Agreement on the Conservation of Cetaceans of the Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea and contiguous Atlantic area, concluded under the auspices of the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS)

Accord sur la Conservation des Cétacés de la mer Noire, de la Méditerranée et de la zone Atlantique adjacente, conclu sous l'égide de la Convention sur la Conservation des Espèces Migratrices appartenant à la Faune Sauvage (CMS)

REPORT OF THE SEVENTEENTH MEETING OF THE ACCOBAMS SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE

4th & 5th February 2026
Tunis

ACCOBAMS

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1. OPENING OF THE MEETING

1. The Seventeenth Meeting of the Scientific Committee (SC17) of the Agreement on the Conservation of Cetaceans of the Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea and Contiguous Atlantic Area (ACCOBAMS) was held at The Nine Hotel in Tunis, Tunisia, on 4 and 5 February 2026. The meeting was attended by members of the Scientific Committee, representatives from the ACCOBAMS Sub-Regional Coordination Units, invited experts, representatives of international organizations and ACCOBAMS Partners, both in person and online.

2. The full list of participants can be found in **Annex I** of this report.

3. Maÿlis SALIVAS, ACCOBAMS Executive Secretary, welcomed all participants and opened the meeting at 8.30 a.m. on Wednesday, 4 February 2026. She provided logistical details and highlighted the relevant documentation for the meeting.

4. Simone PANIGADA, Chair of the Scientific Committee for 2023 - 2025, welcomed the participants, recalling that this was the inaugural meeting of the Scientific Committee of the 2026 - 2028 period.

2. ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

5. The provisional agenda and timetable of the meeting, reflected in documents ACCOBAMS-SC17/2026/**Doc01** and ACCOBAMS-SC17/2026/**Doc03**, were presented, and participants were invited to review and comment on them.

Conclusion 1.
The Scientific Committee adopted the agenda, as shown in **Annex II** to this report, together with the proposed meeting timetable.

3. FUNCTIONING OF THE SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE

3.1 Election of the Chair of the Scientific Committee for 2026 - 2028

6. The Executive Secretary recalled that, pursuant to Resolution 9.4, the Scientific Committee was required to elect a chair from among the experts designated as members to the Committee by the Mediterranean Science Commission (CIESM), the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), the Scientific Committee of the International Whaling Commission (IWC), the Scientific Council of the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species and Wild Animals (CMS), the European Cetacean Society (ECS), as well as Experts from Regions, at its first meeting of the triennium.

7. She presented the Terms of Reference for the election of the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Scientific Committee as shown in **Annex III**.

8. Members of the Scientific Committee were invited to inform the meeting if they did not wish to be considered as candidates to serve as Chair of the Scientific Committee for the period 2026 - 2028.

9. Following this process, the outgoing Chair for 2023 - 2025 was re-elected as Chair of the Scientific Committee for 2026 - 2028, being the sole candidate.

Conclusion 2.
Simone PANIGADA was elected as Chair of the Scientific Committee for 2026 - 2028.

3.2 Election of the Vice-Chair of the Scientific Committee for 2026 - 2028

10. Members of the Scientific Committee were invited to inform the meeting if they did not wish to be considered as candidates to serve as Vice-Chair of the Scientific Committee for the period 2026 - 2028.

11. A secret ballot was organized by the Secretariat among Scientific Committee members present in the room. Additionally, some members in attendance were delegated to cast votes on behalf of their colleagues participating online and were provided with multiple ballots for this purpose. Each member was instructed to circle the name of their preferred candidate.

Conclusion 3.
Pavel GOL'DIN was elected as Vice-Chair of the Scientific Committee for 2026 - 2028.

3.3 Designation of Task Managers of the Scientific Committee for 2026 - 2028

12. The Executive Secretary recalled that, pursuant to Resolution 9.4, the Scientific Committee was required to appoint four (4) "Task Managers" from among the experts designated as members to the Committee by CIESM, IUCN, the Scientific Committee of IWC, the Scientific Council of CMS, ECS, as well as Experts from Regions.

13. She presented the Terms of Reference for Task Managers of the Scientific Committee (ACCOBAMS-SC17/2026/**Doc05**).

Conclusion 4.
In accordance with the main priorities of the 2026 - 2028 Work Programme, the Scientific Committee decided to designate the following Task Managers:

MA3a - NETCCOBAMS
Task Manager: Greg DONOVAN
Support Group: To be determined, including the chairs of other relevant working groups.

CA1a - Cetacean population estimates and distribution
Task Manager: Giancarlo LAURIANO
Support Group: Lorenza BABBINI, Lobna BEN NAKHLA, Léa DAVID, Greg DONOVAN, Tilen GENOV, Joan GIMENEZ VERDUGO, Pavel GOL'DIN, Joan GONZALVO, Simone PANIGADA, Vincent RIDOUX

CA1c - Monitoring cetacean status
Task Manager: Simone PANIGADA
Support Group: Léa DAVID, Greg DONOVAN, Tilen GENOV, Pavel GOL'DIN, Joan GONZALVO, Guido GNONE, Caterina LANFREDI, Aurélie MOULINS

The Scientific Committee agreed that the groups remain open. The list will be circulated to the Scientific Committee members and to the ACCOBAMS Partners

Conclusion 5.
The Scientific Committee recommended the Secretariat, in close coordination with the Scientific Committee Chair and Vice-Chair, to send a kind reminder every two months to the Task Managers, Chairs of Working Groups and points of contact concerning the expected progress in their respective tasks and to check whether they need assistance from the Secretariat or the other Scientific Committee members.

3.4 Update on the internal Scientific Committee Handbook

14. Greg Donovan, the expert designated by the IWC, updated the meeting on the progress made regarding the draft Scientific Committee Handbook. He recalled that the handbook aims at integrating both formal and informal working practices that have developed over time but have not been codified into rules of procedure. It will address the Scientific Committee's structure, membership, responsibilities, meeting guidelines, funding procedures, timelines, paper types, confidentiality, key past recommendations and outcomes, plus a compiled list of documentation and full guidelines.

15. He requested support from the Secretariat, Chair, Vice-Chair, and working group members to finalize the content, especially the historical context. He proposed forming a small working group and expects to complete the draft in two months, aiming for an online living document.

16. The Chair expressed gratitude for the substantial work involved and assured Greg, along with all members and the Secretariat, of their readiness to provide inputs. In this respect, Tilen Genov and Mark Simmonds confirmed their involvement as part of the working group.

