

STATE OF PLAY OF THE ACCOBAMS SURVEY INITIATIVE -II (ASI-II)**Background**

Through Resolution 8.10 on the ACCOBAMS Long-Term Monitoring Programme, Parties committed to facilitate the implementation of regular basin-wide synoptic surveys, by endorsing recommendation 14.1 of the Scientific Committee, in order to ensure systematic monitoring of the distribution and abundance of cetacean populations in the ACCOBAMS Area.

In ACCOBAMS Resolution 8.10, Parties requested *“the Scientific Committee and the Secretariat, in collaboration with the ASI Steering Committee and other relevant experts, to prepare, for the next basin wide survey, a detailed technical document in the form of a project proposal, with a description of the different work packages, timeframe, budget and a SWOT analysis”*.

In addition, under the same Resolution, Parties were invited to:

- *“provide voluntary contributions in 2023 so to meet the expected internal funding in view of undertaking synoptic basin-wide surveys in the ACCOBAMS Area in 2024-2026”* (para. 5)
- *“to commit to providing in-kind support for the next synoptic basin-wide surveys”* (para. 7);
- *to appoint a national contact person to participate in a LTMP Contact Group to define implementation conditions and protocol for logistics (research platform, human means, equipment, training, etc.) and administration (survey restrictions, permits, etc.) related to undertaking basin-wide synoptic surveys based upon the experience gained from ASI-I, taking into account the guidance provided in Recommendation 14.1 of the Scientific Committee”*.

This document provides a comprehensive overview of developments related to the upcoming basin-wide survey under the ASI-II for the period 2023–2025 and outlines key forthcoming developments in light of the aerial and vessel-based survey campaign planned for summer 2026.

1. Preparatory phases of the ASI-II

The project proposal requested by the Parties, consisting of a detailed technical document including different work packages, time frame, budget and SWOT analysis was drafted by the Scientific Committee and the Secretariat and further revised by the SC15 (10-11 May 2023, Tunis, Tunisia), before being circulated to all Parties on 5/10/2023, through their National Focal Points. The project proposal is annexed to this document ([see Annex I](#))

Parties were also requested to officially indicate the following, prior to 31/12/2023:

- *To officially indicate which voluntary contributions and/or in-kind support Parties would be ready to allocate to the implementation of the ASI-II project, and, indicatively, for the following surveys, as foreseen in the Long-Term Monitoring Programme adopted in Resolution 8.10;*
- *To appoint a national representative for the LTMP Contact Group.*

The responses from Parties guided the Secretariat's fundraising efforts and informed the funding strategy for the overall implementation of the initiative. The following sections outline the process related to the **preparatory phase** of the ASI-II, particularly concerning its start date, which has been determined by the availability of funding

1.1 The LTMP Contact Group Discussions on the funding of ASI-II:

The LTMP Contact Group, composed of National representatives appointed by Parties, has met five times between January 2024 and October 2025 to clarify and gather information on expected contributions from their countries (whether in cash or in kind), as required by Resolution 8.10.

The LTMP Contact groups were all held online on the following dates:

- 29 January 2024
- 11 March 2024
- 18 June 2024
- 4 April 2025
- 1 October 2025

The reports of the LTMP Contact Group meetings are compiled in an Information Document (document ACCOBAMS-MOP9/2025/Inf10). The composition of the Contact group as for October 2025 is annexed to this document ([see Annex II](#)).

Such assessments were essential in determining the **date of start and ending of ASI-II**, as well as its launching phase, as reflected in the corresponding timeline in the Project Proposal.

The preparatory stage for launching the ASI-II edition was expected to be completed in the first half of 2024, with the aim of recruiting a scientific and operational team composed of a scientific coordinator and a project officer. This team was expected to begin work in the second half of 2024, focusing in particular on developing a common methodology to launch the initiative at the beginning of 2025.

Due to unclear funding options from the Parties, including the timing of financial availability, the Third Meeting of the LTMP Contact Group meeting held on the 18th of June 2024 concluded that:

- The starting date of **ASI-II should be postponed to 2026**, to give time to:
 - pursue the efforts of Countries and the Secretariat in seeking the necessary funding for launching the initiative;

- have the necessary funds to recruit the coordination personnel at the Secretariat, as well as the Scientific coordinator, in accordance with point VI of the Project (Project Governance): *“full-time Project manager, full-time administrative assistant and the Scientific coordinator”*;
 - use the *momentum* of the political context of the 2025 UNOC to increase visibility of ASI-II.
- There was an urgent need to recruit a full-time ASI-II Project manager and a full-time administrative assistant in the Secretariat, as well as the Scientific Coordinator.
- The Scientific Committee and other relevant experts should be consulted on the need to adapt the current ASI-II, including the survey design, bearing in mind new and environmentally friendly technologies and the need to reduce costs.

The Fourth and Fifth meetings of the LTMP Contact Group held in 2025 were crucial for planning the technical implementation of ASI-II at the national level among participating countries.

1.2 The Sixteenth Meeting of the ACCOBAMS Bureau:

Following the Third Meeting of the LTMP Contact Group, on the morning of 18 June 2024, the Bureau met online in the afternoon of the same day to assess the preparatory stage preceding the ASI-II launching, and to take a decision, in accordance with article 1 of the Rules of Procedure of the Bureau.

The 16th Bureau Meeting reached the following conclusions:

1. Noting the current circumstances, the initial timeline of the project needs to be updated, notably for the ASI-II fieldwork.
2. To start the project as soon as possible, to plan ASI-II fieldwork in 2026, and meanwhile allow time to:
 - pursue the efforts of Countries and the Secretariat in seeking the necessary funding for launching the initiative;
 - have the necessary funds to recruit the coordination personnel at the Secretariat and the Scientific coordinator, in accordance with point VI of the [project proposal](#) (Project Governance): *“full-time Project manager, full-time administrative assistant and the Scientific coordinator”*;
 - use the *momentum* of the political context of the 2025 UNOC to increase the visibility of ASI-II.
3. Subject to bilateral agreements with donor countries, to seek the possibility to use funds from any contributions received in 2024 for engaging a scientific team to adapt the project methodologies, considering appropriate environmentally friendly technologies, and survey design in consultation with the Scientific Committee.

1.3 The Sixteenth Meeting of the Scientific Committee:

During the 16th Meeting of the Scientific Committee (Barcelona, Spain, December 2024), Recommendation 16.3 – « ASI-II and the ACCOBAMS LTMP » was adopted.

It stated the following:

“The Scientific Committee welcomes the commitment in principle shown by the Parties to ASI-II 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/ ASI-II were not obtained. In summary, the Scientific Committee stresses the urgency of the Parties meeting their commitments to ASI-II soon as possible and:

(1) reiterates the fundamental importance of a synoptic ASI-II 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 ASI-II;

(3) confirms that ASI-II 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 ASI-II 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 ASI-II;*
- 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 ASI-II. 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. ASI-II 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 ASI-II.

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 ASI-II. 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."

1.4 The Seventeenth Meeting of the ACCOBAMS Bureau:

During the 17th Meeting of the ACCOBAMS Bureau (Monaco, Hybrid, 14 -15 February), the Bureau acknowledged the necessity of hiring coordination staff to assist the Secretariat with administrative tasks, such as obtaining permits for surveys in national waters and securing funding as well as a Scientific Coordinator.

As such, 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 8.2¹;
- 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)”.

The Bureau also asked the Secretariat to:

- a) prepare an information note about possible unspent funds from the current triennium budget that might be transferred to ASI-II, and present it at the next Extended Bureau (April 2025);
- b) regularly inform the Parties, via the LMTP Contact Group, about the progress in preparation of the ASI-II.

1.5 The Sixth Meeting of the ACCOBAMS Extended Bureau:

During the Sixth Meeting of the ACCOBAMS Extended Bureau (Nice, 23-24 April 2025), the Bureau:

- reiterated the urgency of securing financial contributions and formal commitments from the Parties for ASI-II, as these are essential for the timely planning and successful implementation of the summer 2026 survey.
- stressed the necessity of appointing a Scientific Coordinator as soon as possible, before UNOC3, to ensure efficient planning and coordination of the ASI-II.

1.6 The ASI Steering Committee:

The ASI Steering Committee, formally in place since ASI-I, was mobilized to support the recruitment of a Scientific Coordinator, in coordination with the Bureau and with the Scientific Committee Task Manager on Cetacean Population Estimates and Distribution, Mr Tilen Genov.

2. Revised ASI-II Organisation and Timeline

The revised ASI-II timeline facilitated the recruitment of key personnel essential to the development of the initiative. A consultancy contract was awarded to Ms. Julie Belmont to provide technical and administrative support for the project's implementation. Additionally, in May 2025, a call for applications for the position of ASI-II Scientific Coordinator resulted in the appointment of M. Simone Panigada. Two ACCOBAMS project officers, Mrs Calley dedicated to the ASI-II and Mr Corniquet dedicated to the implementation of the ACCOBAMS Communication Strategy, were appointed in December 2025 following a call for applications issued by the Secretariat and will contribute to the implementation of the initiative.

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.”

In parallel, the updated timeline clarified the implementation schedule for ASI-II's four established Work Packages (WPs), ensuring effective management and streamlined execution of project activities.

The table below presents each Work Package for the Mediterranean region along with its planned implementation period.

WORK PACKAGES	IMPLEMENTATION PERIOD	MAIN ACTIONS
WP1 – Survey preparation and capacity development	Q2 2025 – Q4 2027	Preparing aerial and boat-based surveys through reviewing the scientific methodology and designing the sampling protocol, logistics, permit and authorisation applications, in coordination with the ASI II contact group (ACCOBAMS LTMP Group)
WP2 – Survey Implementation	Q4 2025 – Q4 2026	Implementing surveys (aerial and by boat), from the identification of observers, training of teams to their deployment ,return from the field and end of contracting
WP3 – Data Analysis and Results Interpretation	Q3 2026 – Q4 2028	<p>Analysing the data collected during the survey to produce abundance estimates, identify trends, and generate distribution maps.</p> <p>This WP also includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - activities to develop and strengthen conservation tools based on scientific results. - Organisation of meetings, studies, and workshops to consolidate existing tools (e.g., NW Med PSSA, MPA) and develop new conservation mechanisms and tools.
WP4 – Coordination, communication, and awareness-raising	Q2 2025-Q4 2028	<p>Cross-cutting component supporting the overall management of the project (2025–2028), including the implementation and monitoring of activities, technical and financial reporting, coordination between stakeholders, and project evaluation.</p> <p>Also covering communication and awareness-raising activities, as well as the dissemination of results.</p>

3. ASI-II Launch Event at UNOC3

As advised during the LTMP Contact Group Meetings and in the conclusions of the Sixteenth ACCOBAMS Bureau Meeting, ASI-II was officially launched on June 11, 2025, at the Théâtre de la Cité in Nice during a dedicated side event at the 2025 United Nations Ocean Conference (UNOC3), with the aim of increasing its visibility and mobilising international support.

The launch of ASI-II during UNOC3 comprised three parts:

- **A presentation of the results of ASI-I**, highlighting their significant contributions to advancing scientific knowledge and informing both regional and national marine conservation policies;
- **the official launch of ASI-II**, conducted by Ms. Gambin, Chair of the ACCOBAMS Bureau;
- **an invitation to participating countries and intergovernmental organisations to reaffirm their commitment and express concrete support** for the implementation of the ASI-II.

The side event gathered over 100 participants, including representatives from key organisations such as UNEP-MAP, UNEP-CMS, IWC, IHO, FAO/GFCM, SPA/RAC, PS/BSC, IUCN-Med, FPA II, IFAW, MCR, and Biodivearth. Delegations from several countries were also present, including Cyprus, Croatia, Georgia, Italy, France, Georgia, Malta, Monaco, Spain and Türkiye.



Launch of ASI-II during UNOC3 in Nice

4. ASI-II Communication Campaign

Social Media campaign

Recognizing the strong link between public outreach and fundraising, a LinkedIn campaign for ASI-II was conducted from 2 May to 16 June 2024. The main objective was to build relationships with potential funding organizations in the marine conservation sector.

The campaign consisted of three posts and two videos, as shown in the image below.



