- Identify best practices for minimizing environmental impact for demining operations and the ways for their future development and improvement;
- Evaluate potential locations for new marine protected areas, including Important Marine Mammal Areas (IMMAs);
- Develop recommendations for enhanced stranding response and investigation capacity;
- Propose bycatch mitigation measures addressing post-war effects;
- Provide recommendations for education and public awareness campaigns for professionals and the general public.

2.3. Coordination and Collaboration

- Establish mechanisms for regional cooperation among Black Sea riparian countries;
- Define roles and responsibilities for implementation among Parties, the Secretariat, the Black Sea Sub-Regional Coordination Unit, and relevant partners;
- Explore opportunities for collaboration with:
 - Naval forces and other relevant governmental bodies conducting demining operations;
 - The Black Sea Commission Permanent Secretariat;
 - The General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM);
 - The ACCOBAMS Emergency Task Force for Stranding events (AETFS) Black Sea Sub-Task;
 - Other relevant national and international bodies;
- Identify potential funding sources and partnership opportunities.

2.4. Road Map and Implementation

- Develop a phased implementation timeline with short, medium, and long-term actions;
- Establish indicators and benchmarks for measuring progress;
- Define a monitoring and evaluation framework for the Post-war Plan;
- Outline capacity building needs and training programs;
- Propose mechanisms for adaptive management and plan revision.

3. WORKSHOP STRUCTURE AND METHODOLOGY

3.1. Workshop Format

The workshop will consist of:

- a) A preparatory phase (online consultation/preparation of background materials);
- b) A main workshop (2-3 days, in-person or hybrid format);
- c) A follow-up phase (finalization of outputs and recommendations).

3.2. Working Sessions

The workshop will be organized around thematic sessions aligned with the topics identified in the Annex to Resolution 9.10:

Session 1: Assessment Methodologies and Monitoring Frameworks

The session will cover:

- Monitoring approaches (noise, pollution, marine debris, biological indicators);
- Tissue banking and sample archiving protocols;
- Remote sensing and detection technologies;
- Assessment of prey distribution and abundance;
- Bycatch risk assessment.

Session 2: Priority Actions and Mitigation Measures

The session will cover:

- Demining operations and best environmental practices;
- Marine protected areas and spatial management;
- Stranding response enhancement;
- Bycatch mitigation strategies;
- Education and awareness programs.

Session 3: Regional Cooperation and Implementation Strategy

The session will cover:

- Roles and responsibilities of stakeholders;
- Coordination mechanisms and governance;
- Funding strategies and resource mobilization;
- Timeline and phasing of implementation;
- Monitoring and evaluation framework.

Session 4: Road Map Development and Finalization

The session will cover:

- Synthesis of recommendations;
- Drafting of the road map;
- Identification of immediate priorities;
- Next steps and work plan.

3.3. Outputs

The workshop will produce:

- a) A road map for the Post-war Plan for the Black Sea, including:
 - Situation assessment and baseline information;
 - Priority areas, topics, activities, and measures;
 - Implementation timeline with phased actions;
 - Roles and responsibilities of stakeholders;
 - Monitoring and evaluation framework;
 - Budget estimates;
- b) Technical recommendations for consideration by the Scientific Committee and Meeting of the Parties;
- c) A two-year work plan for immediate implementation priorities;
- d) Recommendations for capacity building and training needs;
- e) Proposals for collaborative projects and partnerships.

4. WORKSHOP COMPOSITION

4.1. Core Participants

The workshop will include experts from:

- Black Sea Parties (Bulgaria, Georgia, Romania, Türkiye, Ukraine) and the EU;
- ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee members and task managers;
- Black Sea Sub-Regional Coordination Unit (Black Sea Commission);
- ACCOBAMS Emergency Task Force for Stranding events (AETFS) – Black Sea Sub-Task members;
- Experts in relevant fields (Section 5.2).

4.2. Required Expertise

The workshop should include experts with knowledge and experience in:

- Cetacean biology, ecology, population dynamics and stock assessment and conservation;
- Underwater acoustics and noise impact assessment;
- Marine pollution and environmental toxicology;
- Marine debris and plastic pollution;
- Cetacean stranding investigation and pathology;

- Tissue banking and sample preservation;
- Fisheries and cetacean-fisheries interactions;
- Marine spatial planning and protected areas management;
- Demining operations and underwater explosives;
- Remote sensing and marine monitoring technologies;
- Risk assessment and environmental impact assessment;
- Marine ecosystem restoration;
- Fish ecology and stock assessment.