4. INSTITUTIONAL ISSUES

4.1 Implementation of, and compliance with, ACCOBAMS Resolutions, and progress monitoring

17. The Executive Secretary informed the meeting that during the 9th Meeting of the Parties (MOP9), Parties reaffirmed the importance of strengthening follow-up mechanisms and enhancing transparency regarding national implementation of ACCOBAMS Resolutions. They welcomed the role of the Follow-up Committee and endorsed its recommendations in Resolution 9.6. Specifically, Resolution 9.6.A addresses the follow-up submission concerning the conservation status of Mediterranean Sperm Whales and Fin Whales, both assessed as "endangered (EN)" on the IUCN Red List and in accordance with ACCOBAMS Resolution 8.12. The national status in Spain has not yet been updated; therefore, Resolution 9.6.A requests Spain to align its national red list accordingly and to clarify its procedures and timeline for implementing these updates.

18. The representative of OceanCare emphasized the reliance on feedback from Spain regarding the timeline and procedure for adjusting their national registry. He also stressed the importance of developing a recovery plan once Spain updates its national list. This requirement holds a significant meaning for a conservation plan and recognition within ACCOBAMS.

19. The Chair recalled that the Committee had offered support to the designated team of Spanish scientists responsible for drafting the necessary amendments, including relevant information and data. He emphasized that the implications for national commitments are significant, especially if the species are categorized as endangered.

20. OceanCare also informed the meeting that a draft review compiling information provided by several Range States under the Follow-up Committee procedure was under preparation in relation to the implementation of the Conservation Plan for the short-beaked common dolphin (*Delphinus delphis*) in the Mediterranean Sea.

Conclusion 6.
The Scientific Committee agreed to review this draft, together with the original information from the States, with a view to formulating technical considerations and recommendations, including in the context of the conservation management plan (CMP) for this species.

4.2 Update on ongoing projects

4.2.1 ACCOBAMS Survey Initiative

21. The Scientific Coordinator of the ACCOBAMS Survey Initiative (ASI) presented the key outcomes of ASI-I (2018–2019) and outlined the rationale for a second basin-wide synoptic survey, ASI-II.

22. Referring to document ACCOBAMS-SC17/2026/**Inf03**, the Executive Secretary informed the meeting that, in line with Resolution 8.10, the Secretariat, the Scientific Committee, and various experts prepared a detailed project proposal for ASI-II (2025–2028). This proposal was circulated to all Parties, inviting them to indicate any voluntary contributions and/or in-kind support they were willing to allocate for the project's implementation, as well as to appoint a national representative for the Long-Term Monitoring Programme (LTMP) Contact Group.

23. She recalled that ASI-II was launched during a dedicated event on 11 June 2025, at the Third United Nations Ocean Conference in Nice (UNOC3), where several countries, Partners and intergovernmental organizations reaffirmed their commitment to support this new edition. The Secretariat has also established partnerships with private foundations and the U.S. Navy for financial contributions and with the UNEP/MAP-Barcelona Convention and its Specially Protected Areas Regional Activity Centre (SPA/RAC) for capacity building.

24. The Executive Secretary presented the governance scheme for ASI-II implementation timeline and coordination arrangements for ASI-II. Possible coverage scenarios for the summer 2026 vessel-based and aerial surveys were outlined, subject to the availability of resources and the timely issuance of permits by the relevant national authorities.

25. She emphasized that ASI-II was designed to complement existing national and regional monitoring efforts and to contribute to harmonised, long-term assessments, in coordination with relevant initiatives (such as the LIFE MareNatura project) and policy frameworks, including the Barcelona Convention IMAP and the EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD)

26. The representative of Archipelagos, announced that, subject to the availability of funding from private sources, Archipelagos would be interested in adapting the ASI methodology and data collection framework for similar surveys covering a large area of the Aegean Sea.

27. Several participants proposed solutions to optimize overall survey coverage of the Mediterranean basin, particularly in the southern region. Suggestions included leveraging expected in-kind contributions from Malta, pursuing potential funding from donors and intergovernmental organizations ahead of the survey date, optimizing capacity-building efforts between the Mediterranean and Black Sea basins, minimizing overlap between aerial and

vessel surveys, and following up with the relevant National Focal Points to facilitate the granting of necessary permits.

28. Léa David informed that a ferry synoptic survey (FLT SynFONy) is scheduled during the same period as ASI-II, that will allow comparison with and calibration of ASI-II results, thanks to the long-term data sets and trends results provided by the FLT Med Network. So, the overlap of results will enable robust analyses and the development of recommendations particularly for monitoring trends over time. After that, Léa David suggests that if overlap between aerial and vessel-based survey of ASI-II should be minimised for a question of budget, some areas covered by the FLT Med Net synoptic survey could replace some vessel surveys. But the ASI-II Scientific Coordinator clarified that fixed-line transect surveys cannot entirely substitute for the efforts of boat surveys.

29. With regard to capacity building, the Executive Secretary informed the meeting that opportunities are being explored to strengthen exchanges between Mediterranean and Black Sea scientists. Participation of Black Sea experts in Mediterranean training activities was welcomed, while noting that a dedicated capacity-building programme tailored to the Black Sea context would be more appropriate in 2027, subject to the availability of resources.

Conclusion 7.
The Scientific Committee recommended the ASI-II Steering Committee to maximize overall survey coverage of the Mediterranean basin, notably by reducing overlap between aerial and vessel-based surveys, while taking into account funding and operational constraints.

4.2.2 Projects under the ACCOBAMS Supplementary Conservation Fund

30. The Executive Secretary provided a brief update on the projects funded under the ACCOBAMS Supplementary Conservation Fund (SCF), highlighting two completed projects and four ongoing initiatives:
    (a) Completed projects:
        - Establishing a cetacean tissue bank in Türkiye (CetaBankTR) (ACCOBAMS-SC17/2026/**Inf04**).
        - Implementing ACCOBAMS best practices in post-mortem investigations on stranded and by-caught cetaceans from Romanian shore and ingested marine litter monitoring (PONTICCET) (ACCOBAMS-SC17/2026/**Inf05**).
    (b) Ongoing projects:
        - The Tunisian Dolphin Project, expanding the monitoring programme to the Gulf of Gabès (ACCOBAMS-SC17/2026/**Inf06**).
        - Setting up a new operational network for monitoring cetacean strandings on the Algerian coast.
        - Research and conservation of Sperm Whales in the Eastern Mediterranean Sea of Türkiye.
        - Establishing the national tissue bank of cetacean samples in Ukraine.

31. The Scientific Committee took note of the update provided on projects supported through the Supplementary Conservation Fund.

4.2.3 Other regional projects (Pelagos Consortium, GFCM, ShiPrint…)

32. The Chair presented the “Pelagos Consortium” aiming at strengthening cetacean conservation in the Pelagos Sanctuary through cross-border collaboration, scientific research, stakeholder engagement, and policy advocacy. The Pelagos Consortium, officially launched during the UNOC3 in Nice (June 2025), is supported by a coalition of philanthropic institutions led by the Prince Albert II of Monaco Foundation through the Pelagos Initiative, and

gathers thirteen international partners (from research, civil society, public institutions, and local authorities) such as ACCOBAMS Secretariat, BlueSeeds, Cerema, CNRS-Géoazur, Green Marine Europe, JRC (EC), MIRACETI, OceanCare, Port-Cros National Park, Portofino Marine Protected Area, Tethys Research Institute, and WWF Italy.