The campaign generated significant engagement, with a total of 2,072 interactions (including comments, likes, and shares), 615 clicks, and over 200,000 impressions (the number of times the content appeared on users' screen).

The campaign can be viewed at the following link: <https://accobams.org/accobams-survey-initiative-ii/>

In person-events:

Institutional meetings were identified as a core platform for increasing the visibility of ASI-II.

Accordingly, the second edition of the ACCOBAMS Survey Initiative was presented during side events at **the 9th Meeting of the Parties to ACCOBAMS** (18–21 November 2025, Cyprus) and the **24th Meeting of the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention (COP24)**, held in December 2025 in Cairo, Egypt.

5. Overview of the National Commitments, Fundraising efforts and Partnerships

Following the momentum generated by UNOC3, the ACCOBAMS Secretariat has been actively engaged in following up on country commitments, pursuing fundraising efforts, and strengthening collaborations with various partners.

The table below summarizes the information provided by the representatives of Parties regarding their commitments to support the ASI-II. The table only presents information received from the 30 April 2024 onward.

PARTIES	CONTRIBUTIONS IN NATURE	IN-KIND CONTRIBUTIONS		No formal information received as of January 2026
		Funds to be allocated to ASI-II	Contributions of local/regional or national surveys planned in 2026	
Albania				X
Algeria			X	
Bulgaria	X			
Croatia		X		
Cyprus		X		
Egypt			X	
France	X			
Georgia			X	
Greece			X	
Italy		X		
Lebanon			X	
Libya			X	

Malta		x	x	
Monaco	x			
Montenegro				x
Morocco			x	
Portugal	x ²			
Romania				x
Slovenia		x		
Spain		x		
Syria				x
Tunisia			x	
Türkiye		x		
Ukraine			x	

Regarding fundraising efforts with Foundations, the Secretariat has:

- Answered two calls for projects:
 - o from the Prince Albert II Foundation;³
 - o from the Audemars Watkins Foundation;⁴
- worked on finalising a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Thalassa Foundation to establish a partnership focused, at minimum, on communication and public awareness activities related to ASI-II.

Regarding strengthening collaborations with various partners:

With Intergovernmental Organizations, the Secretariat:

- Continues collaboration with SPA/RAC, as during ASI-I, to support all capacity-building activities;
- works with UNEP/MAP to create scientific synergies through the SEMPA project, focusing on harmonising methodologies and sharing datasets for regional analysis as well as with the EcAp Med PLUS project in order to position the ASI framework as an eligible best practice example within the project.
- maintains ongoing collaboration with MCRI which has been selected by the ASI Steering Committee to undertake the ASI-II vessel-based survey campaign.

The Secretariat has also approached US Navy to provide support and additional resources for the project.

6. Overview of the Current Budgetary Situation

The ASI-II project proposal estimates a minimum amount of **3 300 000 €** as necessary to support the full implementation of all ASI-II activities for the Mediterranean Region 'as well as a feasibility study for the ASI II implementation in the Black Sea.

In light of the recent developments mentioned above, the following table provides a provisional overview of the current budget, showing both confirmed and pending funding, with official confirmation expected in 2026.

	REQUESTED AMOUNT (EUROS)
FUNDING FROM FRANCE (OFB)*	500 000

2 With an official confirmation expected in 2026.

3 The Secretariat was not selected following its submission to this call for projects.

4 The Secretariat was not selected following its submission to this call for projects.

FUNDING FROM MONACO*	150 000
FUNDING FROM ITALY *	600 000
FUNDING FROM BULGARIA*	46 500
<i>FUNDING FROM SPAIN**</i>	<i>To be estimated</i>
<i>FUNDING FROM FRANCE (FEAMPA)**</i>	<i>1 100 000</i>
<i>FUNDING FROM US NAVY**</i>	<i>130 000</i>
ACCOBAMS SECRETARIAT ***	240 000
TOTAL	2 766 500

* confirmed funding

** pending funding

*** including Secretariat staff salaries

While significant progress has been made in mobilising support and submitting major funding requests, a **critical funding gap remains**. Without the swift confirmation of pending grants, the timely execution of core survey activities in summer 2026 is at risk. Securing additional funding is therefore essential to safeguard the implementation and success of the ASI-II.

7. Preparation of ASI-II Survey Campaign planned for summer 2026

From the end of 2025 onwards, the Secretariat has been working on the preparation of the operational aspects of the aerial and vessel-based survey campaigns. In this context, key meetings were organized, as outlined below.

First Meeting of the ASI Steering Committee for ASI-II, 28 October 2025

The first Meeting of the ASI Steering Committee dedicated to ASI-II was held online on 28 October 2025, enabling the validation of the Committee's Terms of Reference ([see Annex III](#)) and the structure governance of ASI-II ([see Annex IV](#)).

ASI-II Preliminary technical Workshop on Survey Design for MSFD Sub-regions and beyond, 5–7 November 2025 in Milan, Italy.

A technical workshop was held in Milan, Italy, bringing together 23 participants, including members of the ACCOBAMS Secretariat, ACCOBAMS National Focal Points, the ASI-II Scientific Coordination Team, and relevant experts. The objective of the workshop was to bring together the key stakeholders for ASI-II and share information regarding the aerial and vessel-based monitoring campaign planned for summer 2026.

The workshop addressed coordination between ASI-II activities and national monitoring programmes, the identification of potential operational challenges to survey implementation, and key aspects of survey design, including the R simulation framework while also discussing data integration approaches and protocols.

Second ASI Steering Committee Meeting for ASI-II, 20-21 January 2026.

The Second Meeting of the ASI Steering Committee for ASI-II took place on 20–21 January 2026 in Athens, Greece with the objective to provide strategic guidance and adopt operational recommendations ([see Annex V: Recommendations of the ASI Steering Committee for ASI-II](#)) to guide vessel-based and aerial survey campaigns scheduled for summer 2026, within the context of limited available funding for ASI-II.

As such, the Meeting addressed collaboration opportunities and institutional support for ASI-II, reviewed the retro-planning presented below, assessed budgetary aspects and the current financing status of ASI-II, and selected survey

platforms and survey teams. Participants also worked on developing a communication strategy and discussed capacity-building needs.

Implemented	2025				2026				2027				2028			
	T1	T2	T3	T4	T1	T2	T3	T4	T1	T2	T3	T4	T1	T2	T3	T4
Coordination and monitoring																
Secretariat Coordination																
Recruitment of project officer(s)																
Steering Committee ("physical" meetings foreseen)						1				2						
ACCOBAMS meetings (Bureau, MOP, LTMP WG)		BU & LTMP		LTMP & MOP9	SC17			BU18				SC18 BU19		BUEXT7		MOP10
External assistance - consultant technical admin support 2025 & 2026		R														
WP1 Survey preparation and capacity building																
Scientific coordinator and team for surveys preparation (incl. methods & protocols, survey design, software preparation, training support) <i>R=recruitment</i>		R														
Modelling framework development				Analysis 1st												
Survey preparation LTMP Workshop(s) and meetings		LTMP Meeting		LTMP Meeting												
Assessment of regional capacity building needs & implementation of training programme by sub region																
Study and set up for an update of the information management system for survey data																
Feasibility study for ASI II in the Black Sea																
Call for tenders for Survey Platforms (boat and planes), including HD photo STORMM system																
Permits and authorisations preparation and submission (S)																
WP2 Implementation of monitoring campaigns																
Scientific Coordinator & team for the Survey implementation , training & data preparation - <i>R=recruitment</i>					R											
Aerial and boat-based survey teams training workshops																
Survey teams identification, contracting and mobilisation																
Aircraft selection, contracting and mobilisation (including HD photo STORMM system)																
Boat selection, contracting and mobilisation																
Identification & Purchasing of equipment																
WP3 Analysis of results and conservation tools development																
Data analysis expert(s) selection and work							R									
Collaborative analysis work (e.g., workshop, publication)																
Interpretation of results for conservation (IMMA, CCH)																
Strengthening and initiating conservation measures and tools by area (e.g. PSSA)																
WP4 Communication and awareness-raising																
Development of Communication Strategy/ Roadmap																
Communication Material development																
Awareness events and participation in conferences							EMD Cyprus			IMPAC6						
Local communication initiatives (call for projects, selection and implementation of projects)																
ASI II Results launch event											Preliminary results				final results	

**ANNEX I – PROJECT PROPOSAL FOR THE SYNOPTIC BASIN-WIDE SURVEY IN THE ACCOBAMS AREA
PERIOD 2024-2027**

as circulated to the Parties on 5/10/2023 ⁵



**SYNOPTIC BASIN-WIDE SURVEY IN THE ACCOBAMS AREA
PERIOD 2024-2027**

PROJECT PROPOSAL

September 2023

⁵ Project proposal shared with the Parties on 10 October 2023; the project has since evolved and may no longer fully reflect this initial proposal.

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Executive Summary

The ACCOBAMS Agreement area (Mediterranean Sea, contiguous Atlantic area and Black Sea) contains key habitats for cetaceans and hosts more than 20 species, 14 of which are present throughout the year, as well as many other notable marine megafauna species. Most of the Mediterranean cetacean populations are considered "threatened" under the IUCN Red List due to significant human pressure and inferred declines over the last few years.

Robust knowledge of cetacean distribution and abundance is a prerequisite to *"take co-ordinated measures to achieve and maintain a favourable conservation status for cetaceans"* and allow the evaluation of existing conservation measures to this end (see Article II of the Agreement on ACCOBAMS Purpose and Conservation Measures). These are shared objectives with the Barcelona Convention EcAp policy (and its IMAP framework), the EU Habitats Directive and Marine Strategy Framework Directive and the Black Sea Integrated Monitoring and Assessment Programme (BSIMAP). Hence, the ACCOBAMS Survey Initiative (ASI) helps ACCOBAMS Parties to fulfil important parts of their obligations under several international policy and conservation frameworks.

In line with the main objective of ACCOBAMS, the ASI was set up as the first and most fundamental step to establishing a long-term programme for monitoring changes in abundance and distribution of cetaceans within the Agreement area. The first synoptic basin-wide surveys carried out in 2018-2019 helped to establish a technical monitoring framework and to collect the first synoptic baseline data on abundance and distribution of cetaceans at the Agreement area scale. However, in order to allow the ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee to assess trends in cetacean abundance and distribution and evaluate their conservation status, periodic surveys at the same scale are necessary.

At the Eighth ACCOBAMS Meeting of the Parties (Malta, 2022), Resolution 8.10 on the ACCOBAMS Long-Term Monitoring Programme (LTMP) was adopted. This endorsed Recommendation 14.1 of the Scientific Committee on an integrated and coordinated transnational monitoring programme (the LTMP), inviting Parties to facilitate its implementation. In addition, it tasked the Scientific Committee and the Secretariat, *"in collaboration with the ASI Steering Committee and other relevant experts, to prepare, for the next synoptic basin wide survey a detailed technical document in the form of a project proposal, with a description of the different work packages, time-frame, budget and a SWOT analysis"*. This document responds to this Resolution by providing a detailed project proposal for the next synoptic basin-wide survey (2024-2026) that includes a full description of the project's governance structure and of its four work packages, a timeline, a budget and a SWOT analysis.

The aim of this document is to (a) facilitate the tasks of ACCOBAMS Parties in obtaining the necessary funds and identifying the appropriate in-kind support and (b) assist the Secretariat in exploring and identifying external funding opportunities. The present proposal heavily relies on the experience and lessons learnt from the ACCOBAMS Survey Initiative 2018⁶.

⁶ Reference documents:

- Final report of the ACCOBAMS Survey Initiative project (ACCOBAMS-MOP8/2022/Inf12).
- ACCOBAMS Survey Initiative - Evaluation Report (ACCOBAMS-MOP8/2022/Inf16)

I. INTRODUCTION

The Mediterranean Sea, contiguous Atlantic area and Black Sea provide key habitats for cetaceans and host more than 20 species, of which 14 are present throughout the year (11 in the Mediterranean and 3 in the Black Sea). The ACCOBAMS area is also critical for many other marine megafauna species such as the monk seal, birds, turtles, and elasmobranchs. Most species of cetaceans in this area are considered "threatened" and listed on the *International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)* Red List of Threatened Species, and are strictly protected by international and regional law, including those of the European Union (EU) and of the relevant Regional Sea Conventions.