4.3. Invited Organizations and Stakeholders

The workshop should seek participation from:

- Black Sea Commission Permanent Secretariat;
- General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM);
- Relevant naval forces and Mine Countermeasures Task Group representatives (subject to security considerations);
- International Whaling Commission (IWC);
- ASCOBANS (Agreement on the Conservation of Small Cetaceans of the Baltic, North East Atlantic, Irish and North Seas);
- European Commission (DG MARE, DG ENV);
- NGO partners with expertise in the Black Sea region;
- Research institutions and universities from the Black Sea region;
- Relevant ACCOBAMS Partners.

4.4. Steering Group

A Steering Group will be established to guide the workshop preparation and follow-up, consisting of:

- ACCOBAMS Secretariat (co-convenor);
- Black Sea Sub-Regional Coordination Unit representative (co-convenor);
- Representative(s) of the ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee;
- Representative(s) from Black Sea Parties;
- Selected expert(s) on post-war impacts and/or cetacean conservation in the Black Sea.

5. LOGISTICS

5.1. Proposed steps

- Call for experts and nominations
- Preparatory consultations
- Main workshop
- Finalization of outputs
- Presentation to Scientific Committee
- Submission to the Parties: Bureau and as appropriate

5.2. Location

To be determined in consultation with the Black Sea Parties and Black Sea Sub-Regional Coordination Unit. Online or hybrid participation options should be provided to ensure maximum participation.

5.3. Funding

The workshop will be funded through:

- ACCOBAMS (if available);
- Voluntary contributions from Parties;
- External funding sources (to be identified).

Parties and partners are encouraged to provide in-kind contributions, including:

- Hosting facilities;
- Technical support.

6. PREPARATORY WORK

Prior to the workshop, the Secretariat, in collaboration with the Steering Group, will:

- a) Compile relevant background documentation, including:
 - Compilation of available data on warfare impacts in the Black Sea;
 - Review of existing assessments and scientific literature;
 - Review of applicable international guidelines and frameworks;
 - Summary of relevant ACCOBAMS Resolutions and recommendations;
- b) Develop a workshop agenda;
- c) Prepare template documents for working groups;
- d) Conduct preparatory consultations with key stakeholders as needed.

7. POST-WORKSHOP ACTIVITIES

Following the workshop, the Secretariat will:

- a) Compile and edit the workshop report and road map;
- b) Circulate draft outputs to participants for review and comments;
- c) Finalize the Post-war Plan road map;
- d) Present the road map and recommendations to the Scientific Committee;
- e) Submit the Plan for consideration and prompt adoption by the Parties;
- f) Support Parties in implementation of applicable activities and measures.

8. LINKAGES WITH OTHER INITIATIVES

The workshop will ensure coordination with:

- ACCOBAMS Conservation Management Plan for Black Sea cetaceans (in development);
- ACCOBAMS Emergency Task Force for Stranding events (AETFS);
- Network for harbour porpoise bycatch in the Black Sea between European Commission, DG Mare, GFCM, ACCOBAMS and the Black Sea Commission;
- ACCOBAMS Survey Initiative and long-term monitoring programs;
- Joint ACCOBAMS-ASCOBANS Bycatch Working Group;
- Joint CMS/ACCOBAMS/ASCOBANS Noise Working Group;
- Black Sea Strategic Action Plan;
- EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive implementation in the Black Sea;
- Relevant projects under the Black Sea Commission;
- Other regional and international initiatives relevant to Black Sea cetacean conservation.

9. EXPECTED OUTCOMES

The workshop is expected to:

- a) Provide a clear, evidence-based road map for addressing warfare consequences on Black Sea cetaceans;
- b) Establish priorities for immediate, short-term, and long-term action;
- c) Strengthen regional cooperation on cetacean conservation;
- d) Build capacity for monitoring, assessment, and mitigation of warfare impacts;
- e) Support the recovery of Black Sea cetacean populations toward favorable conservation status;
- f) Provide a model for post-war marine conservation planning in other regions.