33. In response to questions from Scientific Committee members, the Chair clarified that scientific analyses conducted under this initiative are intended to consider ecological processes at appropriate spatial scales, while allowing for specific focus on the Pelagos Sanctuary where relevant.

34. The Chair eventually affirmed that the Scientific Committee will be invited to provide technical advice to this project, thereby adding value to the discussions.

35. The Executive Secretary informed the meeting about three collaborative projects developed in partnership with the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO-GFCM) and local stakeholders in Italy (Sicily), Morocco and Türkiye.

36. These projects were fully implemented during the 2024–2025 period, and their final reports are provided as information documents. The projects are as follows:
    - Mitigation of Elasmobranch Bycatch and Dolphin Depredation in Moroccan Waters (ACCOBAMS-SC17/2026/**Inf07**).
    - Reduction and mitigation of the catch of elasmobranchs, sea turtles, and any other vulnerable species (e.g., marine mammals), incidentally captured by trawlers along Turkish coast (ACCOBAMS-SC17/2026/**Inf08**).
    - Monitoring activities and mitigation measures for the reduction of dolphin depredation in small-scale fisheries - western Ionian Sea (ACCOBAMS-SC17/2026/**Inf09**).

37. The Executive Secretary concluded by expressing gratitude to the GFCM for their productive collaboration and emphasized the need for further improvements in the coming years.

38. The Secretariat presented the ShiPrint project (2025–2026), funded by the Pelagos Initiative and led by the ACCOBAMS Secretariat in collaboration with OceanCare, Sinay and We Are Méditerranée. Its primary aim is to support the implementation of the adopted Associated Protective Measures (APMs) within the Northwestern Mediterranean Particularly Sensitive Sea Area (PSSA) by providing coastal States with technical solutions and awareness-raising tools. It comprises four major components:
    - NETCCOBAMS platform module: A new module (VisiZone) will allow relevant countries to track all Automatic Identification System (AIS)-equipped vessels in the area.
    - Stakeholder workshops: Four in-person workshops, preceded by online training courses, will target various vessel categories and relevant national and port authorities.
    - Photo exhibition: A photo exhibition titled “Wild Mediterranean” by Greg Lecoeur, was displayed in Monaco during UNOC3 to raise awareness of cetacean conservation and marine life in the Pelagos Sanctuary.
    - Certification development: A whale-safe certification programme would be developed to recognize best practices among shipping companies and ensure data compliance in reducing ship strikes. This will be based on the results of stakeholder workshops and aligned with the Pelagos Consortium project.

39. The Representative of OceanCare informed the meeting that, following the first two stakeholder workshops—one with the cargo shipping sector, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and scientists, and another with the passenger ferry and cruise sectors in collaboration with the Life Conceptu Maris project and partners —the third

workshop focused on the yachting industry will take place in Spring 2026, while the fourth workshop with national and port authorities is scheduled for Autumn 2026.

40. The Scientific Committee took note of the information presented about the projects.

4.3 NETCCOBAMS

41. Alessio Maglio was invited to present an update on the Network on the Conservation of Cetaceans in the Black Sea, Mediterranean, and Adjacent Atlantic Area (NETCCOBAMS) platform, which has been online since 2020. He recalled that NETCCOBAMS features several modules addressing various topics of interest for ACCOBAMS, including a web Geographic Information System (GIS) platform serving as a repository for data; a module for continuous noise monitoring; a dashboard for stranding statistics, which integrates data from the Mediterranean Database on Cetacean Strandings (MEDACES); the VisiZone module providing ship traffic analyses; and a repository for documents that supports national reporting by Parties.

42. He outlined the next steps regarding update rates and anticipated upgrades for the NETCCOBAMS modules. He emphasized the importance of addressing stakeholder requests for the evolution of NETCCOBAMS, which should be discussed within the NETCCOBAMS Expert Working Group. He also noted that a critical element currently missing is a clear process for discussing, interpreting and validating the data and input received.

43. The meeting stressed the need to contribute to the assessment of the data/maps available on the platform and underscored the importance of ensuring the interoperability of NETCCOBAMS with other platforms and processes, particularly in light of the two Common Indicators on noise recently adopted under the Barcelona Convention's Integrated Monitoring and Assessment Programme for the Mediterranean Sea and Coast and Related Assessment Criteria (IMAP), which should be also addressed under the Noise Joint Working Group.

Conclusion 8.
The Scientific Committee agreed to dedicate a Task Manager and an Expert Working Group to NETCCOBAMS, with a view to enhancing its scientific value, data usability and contribution to ACCOBAMS processes.

Conclusion 9.
The Scientific Committee agreed on updated Terms of Reference for the NETCCOBAMS Expert Working Group and its Task Manager. The updated Terms of Reference are presented in **Annex IV** to this report.

5. CONSERVATION ACTIONS

5.1 Reporting by Scientific Committee Experts from Regions

44. The Executive Secretary recalled that according to the Rules on the Scientific Committee adopted by Resolution 9.4, "the experts from regions shall work together to provide a report to the meetings of the Scientific Committee on the conservation status of cetaceans and relevant activities in their respective region".

45. The Experts from Regions were then invited to present concise updates based on the national reports submitted to MOP9, as well as on recent scientific knowledge and ongoing activities.

(a) Western Mediterranean and contiguous Atlantic area

46. Souad Lamouti and Vincent Ridoux presented a synthesis based on national reports from Algeria, France, Morocco, Portugal and Spain. They highlighted key issues raised by Parties, including priorities related to capacity building, data sharing and harmonisation of monitoring practices.

47. Recurring needs identified by Parties included continued training on stranding response and post-mortem investigations, improved maintenance and traceability of biological sample collections, and further harmonisation of scientific protocols. Several countries expressed interest in strengthening cetacean observation and monitoring at sea, including through passive acoustic monitoring. Requests for access to ASI-I datasets were also reported.

48. Major pressures identified in the region include interactions with fisheries, underwater noise, plastic pollution, maritime traffic and the rapid development of whale-watching activities. Climate-related impacts, particularly marine heatwaves, are emerging as an increasing concern in some areas. Limited and uneven assessments of conservation status persist across species and sub-regions, highlighting gaps in data availability.

(b) Central Mediterranean

49. Martina Duras and Giancarlo Lauriano presented a synthesis based on national reports submitted by Albania, Croatia, Italy, Libya, Malta, Montenegro, Slovenia and Tunisia. The synthesis highlighted disparities in monitoring coverage and capacities across countries.

50. While long-term monitoring programmes and structured conservation measures are in place in several countries, other areas still face substantial gaps in baseline knowledge, particularly with regard to abundance, distribution and trends. Common challenges include limited continuity of monitoring efforts, insufficient stranding response capacity and increasing pressures from maritime traffic and underwater noise.