The main objective of ACCOBAMS is *"to take co-ordinated measures to achieve and maintain a favourable conservation status for cetaceans"*⁷. Tracking changes in the distribution and abundance of species is key to define and monitor conservation status, to optimise and adjust conservation measures according to species needs, and to evaluate whether conservation targets are being met. These objectives are shared with several international policy frameworks (see [Annex 1](#)). In particular, by fulfilling these objectives ACCOBAMS Parties also fulfil some of their obligations under the Barcelona Convention Ecosystem Approach (EcAp) policy and its Integrated Monitoring and Assessment Programme (IMAP)⁸, the EU Habitats Directive (HD) and Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD) and the Black Sea Integrated Monitoring and Assessment Programme (BSIMAP) of the Bucharest Convention.

ACCOBAMS has prioritised cetacean population monitoring as a key aspect of its conservation strategy to achieve its main objective. In recent years, the ACCOBAMS Parties, Scientific Committee, Secretariat and Partners have worked extensively to develop a dedicated initiative to support the establishment of a long-term monitoring programme (LTMP) across the ACCOBAMS area. The ACCOBAMS Survey Initiative (ASI) which was the first step of the ACCOBAMS long-term programme to monitor changes in cetacean distribution and abundance within the Agreement area, was officially launched during ACCOBAMS MOP6 in November 2016 after more than a decade of development and fundraising efforts.

The ASI project was a collaborative effort among riparian countries, national scientists, and over 40 national and international organisations, conducted from 2017 to 2022. Aerial and boat surveys, carried out during the summers of 2018 and 2019 applied a standardised methodological approach, resulting in an unprecedented dataset, across almost the entire ACCOBAMS area, on distribution and abundance of cetaceans, other marine megafauna, human activities and floating macro-litter. The ASI standard protocols on data collection and data analysis allow comparability of results with similar projects within the ACCOBAMS area, or data pooling for subregional modelling, where appropriate. Another positive outcome of the ASI was the establishment of a trained regional operational task force, raising awareness throughout the region, sharing substantial capacity and providing the tools for individual ACCOBAMS Parties to monitor their own marine wildlife. Finally, ASI has made significant contributions to international outreach in marine conservation efforts in the ACCOBAMS area by data sharing and publishing of peer-review scientific papers and technical documents, including: (1) a dedicated ASI Special Issue in the peer-reviewed journal *Frontiers in Marine Science*, (2) informing the IUCN Red List (re)assessment of Mediterranean cetaceans subpopulations and the UNEP-MAP Med Quality Status Report 2023 and (3) publishing the ACCOBAMS Status Report 2021 on *"Conserving Whales, Dolphins and Porpoises in the Mediterranean Sea, Black Sea and adjacent areas"*. These initiatives allowed

⁷ Article II of the Agreement on ACCOBAMS Purpose and Conservation Measures

⁸ The Integrated Meeting of EcAp Correspondence Groups on Monitoring (CORMON) meeting (Athens, Greece 27-28 June 2023,) emphasized 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 contribution. (ref. UNEP/MED WG.550/16/L.3)

further showcasing of the initiative's results to a broader scientific audience. A non-exhaustive list of products is provided in [Annex 2](#). Moreover, various types of stakeholders (including governments, scientists, managers, and NGOs) have benefitted from the ASI data to address local, national, and regional conservation objectives, including in support of the submission and adoption of the North Western Mediterranean PSSA (Particularly Sensitive Sea Area) by the International Maritime Organization, conducting Environmental Impact Assessments (EIA) and developing Maritime Spatial Planning plans ([Annex 2](#)).

Some of the recommendations from the 2021 ASI technical workshop ([Annex 2](#)) were used by the Scientific Committee to develop its Recommendation 14.1 on monitoring efforts in the ACCOBAMS region (LTMP). The latter, in conjunction with insights from sustainability-related studies conducted during the project (including the ASI evaluation, the Roadmap for Financial Support to Future Efforts, and the *ad hoc* Working Group on Financial Aspects), culminated in the adoption of Resolution 8.10 at the Eighth Meeting of the Parties to ACCOBAMS (MOP8, Malta, 28 November – 2 December 2022).

Resolution 8.10 tasked *“the Scientific Committee and the Secretariat, in collaboration with the ASI Steering Committee and other relevant experts, to prepare, for the next synoptic basin-wide survey, a detailed technical document in the form of a project proposal”*.

In consideration of the above, the present proposal takes up the key elements of implementation of the previous ASI synoptic surveys (i.e. main activities, timeline, governance) and builds on the gained experience and lessons learnt on survey methodology, logistical needs, technical issues, the value of a consolidated network and a survey task force.

This proposal is intended to assist countries in identifying appropriate resources and capacities, in kind and financial contributions, and to support the Secretariat in exploring and identifying external opportunities for the next synoptic basin-wide survey in the ACCOBAMS area in 2024-2026.

II. CONTEXT AND RATIONALE

There is widespread recognition of the need for monitoring programs that can assess changes in species distributions and abundances over large spatial and temporal scales, in order to predict and where necessary develop (and monitor the effectiveness of) management strategies to human pressures affecting conservation status. Effective monitoring efforts support national and regional policies by contributing towards understanding environmental status within the context of socioeconomic development. Estimating changes in the distribution and abundance of species is inherently complex, particularly when dealing with highly mobile and cryptic species such as cetaceans, whose ranges often span large areas and are subject to multiple human threats.

Despite the tremendous challenge posed by the geopolitical complexity of the ACCOBAMS area, the ASI has yielded significant benefits. Continuing this work is crucial, as the ACCOBAMS MOP8 has recognised the need for a next synoptic basin-wide survey in the ACCOBAMS area (the focus of this proposal) in the context of the ACCOBAMS LTMP. The protection of cetaceans and their habitats in the ACCOBAMS area presents substantial challenges and requires the Parties to consolidate and implement their monitoring vision at the basin wide and national levels, building upon the ASI and as expressed in the LTMP.

The ASI has established a critical baseline for assessing population trends over time by providing significant information and harmonising methods and protocols for data collection across the

Agreement area. From there, it is crucial that countries continue to systematically and regularly implement coherent, synchronised, and harmonised monitoring actions (or establish them if they do not exist). By collecting systematic time-series of data at the appropriate scales, the conservation status of these species can be regularly assessed and national and regional management strategies of multiple human activities⁹ be developed, prioritised and evaluated in the context of restoring and maintaining favourable conservation status. Monitoring changes in distribution and abundance can also contribute to an understanding of the effects of climate change.

In addition to monitoring the distribution and abundance of cetaceans, it is important to understand the distribution and levels of human activities that can affect cetaceans - only some of which can be assessed via the LTMP approach. Thus hand-in-hand with the LTMP, Parties and stakeholders must work together to obtain a thorough socioeconomic understanding of potential and actual threats of human activities and their environmental impact. The ASI data has been helpful in supporting countries' development of protective spatial measures, conducting EIAs, and developing marine spatial planning strategies. To continue progressing towards a sustainable 'Blue Economy' and ensure the long-term viability of marine and maritime sectors, it is crucial to feed coherent marine spatial planning strategies with data obtained from systematic monitoring of cetaceans and their habitats.

Protecting cetaceans and their habitat can also benefit the wider biodiversity through a variety of mechanisms. It is recognised that 'charismatic' species like cetaceans can also serve as flagship species for conservation, influencing public opinion and raising awareness about the importance of preserving natural resources.

III. PROJECT OBJECTIVES

The implementation of this project as part of the LTMP will facilitate the task of ACCOBAMS Parties in fulfilling their national and international commitments. In particular, this project collects information on key features (species presence, population estimations, critical habitat identification, threat assessment) that are necessary to assess the status of species and populations in the whole ACCOBAMS area. It also allows the gathering of information on other protected species (e.g., sea turtles), some human activities and some types of pollution (e.g., floating marine litter, anthropogenic noise). The project enables ACCOBAMS Parties to respond in particular to commitments with regards to the Barcelona Convention EcAp policy, the EU MSFD and HD, the United Nations *Sustainable Development Goals* (UN-SDG), the International Whaling Commission (IWC), the *Convention on Migratory Species (CMS)* and the *Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)*, etc.

With respect to ACCOBAMS, the project supports adopted conservation measures 2, 4 and 5 of Annex 2 of the Agreement (i.e. "*Assessment and management of human-cetacean interactions*", "*Research and monitoring*" and "*Capacity building, collection and dissemination of information, training and education*", respectively) and with Section 2 of the ACCOBAMS Strategy (Conservation Actions) and theme 5 concerning the improvement of knowledge for conservation contributing to the following specific objectives:

⁹ The nature and significance of the impacts of many human activities, direct (e.g. ship strikes and incidental catch) or indirect (e.g. many types of habitat changes and various forms of chemical, noise and plastic pollution) and cumulative, are often not yet fully understood.

- 5.1 Centralise, organise and disseminate the existing knowledge on cetaceans, their habitat, the pressures and impacts, the national institutions, legislations and capacities¹⁰;
- 5.2. Identify the gaps in knowledge and propose actions or programmes to improve the knowledge on cetaceans¹¹.

The project is part of a comprehensive approach to ensure at the ACCOBAMS level, that stakeholders in the ACCOBAMS area have access to a coherent monitoring system for the species concerned in the Mediterranean/contiguous Atlantic area/Black Sea ecoregion, based on objective, robust and comparable data, with a view to improving the conservation status of these species and their habitats through appropriate management for the good status of the marine and coastal environments in the area of the study.

It is an essential contribution to many of the LTMP objectives, including:

- strengthen international cooperation and synergies between the countries of the ACCOBAMS area to enhance the efficiency of their efforts to establish a transnational approach to conserve the concerned species;
- obtain robust estimates of abundance and distribution of cetaceans and other threatened species in the ACCOBAMS area (at regional, sub-regional and, where possible, national scale) and enable eventual estimation of changes in the abundance and distribution of cetaceans (and some other species), at the appropriate scales;
- collect information on certain human threats and monitor changes in the distribution and relative abundance of certain human activities and marine litter;
- contribute to place-based conservation efforts, such as the identification process of Important Marine Mammal Areas (IMMAs) and Cetacean Critical Habitats (CCH);
- facilitate the identification of high-risk areas of interaction between cetaceans (and other threatened species) and human activities in the ACCOBAMS area;
- inform adaptive conservation and management measures that allow achieving a favourable conservation status for cetaceans in the Agreement area and facilitate the improvement of conservation measures in place;
- contribute key knowledge that allows ACCOBAMS Parties to fulfil part of their obligations under ACCOBAMS and other conventions and multilateral agreements including the necessary information for the establishment and reviewing of reliable indicators and thresholds related to these species.

The project will also:

- enhance national capacity development and empowerment in the ACCOBAMS area for monitoring and conservation measures/policy development;
- contribute to the work on Conservation Management Plans (CMPs) for several species;
- raise awareness throughout the ACCOBAMS area on marine biodiversity conservation and sustainable use of natural resources;

¹⁰ Currently supported by Resolution 6.13 Comprehensive Cetacean population estimates and distribution in the ACCOBAMS Area and Resolution 8.12 IUCN Red List Status of cetacean species in ACCOBAMS Area.

¹¹ Currently supported by Resolution 8.10 ACCOBAMS Long Term Monitoring Programme.

- assist in examination of the effects of climate change on biodiversity.

In summary, this proposal has been developed taking into consideration the most recent international, regional and national strategies for the protection and monitoring of marine biodiversity and the efforts being undertaken by Parties in the ACCOBAMS area to meet their obligations and commitments in this respect ([Annex 1](#)). By improving knowledge of cetacean populations, the project responds directly to a set of international commitments of the ACCOBAMS Parties with regard to sustainable use, management and conservation of the marine environment to achieve or maintain a ‘Good Environmental Status’ of the seas.

IV. PROJECT STRUCTURE AND ACTIVITIES

The project consists of four work packages, whose activities will take place over a 4-year period, ideally starting in 2024. Although the monitoring campaigns in the Mediterranean/contiguous Atlantic area and in the Black Sea area are to be organised over two distinct summer periods (2025 and 2026 respectively), several activities linked to the preparation of the field operations will be carried out transversally and in a synchronised and cooperative manner to minimise costs, optimise available resources, harmonise data collection and analysis efforts and increasing the impact and outreach of the project.

1. Work Package 1: preparation of the survey operations and capacity development

This component encompasses the essential preparatory phase of the surveys, incorporating a diverse array of scientific, technical, administrative, and logistical tasks. Its primary goal is to establish the groundwork for a smooth and efficient execution of the subsequent field operations, as well as to provide a regional capacity-building programme targeting the entire ACCOBAMS area. This phase ensures meticulous preparation to optimize the survey process and long-term monitoring capacities of ACCOBAMS Parties.

i. Expected Results

- **a modelling framework using ASI and other relevant spatial and density data as input** to evaluate survey choices among different line transect distance sampling strategies (e.g. with respect to sampling coverage and geometry), to obtain the most robust abundance (and distribution) estimates, to enable trends to be detected in the future (at both basin and more ‘local’ levels);
- **a complete set of survey protocols for data collection and analytical methods by species/groups of species** at the scale of ACCOBAMS area based upon experience and data from the ASI, taking into account the need for comparability/aggregation/pooling of datasets (including survey platforms and equipment, data collection protocols and software, survey design, analyses);
- **the development of appropriate human and technical capacities in the countries participating in the project**, in terms of survey implementation (including crew by region), regular monitoring

of the species in question and feeding of information to assist the management of their critical and/or preferred habitats;

- **administrative processes identified and completed** (e.g., research permits, authorizations) and all logistics ready for the conduct of the field operations (including an active and responsive Contact Group, recruited Teams, all partnerships/contracts in place);
- **an updated information management system** for data storage and use, taking into account the existing ASI management system and by developing NETCCOBAMS functionalities, interoperable with other existing systems as well as allowing the pooling of all datasets.

ii. Main activities

A. REGIONAL CONSULTATION AND MOBILISATION

- mobilisation of each National Focal Point (NFP) and identified Contact persons to take part in the Project Contact Group;
- organisation of 2 regional Survey preparation Contact Group Workshops (one for the Mediterranean / Contiguous Atlantic area – about 40 participants - and one for the Black Sea about 15 participants).

B. DEVELOPMENT OF SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNICAL TOOLS

- development of a spatial modelling framework using existing ASI and other relevant survey data to explore line transect survey strategies (including frequency and geographical extent) which should allow for optimization by priority species or a priority group of species, and areas of specific interest, (areas with enough number of sightings to get more robust estimates, or areas where a specific intense anthropogenic pressure is acting over a specific endangered population);
- selection and contracting of the Scientific Coordinator and his/her associated experts;
- definition of the surveys monitoring operational method, adjustment of scientific protocols by monitoring sectors and targets, aerial and boat survey design, software identification and preparation;
- identification and purchasing of all equipment.

C. ADMINISTRATIVE AND LOGISTICAL PREPARATION OF FIELD OPERATIONS

- identification and preparation of all permits and authorizations in a timely manner;
- identification and concretization of technical/scientific partnerships for field operations, at national and sub regional/regional level as needed;
- identification, call for tenders and selection of Aerial Companies and Research Vessel (call for tenders or direct MoU);
- identification and recruiting of human resources for field operations (observers and team leaders);
- planification of field operations processes and organisation (including coordination structure, security procedures, teams' daily life organisation).

D. CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT

- assessment of regional capacity building needs and development;

- implementation of a training programme for local stakeholders by subregion or group of subregions, in the use of standardised survey methods and in information management (a minimum of 4 workshops, *i.e.* according to ACCOBAMS sub-region division¹²).

E. DATA SHARING AND MANAGEMENT SYSTEM REVIEW

- study for an update of the information management system for data gathered during the survey exercise and in the medium and long term;
- the subsequent updating of the information management system (incl. IT upgrade, review of terms of use & data policy).

2. Work Package 2: Survey implementation

The survey is to be implemented over two periods of time (summers), for the Mediterranean Sea/contiguous Atlantic area and the Black Sea, respectively.

i.Expected Results

- **Collect data** which will allow the implementation of WP3.
- **Presence/observation maps** to allow the public and project participants to view the progress of the surveys.

ii.Main activities

- survey teams training workshops for aerial and boat-based components (including HUET and any relevant safety trainings);
- implementation of the surveys coordinated by geographic sector and conducted using the agreed methodology/protocols – surveys will be conducted as follow:
 - for the Mediterranean Sea /contiguous Atlantic area:
 - an aerial survey campaign covering the largest area possible (Regional scale);
 - a regional - subregional boat-based survey campaign targeting deep diving species;
 - national boat-based surveys where aerial or regional - subregional boat-based surveys are not possible.
 - for the Black Sea:
 - an aerial survey covering the largest area possible;
 - international/national boat-based surveys where aerial surveys are not possible.
- Preparation of presence/observation maps.

3. Work Package 3: Data analysis and results

This component covers the analysis of the data collected during the surveys to estimate abundance and distribution of species at the ACCOBAMS area, regional, sub-regional (e.g. MFSD sub regions) and national levels; by means of spatial modelling method and identification of important habitats, as well as population trends in targeted areas, where possible. The interpretation of results in the context of conservation and management is primarily the responsibility of the ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee.

¹²Black Sea, Eastern, Central and Western Mediterranean.

i. Expected results

- **distribution and abundance of cetacean species** at the regional, sub-regional (e.g. MFSD sub regions) and national levels, **identification of ‘critical’ habitats** and **trends in cetacean populations** using ASI and relevant data time series provided when sufficient data are available;
- ACCOBAMS area Cetaceans species **Conservation status updated** as relevant (IUCN red list of species);
- Contribute towards an **improved understanding of the impacts of the main human pressures** on the conservation status of cetaceans and their habitat;
- **data and results made available and disseminated** following an agreed data use policy;
- an **Atlas of cetaceans in the ACCOBAMS area**;
- Submit the abundance estimates to the IWC ASI sub-committee to obtain endorsement by the IWC Scientific Committee, as part of their global consideration of abundance estimates;
- Trial the use of the R package AMBIdsm developed by PELAGIS (University of La Rochelle) in the framework of EU-funded CetAMBICion project that allows to merge and analyse data coming from Distance Sampling surveys, build range surface models and estimate species abundance and distribution, and visualise density maps ([Research - CetAMBicion \(cetambicion-project.eu\)](https://cetambicion-project.eu)).

ii. Main activities

- definition of data analysis *modus operandi*, including the selection of a team of data analysis experts, under the direct guidance of the SC;
- sub regional data analysis sessions;
- Spatial analysis (distribution, abundance, habitat and distribution of pressures);
- Two regional workshops led by the interpretation of results for conservation and management recommendations, including on the need for updating of the IUCN lists;
- transfer of and securing data and results to the data management system and implementation of the sharing process;
- contribution toward the development of the Atlas of cetaceans in the ACCOBAMS area.

4. Work Package 4: Coordination and Communication / awareness

The project will be developed by regions or sub-regions depending on the participating countries and the current economic and safety situation. It will be coordinated at the Agreement area level by the ACCOBAMS Secretariat which will provide administrative and financial management, liaising with a Scientific Coordinator, the project’s Steering Committee, the project’s Contact Group and the ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee, and partners.

The ASI project has proven its significance in enhancing communication and awareness-raising efforts. It is important for the project to continue along the same trajectory and at least to replicate the successful actions that were implemented previously. Additionally, it is crucial to engage into a larger communication campaign, leveraging all past results and current initiatives to increase the project’s influence.

i. Expected results

- **successful implementation of the project**, recognising the unforeseen constraints that may arise, e.g., political and weather;

- a **reinforcement of the network** of experts, specialists and other local stakeholders helping to conserve the species in question;
- an **increased awareness** among local stakeholders of maintaining/restoring the good status of marine ecosystem and biodiversity;
- Communicate the results and recommendations arising from WP3 to all relevant local, national and international (e.g., IUCN, IWC,...) stakeholders.

ii. Main activities

- overall coordination of the project, including running costs for the institutional governance of the project by the ACCOBAMS Secretariat, communications and awareness-raising activities development and supervision. Additional external assistance may also be sought as necessary according to the needs;
- definition of communication strategy, priorities, and integration within the overarching ACCOBAMS communication strategy (so to utilise the project as a catalyst for implementing the broader strategy) including:
 - development of a specific campaign targeting institutions and decisions makers;
 - development of digital communication materials to support the communication priorities defined for the project and specific campaign (*e.g.*, leaflet, brochure, video, press Kit, etc.);
 - support local communication actions on the sidelines of the surveys: definition of geographical and thematic communication priorities, development of ToRs and launch of a call for proposals to cover 8-10 small projects;
 - awareness-raising activities (participation to scientific and technical conferences, specific events during the survey campaign, social media public engagement, etc.);
- final Results Presentation Event and delivery of the Report(s);
- project final evaluation.

V. SWOT Analysis and Risk mitigations

1. SWOT Analysis

<i>Internal</i>	<p>STRENGTHS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The knowledge gained during the successful implementation of the ASI. - Established network of partners and stakeholders. - Experienced team and coordinator with a track record of successful surveys. - Availability of proven survey methodology, techniques and equipment. - Strong support from governments and Regional Organisations. - Available research vessels and survey tools from project partners. 	<p>WEAKNESSES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Limited funding for the project. - Strong dependence on volunteers / in kind support. - Some areas to be covered are difficult to access. - Limited time frame for conducting surveys (summer period).
<i>External</i>	<p>OPPORTUNITIES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - High public and media interest in marine mammal conservation allowing increased public and stakeholder engagement in marine mammal conservation efforts. - Fulfil international commitments, including EU obligations, for the ACCOBAMS Parties in regard to cetaceans (and sea turtles). - Possibility to coordinate surveys with other national monitoring programmes of Mediterranean and Black Sea countries (e.g., EcAp/IMAP and MSFD). - Need to enrich existing regional databases with valuable data on several mega fauna species and habitat use. - Inform policy decisions and management strategies. - Opportunity to collaborate with other marine conservation initiatives and organisations. - Potential to leverage project outcomes for future funding opportunities. - Increased research effort and research opportunities at the national level. 	<p>THREATS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Geopolitical instability, human related regional issues (migration, arising conflict areas). - Inflation and fuel costs. - Logistical difficulties in certain areas - Administrative difficulties including obtaining permits for accessing and surveying in certain areas. - Unusual weather conditions. - Risks inherent in working at sea and in the air (safety/security). - Difficulties to mobilise the necessary means for the field work (technical and human).