51. The Experts emphasized the need to strengthen national capacities, improve regional coordination and enhance data harmonisation to support effective conservation planning in the region.

(c) Eastern Mediterranean

52. Anastasia Komnenou and Céline Mahfouz presented a synthesis based on national reports from Cyprus, Greece, Türkiye and Lebanon. The presentation highlighted ongoing legislative, scientific and institutional developments aimed at strengthening cetacean conservation and monitoring.

53. Recent initiatives include the development of national monitoring programmes, improvements in stranding response and increased alignment with regional and European policy frameworks. Data gaps remain in some areas, and the Experts stressed the importance of sustained monitoring and regional cooperation to address pressures such as fisheries interactions, underwater noise and habitat degradation.

(d) Black Sea

54. Pavel Gol'din and Natia Kopaliani presented an overview based on national reports and updated information provided by scientific institutions and ACCOBAMS Partners. Ongoing regional initiatives include passive acoustic monitoring activities, vessel-based surveys and stranding monitoring programmes, with notable progress achieved in data collection and analysis in recent years.

55. Bycatch was identified as a major conservation concern across the Black Sea, requiring continued attention and coordinated mitigation efforts. The Experts also underlined the environmental consequences of recent military activities in the region and the importance of implementing the post-war plan for Black Sea cetaceans.

56. After the regional synthesis presentations, the meeting's participants were invited to provide comments and recommendations.

57. The representative of SPA/RAC stressed the importance of ensuring coherence between regional reports and ongoing processes under the Barcelona Convention, in particular IMAP implementation.

58. Rimel Benmessaoud shared additional information on recent monitoring and research activities in Tunisia, aimed at strengthening baseline knowledge.

59. The representative of Archipelagos highlighted the value of long-term data collected in the Aegean Sea and expressed interest in contributing to regional assessments, noting the importance of clear data-sharing procedures.

60. The Scientific Committee took note of these comments and recalled ongoing work towards the standardisation of regional reporting.

61. The question of whether Parties are systematically using the protocols adopted under ACCOBAMS was raised. The Executive Secretary responded that while they should be using these protocols, she does not have certainty or guarantees regarding their actual implementation. It was proposed to include a standing question in national reports and regional syntheses about which protocols are being utilized and to recommend the use of standardized protocols. Additionally, it was suggested to create a dedicated space on NETCCOBAMS where protocols can be deposited and easily retrieved by various users.

62. The Chair noted that the presentation of the reports by the Experts from Regions varies significantly and emphasized the need to standardize this process.

Conclusion 10.
The Scientific Committee agreed to form a Working Group to develop a standardized template for regional reports, drawing on prior reflections on this topic and the existing format of the report presented in document ACCOBAMS-SC17/2026/**Doc06**. The Terms of Reference for this Working Group are included as **Annex V** to this report.

5.2 Knowledge about state of cetaceans

63. The Scientific Committee was invited to examine the adopted Work Programme for the Scientific Committee for the 2026–2028 triennium and to complete it with concrete and operational actions. For each agenda item covered under sections 5.2, 5.3, 5.4 and 5.5, the Scientific Committee discussed, refined and agreed on specific activities, priorities and expected outputs. The consolidated Work Programme for 2026–2028, including objectives to be achieved by the Scientific Committee prior to its eighteenth meeting (SC18), is presented in **Annex VI** to this report.

5.2.1 Cetacean population estimates and distribution

64. Referring to ACCOBAMS-SC17/2026/**Doc07**, the Executive Secretary reminded the meeting that during MOP9, the Parties reaffirmed the crucial importance of collecting robust and harmonized population estimates and distribution data that address conservation and policy needs. Parties emphasized the need for coordination with existing national and regional monitoring efforts, such as collaboration with the Barcelona Convention's IMAP and the EU MSFD. In this context, the Scientific Committee was tasked, during MOP9, with reviewing not only the progress on ASI-II but also the relevant 2017 IMAP factsheets, with updates to be presented at the Ecosystem Approach Correspondence Group on Monitoring (CORMON) in June 2026.

65. The SPA/RAC Representative informed the meeting that Guidance Factsheets have been developed for each Common Indicator (CI) to ensure harmonized and consistent monitoring. These factsheets define specific objectives and serve as essential references for the Contracting Parties, assisting them in revising and implementing their national IMAPs. The aim is to strengthen the application of the ecosystem approach in the Mediterranean and ensure the achievement of Good Environmental Status (GES).

66. Since 2016, implementation of the IMAP has significantly advanced, leading to national IMAP-based monitoring programmes and the development of the Mediterranean Quality Status Reports (MED QSR) in 2017 and 2023. Drawing on these experiences and findings from the MED QSR 2023, the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention have called for an update of the Ecosystem Approach (EcAp) and IMAP, focusing on enhancing IMAP implementation, strengthening national monitoring and assessment capacities, ensuring quality-assured data and improving assessment reliability.

67. This revision of IMAP includes updates to the guidance factsheets for the CIs. In this context, SPA/RAC is updating the factsheets for CI1 on Biodiversity and CI2 on Non-Indigenous Species (NIS). It is proposed to incorporate climate change considerations into these updated factsheets while considering the development of monitoring and assessment scales, assessment criteria, thresholds and baseline values for IMAP CI3 "Species distributional range", CI4 "Population abundance" and CI5 "Population demographic characteristics" related to marine mammals. Additionally, the latest scientific advancements in marine biodiversity research and ecological monitoring, including climate change impacts on cetaceans, as well as recommendations from the MED QSR 2023, will be taken into account.

68. To facilitate this process, the ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee, with support from the Secretariat, is invited to develop a methodological note and work plan detailing the proposed approach and timeline for the updating process. This includes conducting a critical analysis of the 2017 CI3, 4 and 5 factsheets related to cetaceans, preparing a diagnostic report summarizing the methodological gaps and recommendations for improvement, and drafting updated versions of the IMAP CI3, 4 and 5 factsheets related to cetaceans. The goal is to present this work, if possible, during the next Biodiversity CORMON Meeting scheduled for 10–11 June 2026 (online).

69. In response to a question raised by the Chair regarding the possible integration of the update of the Action Plan for Cetacean Conservation, adopted under the Barcelona Convention, into the process of updating the IMAP Guidance Factsheets, the representative of SPA/RAC clarified that these constitute two distinct but complementary processes. While the Action Plan for Cetaceans includes a monitoring component, its scope is broader and addresses a wider range of policy, management and conservation measures beyond monitoring and assessment frameworks. She further explained that the update of the IMAP Guidance Factsheets follows a specific technical and institutional timeline, with revised factsheets expected to be discussed at the Biodiversity Ecosystem Approach Correspondence Group on Monitoring (CORMON) meeting in June 2026. In contrast, the update of the

Action Plan for Cetaceans is foreseen to begin in September 2026, with the objective of submitting a revised version for consideration at the 18th Meeting of Focal Points for Specially Protected Areas and Biological Diversity (SPA/BD), anticipated in May 2027.