1. Risk Analysis and Mitigation

Risk level		
Low	Medium	High

Risk description	Related project Activity/WP	Likelihood	impact	Mitigation & adaptation actions
Mobilizing sufficient and appropriate technical and human resources	Survey preparation (WP1) & implementation (WP2)			<p>Search for resources beyond the region</p> <p>Reassess the budget consequently</p> <p>Redistribute the effort coverage in different areas where appropriate</p> <p>Rotating system, moving observers and/or planes & boats from one area to another</p>
Obtaining permits for surveying in certain areas	Survey preparation (WP1) & implementation (WP2)			<p>Ensure enough preparation/application time</p> <p>Close consulting / meetings with national contacts and relevant departments</p>
Unfavorable weather conditions for surveying	Survey implementation (WP2)			<p>Keep a close watch on weather forecast and adapt surveys strategy</p> <p>Postpone surveys to favourable days</p> <p>Move to cover other transects with favourable sea state conditions</p>
Logistical obstacles in certain areas (eg.: lack of fuel)	Survey implementation (WP2)			<p>Close consulting / meetings with national contacts for preparation</p> <p>Ensure that each team has national observers</p> <p>Move to cover other survey favourable areas while fixing difficulties</p>
Risks inherent in working at sea and in the air (safety)	Survey implementation (WP2)			<p>Criteria to consider when selecting service providers such as aircraft companies</p> <p>Teams' security preparation (ex HUET training)</p>

				<p>All relevant security equipment (lifejackets, inflatable boat...)</p> <p>Security protocols in place</p> <p>Continuous assistance from coordinators</p>
Geopolitical instability, human related regional issues (migration, arising conflict areas..)	All project and mainly Survey preparation (WP1) and implementation (WP2),			<p>Security protocols for field operations</p> <p>Transferring activities to other areas (ie WS)</p> <p>Investigating the use of alternative technologies for surveying remotely</p>
International hazards (ex. Pandemic (ex Covid)	All activities			<p>Postponing activities</p> <p>Where possible, use online options</p>

VI. PROJECT GOVERNANCE

The project will be coordinated by the ACCOBAMS Secretariat, through a full time Project manager (4 years) and a full-time assistant for administrative and communication aspects (two years), who will be:

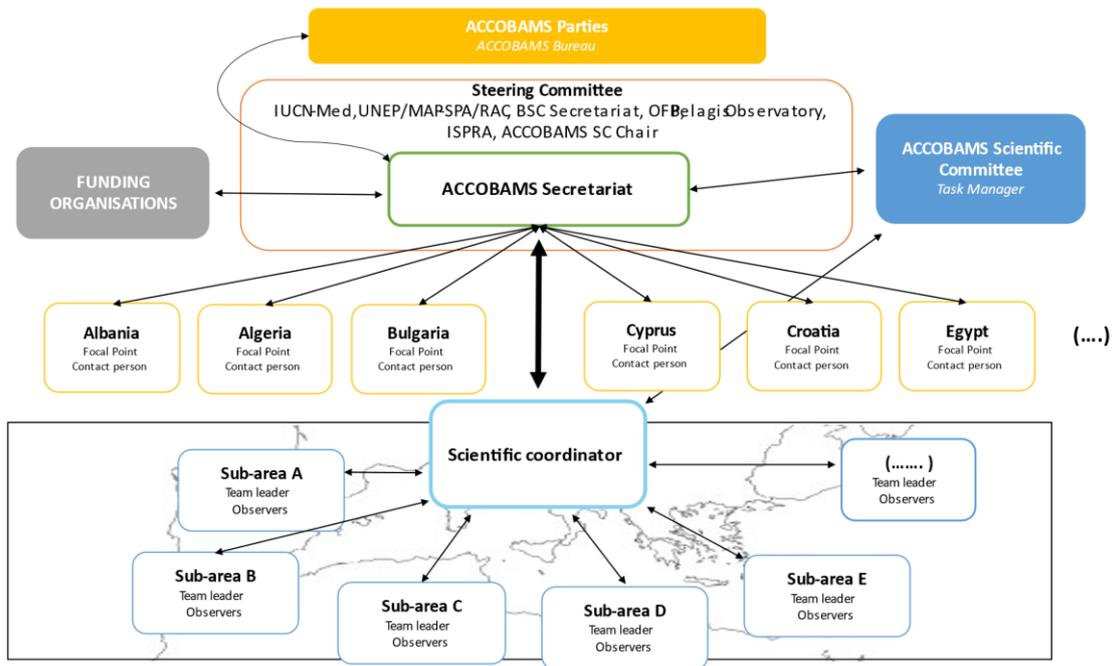
1. responsible for overseeing all planned actions either directly or by coordinating with involved stakeholders and entities,
2. liaising with ACCOBAMS Parties and donors and
3. providing administrative and financial management.

A Scientific Coordinator (external consultant) will support the ACCOBAMS Secretariat on the scientific issues related to the implementation of the project, in particular as regards the scientific aspects related to the assessment and monitoring of cetacean distribution and population abundance.

As shown in Figure 1, the project will be supported by several key groups:

- the existing ASI Steering Committee¹³ which consists of representatives from key technical ASI partnering entities and of the ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee (see figure 1). Additional experts and stakeholders may be added as needed upon request of funders and Parties. The project steering committee will provide guidance and advice to the ACCOBAMS Secretariat to help ensure the project's success, covering all aspects of project coordination, planning and budgeting;
- the ASI Contact Group composed of National Focal points (NFP) and/or designated Contact persons in each country of the ACCOBAMS area. This group is set up to assist the ACCOBAMS Secretariat during the project and will be particularly important for the preparation and implementation of the surveys. In particular, it will support proper operational execution of the surveys and all relevant activities, and facilitate contacts at national levels with all those involved over the course of the project cycle;
- the ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee and its relevant Tasks Groups, which will be providing guidance on matters related to their area of competence.

¹³ The ASI Steering Committee is composed by representatives of the IUCN Centre for Mediterranean Cooperation, Regional Activity Centre for Specially Protected Areas (UNEP/MAP-SPA/RAC), Office Français de la Biodiversité (OFB), PELAGIS, Italian National Institute for Environmental Protection and Research (ISPRA), Bucharest Convention Secretariat (BSC), and the Chair of the ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee.



VII. TIMELINE AND MILESTONES

ACCOBAMS Resolution 8.10 seeks to conduct the next synoptic basin-wide survey in the ACCOBAMS area in 2024-2026, to accomplish the entire program cycle by 2027. The proposed timetable suggests that monitoring in the Mediterranean and contiguous Atlantic area will be implemented first (in 2025), followed by monitoring in the Black Sea (in 2026). However, the order of implementation may be reversed, depending on financial, practical, and geopolitical considerations. If this is the case, the overall duration of the project would remain the same, but the timetable would need to be adjusted accordingly.

Milestones:

- Recruitment of Coordination personnel and Scientific coordinator by March 2024
- Survey methodology ready by May 2025 (survey 1) and May 2026 (Survey 2)
- Teams recruited and trained by May 2025 (Survey 1) and May 2026 (survey 2) (or one week prior to survey starts)
- All Permits and authorization obtained by April 2025 (survey 1) and April 2026 (survey 2)
- Regional Datasets ready by September 2025 (survey 1) and September 2026 (survey 2)
- Preliminary survey results ready by October 2026 (Survey 1) and October 2027 (survey 2)
- All results reports finalised and presented during Event by June 2027
- Recommendations from workshop on Interpretation of results for conservation available by September 2027
- All data transferred to data management system and ready for sharing by December 2026

	2024				2025				2026				2027			
	T1	T2	T3	T4												
WP 1- Survey preparation & capacity development																
Development of scientific & technical tools																
Spatial modelling framework development																
Selection and contracting of the Scientific coordinator and associated experts																
Definition of complete surveys methodology																
Identification and purchasing of all equipment																

Regional consultation and mobilisation																	
Mobilisation of NFP & Contact persons for the Project Contact Group			■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■							
Survey preparation Contact Group Workshop(s) (2)				■				■									
Administrative and logistical preparation of field operations																	
Identification and preparation of all permits and authorizations			■	■	■	■	■										
Set up of technical /scientific partnerships;			■	■	■	■	■										
Identification, call for tenders and selection of Aerial Companies and Research Vessels			■	■	■	■	■										
identification and recruiting of human resources for field operations			■	■	■	■	■										
Planification of Field operations processes and organisation			■	■	■	■	■										
Capacity development																	
Assessment of regional capacity building needs							■			■	■		■	■	■		
Implementation of training programme by sub region (4)							■			■	■		■	■	■		
Data sharing & management system review																	
Study for an update of the information management system for data gathered during the survey			■	■	■												
subsequent updating of the information management system (incl. IT upgrade, review of terms of use & data policy).			■	■	■	■	■	■	■								
WP 2 - Survey implementation																	

Teams survey Training workshops (aerial and boat) (April-May)																
Implementation Mediterranean & contiguous Atlantic area survey (may-sept)																
Teams aerial survey training workshop (May)																
Implementation Black sea survey (June-July)																
Presence/Observation maps conception and preparation ¹⁴																
WP 3 - Data analysis & results interpretation																
Definition of data analysis modus operandi & selection experts																
Data analysis and reporting: analysis of the data collected during the survey (abundance and distribution of species);																
Spatial modelling, identification and characterization of critical and preferential habitats establishing links with the main human pressures and analysis of trends																
Sub regional data analysis workshops for a consultative and participatory approach (4)																
Reassessment and updating of the IUCN red/green list status																
Interpretation of results for conservation (Regional/sub regional workshops) (2)																

¹⁴ This is to be covered by the Data analyst, budgeted in WP3.

WP 2 - Survey implementation	
Aerial and boat-based survey teams training workshops	75 000
Aircraft renting	1 100 000
Research vessels renting and/or mobilisation	550 000
Purchasing of equipment	15 000
Team fees, daily life and transport	350 000
Scientific coordinator and team support fees (incl. training fees)	65 000
Total WP 2	2 155 000
WP 3 - Data analysis & results interpretation	
Data analysis expert work ¹⁶	150 000
Sub regional data analysis sessions (4)	120 000
Interpretation of results for conservation (2 workshops)	50 000
ACCOBAMS area cetaceans' Atlas	50 000
TOTAL WP3	370 000
WP 4 – Coordination, communication & awareness	
Project officer (4 years)	240 000

¹⁶ Which will also cover the preparation of presence/observation maps (planned in WP2).

Administrative and communication assistant (2 years)	110 000
Steering Committee meetings	20 000
External project assessment/Evaluation	15 000
Travel and meeting	30 000
External assistance	10 000
Development of communication materials	20 000
Awareness-raising events and participation to conferences	20 000
Local communication actions (call for proposals)	40 000
Results launching Event	20 000
TOTAL WP 4	525 000
TOTAL PROJECT ACTIVITIES	3 340 000

ANNEX 1 - List of the most relevant commitments for ACCOBAMS Parties related to other policy frameworks in the context of benefits provided a new ACCOBAMS synoptic survey

Organisation	Relevant reference(s)
UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)	Goal 14: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development
Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)	Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework ; Targets in priority 4, 20, 21
Bonn Convention (CMS)	Appendices I and II of the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals
Bucharest Convention	Black Sea Integrated Monitoring and Assessment Programme (BSIMAP)
Barcelona Convention (UNEP/MAP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Protocol concerning specially protected area and biodiversity in the Mediterranean (SPA/BD), annexe II List of endangered or threatened species → Ecosystem Approach (EcAp; Decision IG 17/6) → Integrated Monitoring and Assessment Programme (IMAP; Decision IG.22/7) → Actions plans for the conservation of cetaceans (Decision IG 25/13), sea turtles and seabirds (Decision IG.21/4)
Washington convention (CITES)	Appendices I and II ; Conf 11.4 (Rev.CoP 12) ; CoP14 doc 51 :
General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Recommendation GFCM/35/2011/3 on reducing incidental bycatch of seabirds in fisheries in the GFCM area of application → Recommendation GFCM/35/2011/4 on the incidental bycatch of sea turtles in fisheries in the GFCM area of application → Recommendation GFCM/36/2012/2 on mitigation of incidental catches of cetaceans in the GFCM area of application → Resolution GFCM/43/2019/2 on enhancing the conservation of cetaceans in the GFCM area of application → GFCM/44/2021/13 on the mitigation of fisheries impacts for the conservation of seabirds in the Mediterranean Sea → Recommendation GFCM/44/2021/14 on the mitigation of fisheries impacts for the conservation of sea turtles → Recommendation GFCM/44/2021/15 on the mitigation of fisheries impacts for the conservation of cetaceans
European Union	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Habitats Directive (Directive 92/43/CEE) → Marine Strategy Framework Directive (Directive 2008/56/EC) → Marine Spatial Planning Directive (Directive 2014/89/EU) → EU Action Plan on 'Protecting and restoring marine ecosystems for sustainable and resilient fisheries' (COM/2023/102 final)
IPBES (2019)	IPBES (2019): Global assessment report on biodiversity and ecosystem services of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services . E. S. Brondizio, J. Settele, S. Díaz, and H. T. Ngo (editors). IPBES secretariat, Bonn, Germany. 1148 pages.

ANNEX 2 - main products based on ASI data

Product / Deliverable	Type	ACCOBAMS link (Direct / Indirect)
ACCOBAMS, 2021. Conserving Whales, Dolphins and Porpoises in the Mediterranean Sea, Black Sea and adjacent areas: an ACCOBAMS status report , (2021). By: Notarbartolo di Sciara G., Tonay A.M. Ed. ACCOBAMS, Monaco. 160 p. ISBN: 978-2-9579273-1-9	Book	Direct
ACCOBAMS, 2021. Estimates of abundance and distribution of cetaceans, marine mega-fauna and marine litter in the Mediterranean Sea from 2018-2019 surveys . By Panigada S., Boisseau O., Canadas A., Lambert C., Laran S., McLanaghan R., Moscrop A. Ed. ACCOBAMS - ACCOBAMS Survey Initiative Project, Monaco, 177 pp.	Technical report	Direct
ACCOBAMS, 2021. Estimates of abundance and distribution of cetaceans in the Black Sea from 2019 surveys . By Paiu, R.M., Panigada, S., Cañadas, A., Gol'din, P., Popov, D., David, L., Amaha Ozturk, A., Glazov, D. Ed. ACCOBAMS - ACCOBAMS Survey Initiative/CeNoBS Projects, Monaco, 54 pages.	Technical report	Direct
ASI Technical Recommendations Workshop - Moving from science to conservation, online, 11, 12, 14 &-15 October 2021.	Technical report	Direct
DiMatteo A, Cañadas A, Roberts J, Sparks L, Panigada S, Boisseau O, Moscrop A, Fortuna CM, Lauriano G, Holcer D, Peltier H, Ridoux V, Raga JA, Toma´s J, Broderick AC, Godley BJ, Haywood J, March D, Snape R, Sagarminaga R and Hochscheid S (2022) Basin-wide estimates of loggerhead turtle abundance in the Mediterranean Sea derived from line transect surveys. <i>Front. Mar. Sci.</i> 9:930412. doi: 10.3389/fmars.2022.930412	Peer-reviewed publication	Direct
Popov D, Meshkova G, Vishnyakova K, Ivanchikova J, Paiu M, Timofte C, Amaha Öztürk A, Tonay AM, Dede A, Panayotova M, Düzgünes, E and Gol'din P (2023) Assessment of the bycatch level for the Black Sea harbour porpoise in the light of new data on population abundance. <i>Front. Mar. Sci.</i> 10:1119983. doi: 10.3389/fmars.2023.1119983	Peer-reviewed publication	Direct
Frassa V, Prospathopoulos A. M, Maglio A, Ortgea N, Paiu M, Azzelino A (2023) Shipping noise assessment in the Black Sea: insights from large-scale ASI CeNoBS survey data <i>Front. Mar. Sci.</i> Volume 10 – 2023 doi: 10.3389/fmars.2023.1200340	Peer-reviewed publication	Direct
New IUCN Assessments for Mediterranean sub-populations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bearzi, G., Bonizzoni, S. & Santostasi, N.L. 2022. <i>Stenella coeruleoalba</i> (Gulf of Corinth subpopulation). <i>The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species</i> 2022: e.T210188066A210188619. https://dx.doi.org/10.2305/IUCN.UK.2022-1.RLTS.T210188066A210188619.en. • Bearzi, G., T. Genov, A. Natoli, J. Gonzalvo, & G. J. Pierce. 2021. <i>Delphinus delphis</i> (Inner Mediterranean subpopulation). <i>The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species</i>: e.T189865869A189865884. https://dx.doi.org/10.2305/IUCN.UK.2021-3.RLTS.T189865869A189865884.en. • Cañadas, A. & Notarbartolo di Sciara, G. 2018. <i>Ziphius cavirostris</i> (Mediterranean subpopulation) (errata version published in 2021). <i>The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species</i> 2018: e.T16381144A199549199. https://dx.doi.org/10.2305/IUCN.UK.2018- 	Technical reports (10)	Direct

Product / Deliverable	Type	ACCOBAMS link (Direct / Indirect)
<p>2.RLTS.T16381144A199549199.en.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gauffier, P. & Verborgh, P. 2021. <i>Globicephala melas</i> (Inner Mediterranean subpopulation). <i>The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species</i> 2021: e.T198785664A198787672. https://dx.doi.org/10.2305/IUCN.UK.2021-3.RLTS.T198785664A198787672.en. Gonzalvo, J. & Notarbartolo di Sciara, G. 2021. <i>Tursiops truncatus</i> (Gulf of Ambracia subpopulation). <i>The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species</i> 2021: e.T181208820A181210985. https://dx.doi.org/10.2305/IUCN.UK.2021-3.RLTS.T181208820A181210985.en. Lanfredi, C., Arcangeli, A., David, L., Holcer, D., Rosso, M. & Natoli, A. 2022. <i>Grampus griseus</i> (Mediterranean subpopulation) (errata version published in 2022). <i>The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species</i> 2022: e.T16378423A210404051. Lauriano, G. 2022. <i>Stenella coeruleoalba</i> (Mediterranean subpopulation) (errata version published in 2022). <i>The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species</i> 2022: e.T16674437A210833690. Natoli, A., Genov, T., Kerem, D., Gonzalvo, J., Lauriano, G., Holcer, D., Labach, H., Marsili, L., Mazzariol, S., Moura, A.E., Öztürk, A.A., Pardalou, A., Tonay, A.M., Verborgh, P. & Fortuna, C. 2021. <i>Tursiops truncatus</i> (Mediterranean subpopulation) (errata version published in 2022). <i>The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species</i> 2021: e.T16369383A215248781. Panigada, S., Gauffier, P. & Notarbartolo di Sciara, G. 2021. <i>Balaenoptera physalus</i> (Mediterranean subpopulation). <i>The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species</i> 2021: e.T16208224A50387979. https://dx.doi.org/10.2305/IUCN.UK.2021-3.RLTS.T16208224A50387979.en. Pirotta, E., Carpinelli, E., Frantzis, A., Gauffier, P., Lanfredi, C., Pace, D.S. & Rendell, L.E. 2021. <i>Physeter macrocephalus</i> (Mediterranean subpopulation). <i>The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species</i> 2021: e.T16370739A50285671. https://dx.doi.org/10.2305/IUCN.UK.2021-3.RLTS.T16370739A50285671.en. 		
UNEP-MAP Med Quality Status Report 2023	Technical report	Indirect
Document MEPC 79/10. Designation of a particular sensitive sea area in the North-Western Mediterranean Sea to protect cetaceans from international shipping. Submitted by France, Italy, Monaco and Spain at the 79th session of the Marine Environment Protection Committee, December 2022. 53 pages.	Meeting document	Indirect
Document NCSR 10/INF.3. Designation in principle of NW Med PSSA to protect cetaceans, minimizing the risk of ship strikes and support scientific research on the matter. Submitted by France, Italy, Monaco and Spain at the 10th session of the Sub-Committee on Navigation, Communications and Search and Rescue, May 2023. 12 pages.	Meeting document	Indirect
Fortuna, C., Sánchez-Espinosa, A., Rodríguez-Rodríguez, D., Abdul Malak, D., Podestà, M., Panigada, S. 2022. Pathways to coexistence between large cetaceans and maritime transport in the north-western Mediterranean region: Collision risk between ships and whales within the proposed north-western Mediterranean Particularly Sensitive Sea Area (PSSA), including the Pelagos Sanctuary. Factsheet, Interreg Med Biodiversity Protection project, 23 pages.	Peer-reviewed publication	Indirect

In addition to the above products, ASI data has been shared with a large number of different types of organisations. The table below show the requests for the Mediterranean and Black Sea ASI data received by the ACCOBAMS Secretariat since 2019 (updated September 2023).

NB	Request holder	Species / object	Type of data	Intended research
1	St Andrews University, UK Jonathan Reid	Sperm whale	Acoustic data	MSc Thesis: Measuring body length of sperm whales (<i>Physeter macrocephalus</i>) in the Mediterranean from their clicks.
2	Centre d'Écologie Fonctionnelle et Évolutive / École Pratique des Hautes Études (CEFE/EPHE), France Gaëlle Darmon, Jeremy Mansui, Claude Miaud	Marine litter Sea turtles	Raw Boat and aerial	Risky areas of litter impacts for sea turtles at the Mediterranean basin level
3	McLaughlin Research Corporation , USA Andrew DiMatteo	Sea turtles	Raw Boat and aerial	A loggerhead turtle (<i>Caretta caretta</i>) spatial density model for the Mediterranean Sea derived from multiple survey platforms
4	European Topic Centre – University of Malaga (ETC-UMA), Spain Dania Abdul Malak	Marine litter, Cetaceans Sea turtles	Boat and aerial	Marine litter pressures in the Mediterranean Sea. <i>ASI data will be supporting the visualization and meta-analysis of status of the pressures of marine litter on Mediterranean marine biota</i>
5	University of Siena, Italy Cristina Fossi	Marine litter Cetaceans Other megafauna sp.	Boat and plane	Identification of Marine litter Hot spot areas and interaction with Biota (PlasticBusters MPAs Interreg –Med Project context)
6	Institute of Marine Science (ICM-CSIC), Spain Joan Giménez	Short-beaked common dolphin	Boat and aerial	Niche conservatism in cetaceans: common dolphins in European waters as a case study
7	Observatoire Pelagis, Université de La Rochelle, France Auriane Virgili / Vincent Ridoux and collaborative work with INAT, ENIT, ESSAI, Tunisia;	Beaked whale sperm whale	Boat and aerial	Processes underlying beaked whale and sperm whale hotspots to inform naval training planning in the aim to avoid interaction with impulse noise sources
8	Israel Marine Mammal Research and Assistance Center (IMMRAC) Dani Kerem	Rough-toothed dolphin	Boat	To be mentioned in a chapter on rough-toothed dolphin in a forthcoming Springer book on the marine mammals of Europe
9	WWF Mediterranean Marine Initiative Simone Niedermueller	Sharks and rays	Aerial	Evaluation of shark and ray occurrence data to inform WWF conservation strategy
10	Mediterranean Association to Save the Sea Turtles (MEDASSET) Vicky Rae & Eleana Touloupaki	Sea turtles	Aerial	MAVA Funded: Increasing knowledge on the Sea Turtle population within the northern Aegean.
11	Open University, Germany Judith Matz – Student	Marine litter	Boat	BSc course report on ‘Distribution of plastic pollution across the Mediterranean Sea’
12	Permanent Secretariat of the Pelagos Agreement Costanza Favilli – Executive Secretary	Cetaceans Marine Litter	Boat and aerial	Cetaceans and marine litter distribution and abundance in the Pelagos Sanctuary
13	University of Exeter, UK David March	Cetaceans Sea turtles, Fish, Rays, Marine litter	Boat and aerial	MOVEMED: Linking Human Mobility and Marine Megafauna Movement in the Mediterranean Sea for a better integration of Blue Growth
14	WWF France Denis Ody	Fin Whale, Sperm whale	Aerial	Evaluation des risques de collisions entre grand cétacés et trafic maritime sur la zone du projet de Zone Maritime Particulièrement Vulnérable (ZMPV) en Méditerranée Nord-Ouest.
15	EcoOcéan Institut, France	Bottlenose dolphin	Aerial	Consultation prior to the public debate on the development of floating wind power farm in the Mediterranean Sea over the shelf of the Gulf of Lion.