Conclusion 11.
The Scientific Committee decided to dedicate a Task Manager on Cetacean population estimates and distribution

Conclusion 12.
The Scientific Committee agreed to contribute to the process being launched by SPA/RAC to update the Guidance Factsheets of Common Indicators for Ecological Objectives EO1 on Biodiversity.
With the support of the ACCOBAMS Secretariat, the Scientific Committee will:
- develop a methodological note and workplan detailing the proposed approach and timeline for the update process.
- conduct a critical analysis of the 2017 IMAP Common Indicators 3, 4 and 5 factsheets related to the Mediterranean monk seal, and prepare a diagnostic report summarizing the findings, methodological gaps and recommendations for improvement.
- produce a draft updated version of the IMAP Common Indicators 3, 4 and 5 factsheets related to cetaceans.

5.2.2 Population structure

70. Referring to document ACCOBAMS-SC17/2026/**Doc07**, the Executive Secretary outlined the actions detailed in the Work Programme and Resolution 9.12. The objective of Resolution 9.12 is to encourage the collection and preservation of cetacean tissue samples for genetic research, promote the implementation of ACCOBAMS best practices on cetacean population genetics, and harmonize procedures for sample exchange among ACCOBAMS Parties.

Conclusion 13.
The Scientific Committee decided to create a Working Group on Population Structure and endorsed the draft Terms of Reference that are presented in **Annex VII** to this report.

5.2.3 Monitoring cetacean's status (including CMPs and Black Sea post war plan)

71. Referring to document ACCOBAMS-SC17/2026/**Doc07**, the Chair presented the actions required under the Conservation Management Plans (CMPs).

72. The Scientific Committee discussed progress and challenges related to existing CMPs, noting that limited financial and human resources require a strategic and prioritised approach. In this regard, the Committee reiterated the importance of focusing on the finalisation and effective implementation of a limited number of CMPs before launching additional plans.

Conclusion 14.
The Scientific Committee also decided to establish a CMP ad-hoc group as soon as possible, while considering budget availability, to finalize the specific agenda for the CMP development stakeholders' workshop, including:
- Identify key stakeholders needed, based upon identified priority threats.
- Select a suitable venue (including breakout groups, time and budget required).
- Prepare background documentation and introductory presentations for each item.

Its members should include at least:

- 1 Scientific Committee member who led the draft CMP development work.
- 1 member of the ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee Steering Group on CMPs.
- 2 relevant Regional and/or National Representatives with knowledge of stakeholders.
- 1 member of the ACCOBAMS Secretariat.

Conclusion 15.
The Scientific Committee emphasized the need to ensure that CMPs are allocated the funding required for their development, while acknowledging that, in order to address short-term liquidity constraints, prioritizing ASI-II activities could be considered.

Conclusion 16.
The Scientific Committee recommended that the Secretariat coordinate with National Focal Points to invite voluntary contributions in support of CMPs stakeholders' workshop.

73. Referring to document ACCOBAMS-SC17/2026/**Doc08**, Pavel Gol'din, Expert from the Black Sea region, presented the Terms of Reference for an ACCOBAMS expert workshop on the post-war plan for Black Sea cetaceans.

74. In response to a question regarding any existing initiatives related to post-war monitoring activities for other species or the overall Black Sea ecosystem and the potential to integrate cetacean-related matters into a broader ecological framework, the Representative from the Black Sea Commission, explained that while the Black Sea Commission does not currently have such initiatives, several projects under other contexts could provide opportunities for coordination with the cetacean post-war plan workshop.

Conclusion 17.
The Scientific Committee adopted the Terms of Reference for the ACCOBAMS Expert Workshop on the post-war plan for Black Sea cetaceans that are presented in **Annex VIII** to this report.

Conclusion 18.
The Scientific Committee recommended that the Secretariat coordinate with National Focal Points, Sub-Regional Coordination Units and other relevant stakeholders to invite voluntary contributions in support of the Black Sea post-war plan.

5.2.4 Functional stranding networks and responses to emergency situations

75. Referring to document ACCOBAMS-SC17/2026/**Doc07**, the Chair presented briefly the actions foreseen by Resolution 9.13.

76. Sandro Mazzariol, Co-Chair of the ACCOBAMS Emergency Task Force for Stranding Events (AETFS), briefly outlined the emergency situations the Task Force has addressed in recent months. He noted mass strandings in southern Spain in January 2026 and in Greece in December 2025, likely linked to acoustic disturbances, and emphasized that post-mortem investigations are still ongoing.

77. The Scientific Committee took note of recent emergency situations addressed by the AETFS, including atypical and mass strandings that occurred in different parts of the ACCOBAMS area. It was recalled that such events often require rapid coordination among national authorities, scientific experts and relevant stakeholders, as well as the consistent application of harmonised protocols

78. In addition, the Scientific Committee stressed the importance of ensuring that up-to-date guidance documents, protocols and relevant ACCOBAMS Resolutions are easily accessible to all relevant actors, including through the ACCOBAMS website and NETCCOBAMS platform. The potential role of a dedicated emergency fund, supported by voluntary contributions, was also recalled as a means to enhance rapid response capabilities.

79. In the context of the recent atypical mass stranding of beaked whales in southern Spain in late January 2026, the Representative of OceanCare referred to numerous similar events have occurred in several ACCOBAMS countries in recent years. He underlined that such incidents, particularly those linked to impulsive noise, have contributed to follow-up procedures and resolutions on anthropogenic noise, and recommended the application of preventive measures during the planning of military activities, in line with ACCOBAMS Noise Guidelines.

80. OceanCare also offered to prepare a review of atypical mass strandings that have occurred since 2020 in the ACCOBAMS area, to be developed in liaison with the AETFS.

Conclusion 19.
The Scientific Committee recommended that National Reports include specific information on unusual and / or mass stranding events, indicating the outcomes of the intervention and the type of protocol that was used. This will allow to identify areas where there is a need for training.

Conclusion 20.
The Scientific Committee recommended Parties to effectively use ASCOBANS-ACCOBAMS protocols on stranding monitoring, as well as to specify clearly in National Reports if these protocols are followed.

Conclusion 21.
The Scientific Committee recommended calling for voluntary contributions from National Focal Points and other relevant stakeholders to support the dedicated fund for emergency situations.

Conclusion 22.
The Scientific Committee requested the ACCOBAMS Emergency Task Force to review the available material relating to emergency and stranding responses to determine if there are other documents that should be disseminated.

Conclusion 23.
The Scientific Committee noted the importance of ensuring that the most up-to-date documents related to stranding protocols and relevant Resolutions are available on the ACCOBAMS website and NETCCOBAMS, and accessible to relevant actors and organizations across the ACCOBAMS area.

5.3 Human pressures on cetaceans

5.3.1 Interaction with fisheries / aquaculture

81. Referring to the relevant section of document ACCOBAMS-SC17/2026/**Doc07**, the Chair briefly introduced the actions requested in Resolution 9.14. He recalled that interactions between cetaceans and fisheries or aquaculture activities remain one of the main conservation challenges across the ACCOBAMS area, in particular due to incidental bycatch, depredation phenomena and their associated ecological and socio-economic implications. He further recalled that this issue had already been identified as a priority during previous meetings

of the Scientific Committee, including SC16, where the need for improved monitoring, data comparability and strengthened cooperation with fisheries management bodies had been emphasized.

82. The Executive Secretary recalled that the second Meeting of the JBWG of ACCOBAMS and ASCOBANS was held online on 5-6 February 2025.

Conclusion 24.
The Scientific Committee endorsed the recommendations from the 2nd Meeting of the ASCOBANS-ACCOBAMS Joint Bycatch Working Group (JBWG2). The Scientific Committee agreed to draft recommendations aimed at specific bodies, and work to implement them.

83. Anis Zarrouk, representative of FAO/GFCM, provided an update on recent and ongoing work addressing interactions between fisheries and vulnerable species within GFCM structures. He recalled that recent quantitative analyses carried out in the framework of the State of Mediterranean and Black Sea Fisheries 2025 (SoMFi) have been expanded to a qualitative analysis to better identify areas and fisheries at risk, and to inform the formulation of advice by the GFCM Scientific Advisory Committee (SAC) and the Scientific Advisory Committee for the Black Sea (ACBS).

84. He further explained that technical discussions on interactions with vulnerable species are being pursued within dedicated expert frameworks, notably the Working Group on Vulnerable Species (WGVUL), which facilitates continuous exchanges among vulnerable species experts in the GFCM area of application. In the Black Sea context, he recalled that these issues are also addressed through the Advisory Committee for the Black Sea (ACBS), which evolved from the former Working Group on the Black Sea (WGBS), ensuring continuity and integration of work on bycatch and interactions with marine mammals in that region. He specifically informed that the WGVUL, to be held on 30–31 March 2026, is expected, among other tasks, to support the advancement of bycatch and depredation measures in identified high-risk areas, to be further discussed at the SAC and ACBS in 2026.

85. Reference was made to the existing FAO-GFCM guidelines on bycatch monitoring, which include a recommended minimum onboard observer coverage threshold of 0.5 %. Participants noted that, while this threshold represents an important baseline, it may not be sufficient in all contexts to accurately assess the magnitude and patterns of cetacean bycatch. The Scientific Committee underlined that monitoring needs may vary according to fishing gears, fleet characteristics and regional contexts, and highlighted the importance of considering adaptive and complementary monitoring approaches, in coordination with fisheries management bodies and scientific advisory processes.

86. The Scientific Committee emphasized the importance of strengthening data collection on interactions with fisheries, including through onboard observer programmes where feasible, port-based surveys and the systematic use of stranding data to assess bycatch-related mortality. The need to improve harmonisation of methodologies and reporting, while taking into account regional specificities, was reiterated, in line with discussions previously held at SC16.

Conclusion 25.
The Scientific Committee reiterated the need to build on discussions held at previous meetings, including SC16, and to further strengthen cooperation with FAO-GFCM and its relevant bodies (Commission, SAC, WGVUL, ACBS) in order to improve monitoring and mitigation of interactions between cetaceans and fisheries or aquaculture activities. Particular

attention should be given to revise the 2019 FAO-GFCM Guidelines for bycatch monitoring, particularly in relation to the 0.5% minimum coverage for onboard observation.

5.3.2 Anthropogenic underwater noise

87. Referring to the relevant section of document ACCOBAMS-SC17/2026/**Doc07**, the Chair briefly introduced the actions requested in Resolution 9.15 where the need to strengthen monitoring, assessment and mitigation measures was highlighted.

88. He presented the report the Joint CMS/ACCOBAMS/ASCOBANS Noise Working Group (JNWG). The Scientific Committee reiterated the central role of the Joint CMS/ACCOBAMS/ASCOBANS Noise Working Group (JNWG) in advancing technical work on monitoring, modelling and mitigation of underwater noise. Members discussed the need to further develop calibration and validation approaches for noise maps, improve data quality and comparability, and strengthen cooperation with competent authorities, including navies, port authorities and international organisations such as IMO and REMPEC.

Conclusion 26.
The Scientific Committee recommended organizing an in-person meeting for the JNWG to facilitate progress on complex issues, while enabling hybrid participation, and agreed to draft objectives and terms of reference for this meeting.

89. The SPA/RAC Representative reported on the implications of the adopted COP 24 Decision IG.27/6 regarding the Ecosystem Approach (EcAp) Policy and Roadmap for 2026–2035 and Integrated Monitoring and Assessment Programme for the Mediterranean Sea and Coast (IMAP). She noted that EO11 has been integrated into IMAP with the support of the Joint Noise Working Group of CMS, ACCOBAMS and ASCOBANS, setting the stage for advancing two noise candidate indicators to full common indicators. The monitoring strategy for these two indicators is outlined in the Indicators' Guidance Factsheets, which ensure effective and widely agreed methods for monitoring underwater noise at a regional scale. In this context, the Barcelona Convention Contracting Parties should consider progressively including these two Common Indicators in their IMAP-based national monitoring programmes, while taking national specificities into account. She emphasized the importance of continued support from ACCOBAMS and the Working Group to enhance the quality and availability of underwater noise data, as well as to improve monitoring and assessment practices.

Conclusion 27.
The Scientific Committee recommended to organize series of targeted, cost-effective online workshops, or in-person if funds become available in the future, involving members of the JNWG, to address specific technical and strategic issues. These would include:
- Discussions on calibration and verification methods for noise maps, which drafting has already started, ideally to be held in 2026.
- Mitigation-related topics: (a) the update of the guidelines for impulsive noise, the development of a EO11/D11 assessment process for future IMAP/MSFD cycles (including clarification of the role of the Industry Advisory Group - IAG-), and the preparation of a post-conflict plan for the Black Sea.
- A third workshop focusing on navy and sonar issues is also suggested, taking into consideration the conclusions of the last workshop with Navies (2024).

For this set of activities, a preliminary meeting among existing JNWG members might be needed to agree on priorities.

Conclusion 28.
The Scientific Committee recommended:
- the Secretariat to further coordinate and collaborate with the International Maritime Organization (IMO), through participation in the Intersessional Working Group on underwater noise from ships (IWG-Noise) established in the framework of the Regional Marine Pollution Emergency Response Centre for the Mediterranean Sea's (REMPEC);
- to reinforce existing collaboration with UNEP/MAP especially through the participation in the next CORMON meetings.