16	Istanbul University, Institute of Graduate Studies in Science and Engineering, Marine Biology program	Cetaceans Marine litter	Aerial	An abundance and distribution study of small cetaceans and marine litter in the Turkish part of the Mediterranean Sea using a species distribution modeling
17	Institut National d'Agronomie de Tunis/Observatoire Pelagis Université de La Rochelle	All	Boat and aerial	Ecosystemic and anthropogenic drivers of Mediterranean megafauna species assemblage spatial patterns
18	Office Français pour la Biodiversité	All species and marine litter	Boat and aerial	taking into account the environmental stakes for the off-shore wind turbine to be set up off the Gulf of Lion.
19	Pelagos Cetacean Research Institute	All cetacean species	Boat and plane Acoustic	Current knowledge on the cetaceans in the Greek Seas with emphasis on sperm whales
20	Cerema Eau, mer et fleuves, France Nathalie METZLER	All	Aerial	Technical document for proposal ZMPV Cetaceans in the Mediterranean in IMO
21	CREOCEAN, France Thibault Schvartz	Cetaceans and Seabirds	Boat and aerial	Study for the French Ministry of the Environment (Energy-Climate Department) to help in the selection process of future offshore windfarms in the Mediterranean Sea.
22	MCR (UK) & PELAGIS (France)	Cetaceans	Boat and aerial Accoustics	Modelling cetacean habitat: the merits and challenges of combining acoustic and visual observational data
23	MIRACETI, France Léa JURET / Hélène LABACH	Cetaceans	Aerial	Research and development contract relating to the implementation of a monitoring program for the bottlenose dolphin within the Cap Corse and Agriate Marine Nature Park
24	CNRS Centre d'Ecologie Fonctionnelle et Evolutive, Montpellier, France Olivier Gimenez	Fin Whales	Aerial	Combining data to estimate fin whales spatial density
25	SHOM Laura Ceyrac (Project manager underwater acoustic_Thematic Manager assistant of underwater noise descriptor MSFD)	Marine turtles, marine litter	Boat and aerial	Assessment of cumulated risks of marine litter and anthropogenic noise on marine turtles in Mediterranean Sea.
26	Office Français de la Biodiversité Marine Natural Park of the Gulf of Lions Camille ASSALI, Task officer within the MSPMED project https://mspmmed.eu ,	megafauna, i.e. seabirds, land birds, cetaceans, sea turtles, large fishes, selacians.	Boat and aerial Accoustics	MSPMED task 2.2, deliverable 2.7 : France and Spain: knowledge synthesis about ecological stakes related with birds, mammals and deep habitats
27	University of Siena Maria Cristina Fossi	Marine Litter, megafauna	Boat and plane survey	Identification of Marine litter Hot spot areas and interaction with Biota (PlasticBusters MPAs Interreg –Med Project)
28	PELAGIS / MCR	Sperm whale and beaked whale	Boat and acoustic	Processes underlying beaked whale and sperm whale hotspots from acoustic detections to inform naval training planning in the aim to avoid interaction with impulse noise sources.
29	PELAGIS Lola Gilbert	Cetacean	Aerial	PhD thesis Role of marine mammals in nutrient flows and carbon storage
30	Bangor University James Waggitt and Peter Evans	Birds	aerial	Distribution modelling and environmental associations of Balearic and Yelkouan Shearwater in the northeast Atlantic and western Mediterranean.
31	Tour du Valat CHAMPAGNON Jocelyn	Birds	Aerial	MIGRALION - Characterization of the use of the Gulf of Lion by terrestrial migrants and marine avifauna using complementary methods

32	MIRACETI Julie Jourdan	Cetacean	Aerial	Cetaceans' spatio-temporal distribution within Calanques national park
33	Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle (MNHN) Antoine Chabrolle	Birds	Aerial	Report for the evaluation of the 3rd cycle of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD) -2024
34	Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle (MNHN) Timothée Poupart	Birds	Aerial	Coherence of the french Natura 2000 network for seabird conservation
35	Institut National Agronomique de Tunisie Marwen Abderrahim	Marine turtles, human activities marine litter,	Boat and plane survey	Assessment of nuisance sources affecting marine turtles populations on the Tunisian Coasts.
36	Spanish Herpetological Association (AHE) Juan A. Camiñas	Marine turtles	Boat and aerial	Challenges in managing and mitigating sea turtle bycatch, in pelagic longline and purse seine fleets (RFMOs from the Atlantic and Indian Oceans and the Mediterranean Sea).
37	Tethys Research Institute Simone Panigada	Cetaceans	Aerial	Spatial models in the Hellenic Trench and Ionian Sea
38	Politecnico di Milano - Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering Arianna Azzellino	Cetaceans	Aerial	Testing applicability of the methodologies and tools of QUIETSEAS to promote the consolidation of indicators by performing an operational pilot on GES (Good Ecological Status) assessment for D11 (D11C1 and D11C2)
39	Observatoire Pelagis, La Rochelle, France Auriane Virgili / Vincent Ridoux	Cetaceans	Boat and aerial	Processes underlying cetacean hotspots to inform naval training planning in the aim to avoid interaction with impulse noise sources.
40	CNRS, Centre d'Ecologie Fonctionnelle et Evolutive (CEFE) Martha Mac Call and David Grémillet	Seabirds	Aerial	Production of habitat preference models and habitat change models (BIRDMOVE project)
41	Direction générale de l'énergie et du climat – Ministère de la transition énergétique Julie Pidoux	Marine megafauna species	Boat and aerial	Report on environment for public debates on offshore wind farm planning
42	MIRACETI DONEY Marine	Cetaceans	Aerial	Testing a methodology for estimating and quantifying anthropogenic impacts on cetaceans in marine protected areas
43	ISMAR – CNR Italy Elisabeth De Maio	Cetaceans	Aerial	Cumulative effects assessment case study for the Black Sea within the project H2020 BRIDGE-BS

ANNEX II - LTMP CONTACT GROUP COMPOSITION

as for October 2025

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ANNEX III - TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR THE ACCOBAMS SURVEY INITIATIVE (ASI) STEERING COMMITTEE

I. BACKGROUND

1. The ACCOBAMS Survey Initiative (ASI) is a long-term initiative initiated by ACCOBAMS Parties, which is part of the ACCOBAMS Conservation Plan, in which ACCOBAMS Parties undertake coordinated and concerted research on cetaceans and facilitate the development of new techniques to improve their conservation (Annex 2 of the Agreement, Research and Monitoring).
2. In particular, the Parties shall: (a) monitor the status and trends of the species covered by this Agreement, in particular those present in poorly known areas, or those for which very little data is available, with a view to facilitating the development of conservation measures; (b) cooperate with a view to determining the migration routes as well as the breeding and feeding grounds of the species covered by the Agreement, in order to define areas in which human activities may need to be regulated accordingly.
3. Deployed between 2018 and 2023, the first edition of ASI (ASI-I) represented the first coordinated large-scale cetacean monitoring effort in the Mediterranean and Black Seas, combining aerial, marine observations and passive acoustic monitoring. It provided the first synoptic, basin-wide assessment of cetaceans and other marine megafauna across the Mediterranean Sea and the Black Sea, serving as a vital scientific baseline for conservation, management, and policy efforts in the region. Its results have laid the foundations for long-term monitoring, in particular through the implementation of regular ASI editions.
4. The ASI Steering Committee played a pivotal role in achieving the scientific and operational successes of ASI-I. In recognition of this, and to ensure institutional continuity, preserve accumulated expertise, and enhance overall operational efficiency in implementing the next editions of the ASI, these Terms of Reference define the composition and functions of the Steering Committee to ensure effective coordination and scientific guidance for the continuity of the initiative.

II. COMPOSITION

1. The composition of the ASI Steering Committee reflects a balanced representation of key scientific, technical, and policy institutions directly involved in marine biodiversity monitoring and management across the ACCOBAMS area.
2. The ASI Steering Committee is composed of representatives from the following key partner entities involved in marine biodiversity monitoring and management across the ACCOBAMS area:
 - The two ACCOBAMS Sub Regional Coordination Units: Specially Protected Areas Regional Activity Centre (SPA/RAC) and Black Sea Commission' Permanent Secretariat (BSC PS)
 - IUCN Centre for Mediterranean Cooperation
 - Office Français pour la Biodiversité - *French Biodiversity Agency* (OFB)
 - Istituto Superiore per la Protezione e la Ricerca Ambientale - *Italian National Institute for Environmental Protection and Research* (ISPRA)
 - ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee
 - ACCOBAMS Secretariat

5. Each ASI edition's Scientific Coordinator is invited to participate in the Committee's Meetings and exchanges related to the edition for which they serve as Scientific Coordinator.
6. Additional relevant experts may be involved, as needed, to ensure adequate technical coverage and coordination with relevant partners. In this regard, members of the ASI Steering Committee may designate experts to support specific and relevant aspects of ASI. These experts may be invited to attend meetings as observers, as deemed necessary, to provide specific expertise or advice on particular issues. They may also be requested to review relevant documentation as required.
7. Any proposal to designate additional experts should be communicated to all Steering Committee members by email. The involvement of the proposed additional expert must be approved by all Steering Committee members at least two weeks before the next planned meeting.

III. ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES

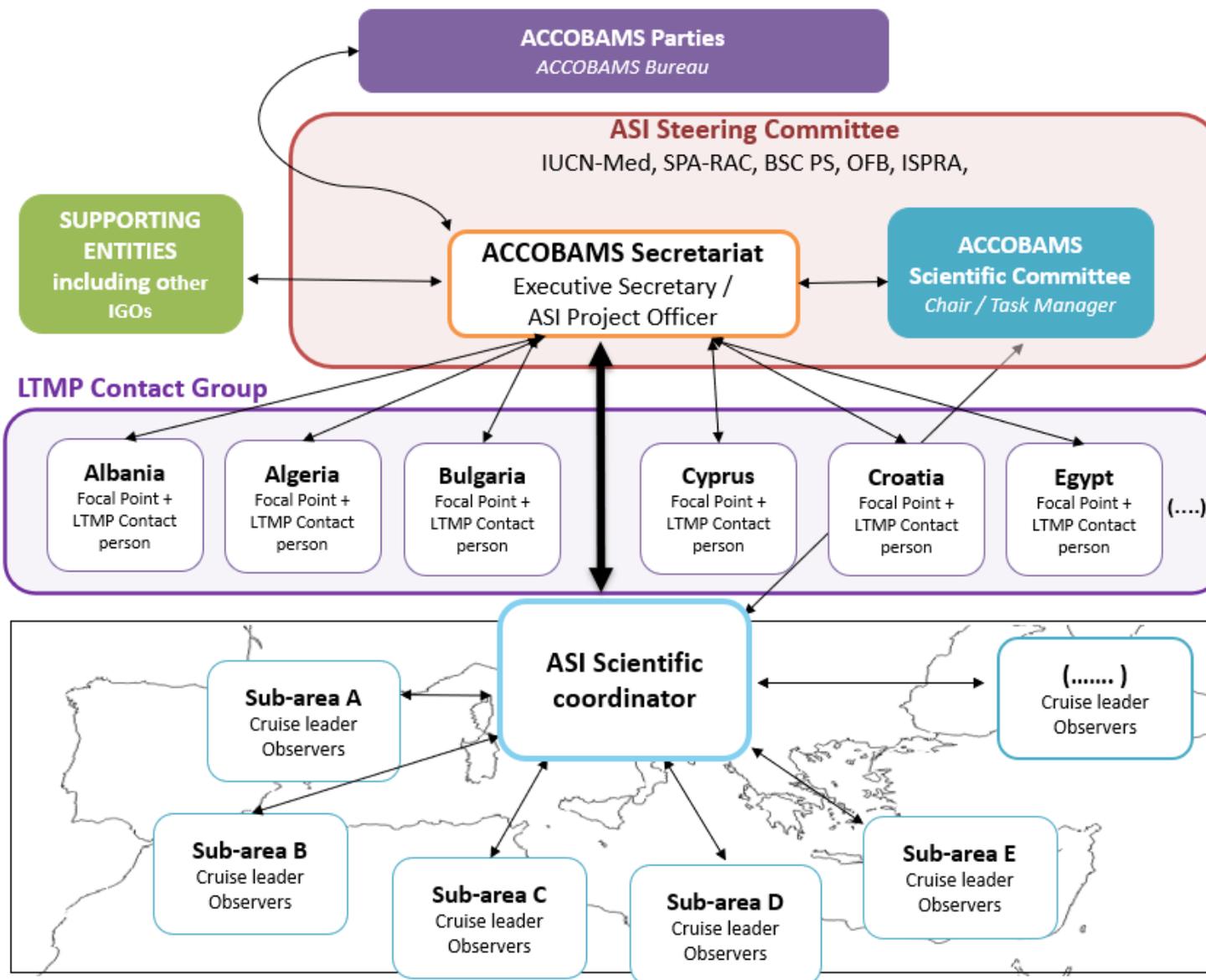
1. The ASI Steering Committee provides strategic guidance and technical advice to the ACCOBAMS Secretariat, supporting the planning, coordination, and oversight of all aspects of the implementation of ASI. Through this advisory and coordination role, the Committee ensures alignment with the objectives of the ACCOBAMS Long-Term Monitoring Programme (LTMP)¹⁷ and coherence with regional and national monitoring initiatives and programs, such as MSFD; EcAP/IMAP and BSIMAP.
2. Its main responsibilities include, but are not limited to:
 - Advising on the overall strategic direction and priorities of ASI;
 - Contributing to risk identification and mitigation strategies;
 - Supporting budget planning and allocation in accordance with project objectives and implementation progress;
 - Reviewing progress reports and monitoring key milestones and deliverables;
 - Facilitating coordination and communication among participating institutions and stakeholders, as appropriate;
 - Reviewing potential synergies with current initiatives and assessing collaboration requests to support the project implementation and to optimize project results
 - Approving the final scientific approaches, methodologies as suggested by the Scientific Coordinator,
 - Providing input on data-sharing procedures;
 - Providing guidance on specific questions or issues related to ASI, including the sharing and use of data generated, in accordance with the relevant Terms of Use and ACCOBAMS objectives.