90. OceanCare offered to provide a draft note elaborating the concept of "Quiet Zones" to support the achievement of marine restoration objectives, and particularly those relating to cetaceans, within the Agreement area, in the context of internationally agreed objectives for marine ecosystem restoration (Global Biodiversity Framework - GBF), including the EU Nature Restoration Law.

Conclusion 29.
The Scientific Committee welcomed the offer from OceanCare and proposed to review and discuss it at its next Meeting (SC18).

5.3.3 Vessel strikes

91. Referring to the relevant section of document ACCOBAMS-SC17/2026/**Doc07**, the Chair briefly introduced the actions requested in Resolution 9.16. He recalled that this issue has been repeatedly addressed during previous meetings of the Scientific Committee and remains a priority where maritime traffic overlaps with important cetacean habitats.

92. Participants highlighted that vessel strike mitigation requires a combination of measures, including spatial management approaches, speed reduction schemes, improved awareness among mariners, and the development of incentive-based tools encouraging compliance with best practices. The Scientific Committee also underlined the importance of improving reporting of vessel strike events and related post-mortem investigations to better quantify the magnitude of the problem and assess the effectiveness of mitigation measures.

93. OceanCare recalled the need to further accelerate efforts to reduce the risk of vessel strikes, notably in high-risk areas already identified through ACCOBAMS and partner initiatives. They offered to develop a draft document developing standards and accelerate the process for nautical charts to be updated and reflect the areas crucial for the protection of cetaceans, particularly in high-risk areas. The document shall assist developing a homogeneous approach by Hydrographic Offices for informing mariners about the presence of whales and known whale habitats within the Agreement area.

Conclusion 30.
The Scientific Committee reiterated the importance of strengthening coordinated efforts to reduce the risk of vessel strikes, particularly in identified high-risk areas. It stressed the need to further enhance cooperation with relevant partners, including IMO, IWC and the Pelagos Agreement, to improve the integration of scientific information into maritime navigation and to support the implementation and evaluation of effective, science-based mitigation measures across the ACCOBAMS area. They recommended strengthening the activities of the Joint ACCOBAMS-Pelagos Vessel Strike Working Group.

5.3.4 Cetacean watching

94. The CIMA Foundation Representative provided updates on the three proposed actions for cetacean watching and their means of implementation, as detailed in the Work Programme 2026-2028 (ACCOBAMS-SC17/2026/**Doc07)**. She noted that the high number and diversity of the planned activities could pose challenges for implementation within the 2026–2028 work programme, especially without secured funding and that it may be necessary to prioritize activities. She suggested that the Whale Watching Working group (WWWG) support the work, and to work in close collaboration with the Pelagos Working group "Lois" (Law) to conduct an analysis of existing national legislations related to cetacean watching.

Conclusion 31.
The Scientific Committee underlined the need to continue efforts to ensure that cetacean watching activities in the ACCOBAMS area are conducted in a sustainable manner. They stressed the importance of prioritising actions under the Work Programme, strengthening coordination through the Whale Watching Working Group, and promoting the implementation of the HQWW label and harmonised monitoring approaches, in close cooperation with relevant partners.

5.3.5 Marine litter & chemical and biological pollution

95. Referring to the relevant sections of document ACCOBAMS-SC17/2026/**Doc07**, Cristina Fossi, presented various actions aimed at streamlining efforts before the next meeting of the Scientific Committee. She emphasized the critical importance of interlinking the impacts of marine litter and microplastics on cetaceans with those of legacy and emerging contaminants at both the Mediterranean level, in collaboration with ACCOBAMS, and the Pelagos level. In this context, she highlighted collaborative efforts to identify hotspot areas for chemical pollution and marine litter, sharing data on potential risks to the Pelagos Sanctuary.

96. Concerning implementation activities, she noted the necessity of addressing both stranded and living organisms, particularly emphasizing the importance of supporting best practices and guidelines for post-mortem investigations. She mentioned the significant work done two years ago with Padova University, which resulted in a comprehensive document outlining harmonized technologies and methodologies for consistent post-mortem investigations. Cristina Fossi also called for enhanced collaboration in research dissemination and interaction with governmental bodies to secure external funding at both Mediterranean and EU levels. She strongly encouraged greater coordination in the development of related research proposals.

97. A key focus has been on developing new techniques to assess the potential impacts of marine litter and plastic additives as well as emerging chemicals. She referenced a recent case study published in the journal *Environmental Science & Technology* that examined the use of omics techniques in fin whales, identifying over 35 endpoints related to the presence of chemicals (DOI: 10.1021/acs.est.5c00844). This line of research is crucial to understanding both marine litter and emerging contaminants.

98. She also underscored the need for interaction with tissue banks to facilitate the detection of potential effects of marine litter and emerging chemicals. She proposed the idea of organizing a meeting hosted in Siena (Italy) to consolidate available data on marine litter, harmonized methodologies for stranded organisms and new technologies for assessing the effects of emerging chemicals. Finally, she stressed the importance of continuing

efforts at the local level in Pelagos, drawing on the work accomplished over the past 15 years by organizations such as the IWC.

99. Sandro Mazzariol reported on significant progress achieved through pilot actions in the Adriatic Sea, where harmonised post-mortem ingestion guidelines have been applied in Croatia, Italy and Slovenia. These efforts have enabled the consolidation of extensive datasets on ingestion patterns and their effects on different cetacean species, showing particularly high impacts on deep-diving species. He noted that ongoing work aims to integrate these findings with information on other stressors identified through stranding data, including climate-related factors, in order to support risk assessment approaches.

100. Pavel Gol'din expressed his concerns about the operation of tissue banks in only two Black Sea countries, Türkiye and Ukraine, thanks to the ACCOBAMS Supplementary Conservation Fund. He noted that efforts to collect data on marine litter and pollution involve all Black Sea Parties, including Bulgaria, Georgia, Romania, Türkiye and Ukraine. This process, however, is costly and resource-intensive, requiring significant effort for proper laboratory analyses. Pavel Gol'din emphasized the urgent need to enhance the exchange of information between tissue banks and expressed interest in enhanced cooperation between Black Sea and Mediterranean experts through joint analyses and programmes.

101. Mark Simmonds referenced the review of fish aggregating devices (FADs) conducted under the auspices of the CMS in preparation for its upcoming COP in March 2026 in Brazil (https://www.cms.int/document/fish-aggregating-devices-2). He noted that this review has identified FADs as a source of plastic pollution. He emphasized that there is an active work stream on marine pollution within the CMS framework, involving participants from various regions, including representatives from the ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee. This work stream is set to report on a plan for advancing efforts related to marine pollution, particularly focusing on persistent organic pollutants (POPs), which are often overlooked but pose significant threats to top predators in the region. The document outlining this new work stream (https://www.cms.int/document/marine-pollution-0), if approved, will establish a dedicated team to advance initiatives related to marine pollution. Mark Simmonds expressed hope for strengthened involvement of ACCOBAMS in this ongoing process.