IV. MEETINGS AND CONSULTATION

1. The ASI Steering Committee may be convened or consulted at any time, but consultations are more frequent and intensive during the implementation of ASI editions, particularly throughout their critical phases, such as survey preparation and execution.

¹⁷ As adopted in 2022 at the 8th Meeting of the Parties through Resolution 8.10

ANNEX IV – ASI-II GOVERNANCE



ANNEX IV – RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE ASI STEERING COMMITTEE FOR ASI-II

SECOND MEETING OF THE ASI STEERING COMMITTEE FOR ASI-II

RECOMMENDATIONS

ATHENS, | JANUARY 20th-21st, 2026

COLLABORATION OPPORTUNITIES AND INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT FOR ASI-II

→ The Steering Committee recommends strengthening synergies with relevant existing projects and initiatives led by partner organisations and ACCOBAMS Parties and establishing a joint complementarity framework with UNEP/MAP and the Black Sea Commission for ASI-II.

→ The Steering Committee recommends the ACCOBAMS Secretariat to organise a joint webinar with UNEP-MAP, SPA/RAC and Black Sea Commission, before March 2026 to present the ASI project and calendar to respective Focal Points, EU services, and relevant national administrations and stakeholders.

→ The Steering Committee recommends positioning ASI framework as an eligible best practice example within the EcAp MED PLUS project.

→ The Steering Committee recommends coordinating closely with the SEMPA project to consider channelling part of the available €100,000 per country towards ASI-II activities.

→ The Steering Committee recommends exploring harmonisation opportunities between ASI-II and national cetacean monitoring programmes.

SURVEY COVERAGE

→ The Steering Committee recommends adjusting aerial survey coverage by reducing Block 3 and Block 6, while ensuring adequate coverage via ISPRA and vessel surveys.

→ The Steering Committee recommends using the opportunity of Spanish surveys and aircraft mobilisation to cover Blocks 1c and 1e (with ACCOBAMS funding).

→ The Steering Committee recommends dividing Block 24 between ISPRA (LIFE MareNatura project) and the Maltese-waters survey operator.

→ The Steering Committee recommends the Secretariat will liaise formally with countries of the Adriatic to confirm Italy's availability to cover the Adriatic through aerial surveys, as well as to discuss a dedicated MoU proposal between ACCOBAMS and ISPRA

→ The Steering Committee recommends keeping the aerial and vessel-based surveys as it is presented below, keeping in mind there might be a need to reduce the effort of the surveys in some specific areas (for example, blocks 8a, 21b, 11, 12, 13, 14 and 15 for boat) in case of limited budget. In the latter case, the committee will convene again to decide on the prioritisation of blocks.

→ The Steering Committee recommends contacting private foundations to explore urgent co-funding opportunities for ASI-II.

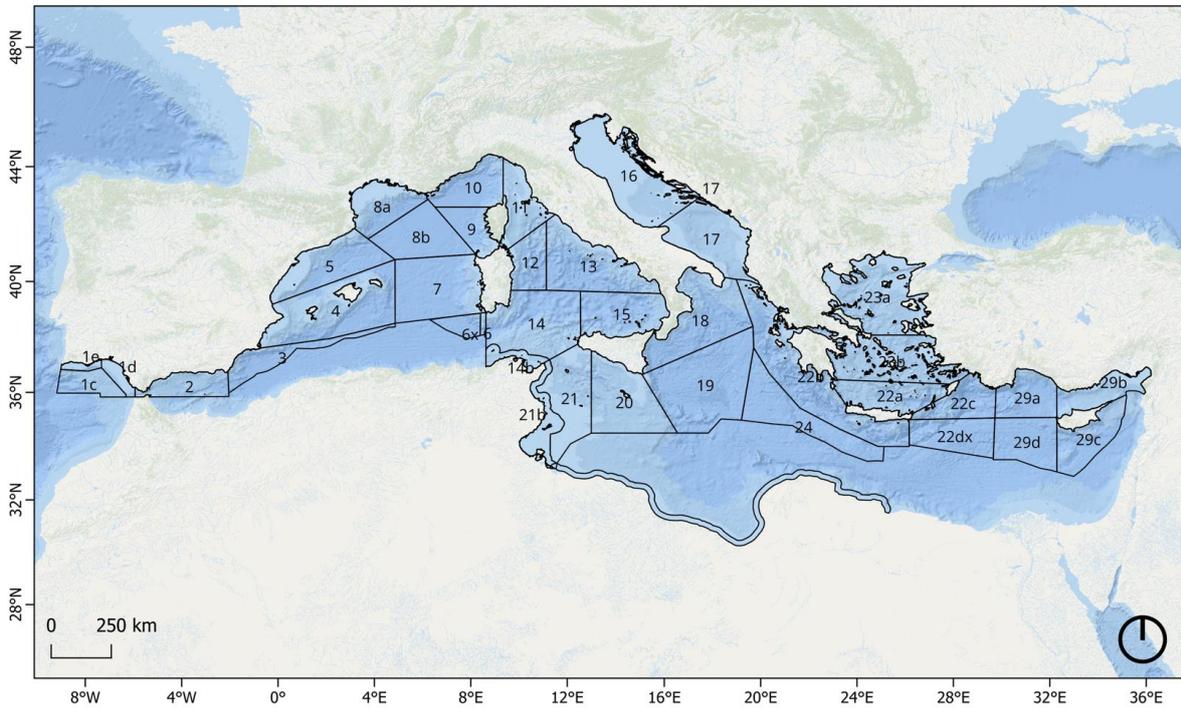


Figure 1. Preliminary ASI-II aerial coverage as decided during the Second Meeting of the ASI Steering Committee for ASI-II

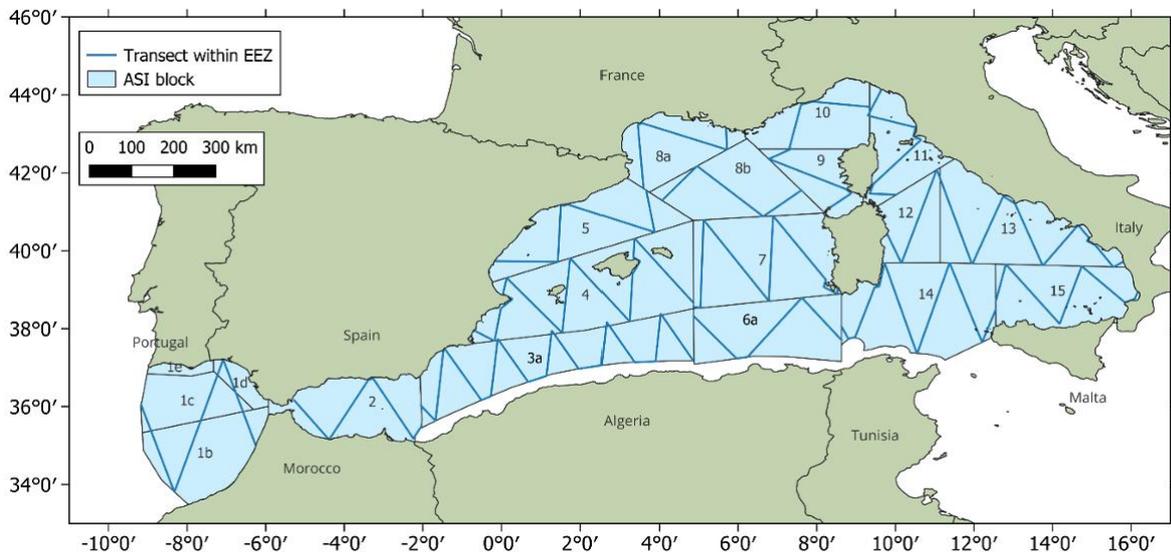


Figure 2. Representative transects for vessel-based surveys of ASI blocks 1-15 as presented in Marine Conservation Research International (MCRI) proposal

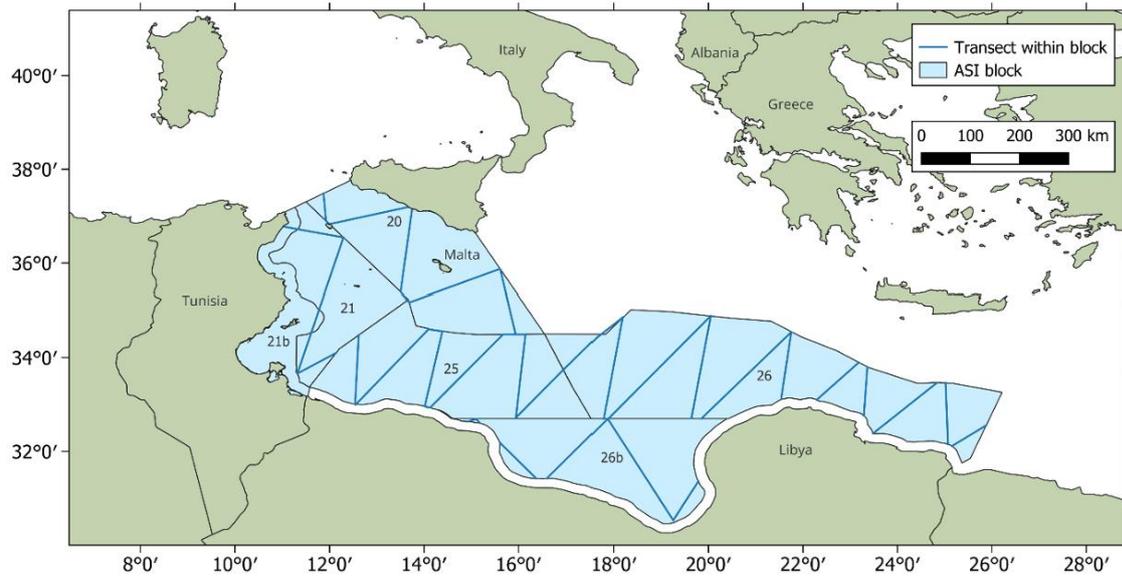


Figure 3. Representative transects for vessel-based surveys of ASI blocks 20, 21, 25 and 26 as presented in Marine Conservation Research International (MCRI) proposal

ASI-II DATA COLLECTION AND DATA ANALYSIS

- The Steering Committee recommends that all ACCOBAMS Parties formally commit to sharing data as soon as possible after collection.
- The Steering Committee recommends that Scientists and research institutions should begin considering analytical needs ahead of time, to ensure that they fully use the ASI dataset. The Steering Committee also recommends involving National Focal Points early in this process.
- The Steering Committee recommends using combined acoustic and visual methods and employing “dual-platform” blocks (i.e. areas where both aerial and vessel platforms are engaged) for cross-validation of abundance estimates.

ASI-II SURVEY PLATFORMS SELECTION

- The Steering Committee recommends retaining Pixair for Package 1 and finalising the selection for Package 2 among the preselected operators based on technical compliance and budget considerations.
- The Steering Committee recommends selecting Marine Conservation Research International to conduct the vessel surveys of ASI-II.
- The Steering Committee recommends Marine Conservation Research International to coordinate with the Life MareNatura vessel-based effort in order to facilitate a standardized data collection.

SURVEY TEAMS SELECTION AND PREPARATION FOR AERIAL AND BOAT SURVEYS

→ The Steering Committee recommends organising a team leaders/observers' workshop during the week of 18 May 2026, in Italy (Pavia or Anzio) - The Steering Committee recommends that the Terms of Reference for such workshop be drafted by the ASI Scientific Coordinator.

ASI-II COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

→ The Steering Committee recommends promoting ASI-II during major regional and global events throughout 2026–2027.

→ The Steering Committee recommends using UNEP Regional Seas communication and other relevant channels for continuous visibility and information sharing

→ The Steering Committee recommends the Secretariat to coordinate with IUCN-Med to organise an event to launch the ASI-II at-sea campaign, in Malaga (May/June 2026).