Conclusion 32. The Scientific Committee recommended that ASI II include the collection of data on marine litter and fish aggregating devices (FADs), in order to improve the identification of hotspots and better assess cumulative pressures on cetaceans.

5.3.6 Climate change

102. The Executive Secretary introduced the agenda item on climate change, referring to the relevant section in document ACCOBAMS-SC17/2026/**Doc07**. She noted that climate change had been classified as a medium priority by the MOP. The objective remains to continue collaboration with existing initiatives.

103. Mark Simmonds noted that CMS conducted a workshop a year ago on climate change and its effects on migratory species, which included a substantive section addressing implications for cetaceans. The report from this workshop is significant with a strong focus on the ACCOBAMS region (https://www.cms.int/document/report-migratory-species-and-climate-change-expert-workshop-edinburgh-united-kingdom-11-13).

104. The SPA/RAC representative recalled two key points regarding climate change in relation to the Barcelona Convention IMAP:

- following the adoption of COP Decision IG.27/6, climate change aspects are progressively being incorporated into the third phase of the Integrated Monitoring and Assessment Programme (IMAP), notably through the introduction of climate-related Candidate Common Indicators under Ecological Objective EO7. These indicators aim to enhance knowledge and application of adaptation measures to mitigate the impacts of climate change on the coastal and marine environment, primarily through monitoring changes in hydrographic parameters such as temperature, pH, salinity and sea level rise. The two new indicators are: Candidate Common Indicator 39: Large-scale changes in circulation patterns, temperature, pH and salinity distribution, and Candidate Common Indicator 40: Long-term changes in sea level.
- Additionally, it is essential to incorporate climate change considerations into the updated Guidance Factsheets. As one of the most significant threats to biodiversity in the Mediterranean Sea, climate change requires further clarification within the Guidance Factsheets (EO1 Biodiversity) and definitions of GES. Its impacts should be integrated into existing indicators and methodologies, particularly in establishing baseline and threshold values.

Conclusion 33.
The Scientific Committee, while contributing to the process launched by SPA/RAC to update Guidance Factsheets, agreed to incorporate climate change considerations. As one of the most significant threats to biodiversity in the Mediterranean Sea, climate change requires further clarification within the Guidance Factsheets (EO1 Biodiversity) and GES definitions. Its impacts should be integrated into existing indicators and methodologies, particularly in the establishment of baseline and threshold values.

105. Several members of the Scientific Committee underlined that the Mediterranean Sea was recognised as a climate change hotspot, where rapid warming and altered circulation patterns may have major ecological consequences. Particular attention was drawn to climate-driven changes occurring at lower trophic levels, notably affecting krill and other key prey species. Observed and projected variations in krill availability, distribution and seasonal aggregation may have significant implications for large baleen whales, including the fin whale (*Balaenoptera physalus*), a species strongly dependent on such prey resources. Reduced or spatially displaced krill biomass may negatively affect foraging efficiency, energetic balance and habitat use.

106. In this context, the Scientific Committee referred to a recent study by D'Amen et al. (2025), which assessed current and future habitat suitability for several cetacean species in the Mediterranean under different climate change scenarios (DOI: https://doi.org/10.1111/acv.13002). This study indicates a potential reduction in suitable habitat for fin whales and bottlenose dolphins, suggesting that climate-driven environmental changes may force some populations beyond significant portions of their current range, therefore increasing vulnerability and management challenges. The Scientific Committee noted the relevance of such modelling approaches for anticipating future distribution patterns and informing long-term conservation planning.

107. With regard to the Black Sea, participants recalled that the basin is experiencing the adverse effects of climate change primarily through increased aridification and a decrease in freshwater inflow from river basins. The Sea of Azov and the northern Black Sea are particularly vulnerable habitats, with populations, such as the Azov population of harbour porpoises, at risk.

Conclusion 34.
The Scientific Committee recognised climate change as an increasingly significant pressure affecting cetaceans in both the Mediterranean and the Black Seas and recommended the Secretariat to strengthen collaboration with the newly established Climate Change Regional Activity Centre (CC/RAC) of the UNEP/MAP-Barcelona Convention, as well as the CMS and GFCM, on issues relating to climate change.

Conclusion 35.
The Scientific Committee recommended collecting information relating to bio-invasion as an issue related to climate change.

108. OceanCare offered to develop a Concept Note for developing the study "Assess the carbon footprint of bottom trawl fisheries in the Mediterranean Sea in terms of their contribution to climate change, including both direct and indirect greenhouse gas emissions" to be shared with the Chair of the Scientific Committee and the Secretariat. The study will most likely be of interest to GFCM and UNEP/MAP (including the newly established CC/RAC) and shall be looked in within this wider collaboration between the three international organizations.

Conclusion 36.
The Scientific Committee welcomed the offer by OceanCare.

5.3.7 Captivity related issues

109. The Executive Secretary referred to the relevant section in document ACCOBAMS-SC17/2026/**Doc07** and reported that, during the last triennium, an Advisory Committee on Semi-enclosed Facilities (AACSF) had been established under the Scientific Committee and was led by Joan Gonzalvo. This AACSF produced two significant documents: the Cetacean Genetic Passport and the Guidelines for best practices during the installation and management of semi-enclosed facilities for cetacean species in the ACCOBAMS area, which were adopted by MOP9 (Resolution 9.19). The aim of these documents is to improve understanding of, and management of, cetacean species within semi-enclosed environments in the ACCOBAMS area.

110. Joan Gonzalvo referred to document ACCOBAMS-SC17/2026/**Inf10**, presented in Annex IX and entitled "Letter of concern from the ACCOBAMS Advisory Committee on semi-enclosed facilities regarding two Dolphin Refuges/Sanctuaries in Italy and Greece". He brought to the attention of the meeting that the San Paolo Dolphin Refuge (Jonian Dolphin Conservation, Gulf of Taranto, Italy) and the Aegean Marine Life Sanctuary (Archipelagos Institute of Marine Conservation, Lipsi Island, Greece) have raised concerns due to their apparent failure to comply with the semi-captivity guidelines.

111. The Scientific Committee members noted their concern on this issue. In particular, they noted that these two initiatives appeared to have been progressing outside of the current established ACCOBAMS processes on this topic. They noted that ACCOBAMS has had a long-standing process on this issue, with a dedicated Advisory Committee. It was also pointed out that this is a highly delicate issue, as it pertains not only to the health and welfare of the animals being kept in these facilities, but also poses potential serious risk to wild populations.

112. Representatives of the organisations involved provided updates on their respective dolphin refuge initiatives. The representative of Archipelagos indicated that the project is broadly aligned with ACCOBAMS requirements and that technical information, while not publicly available, can be shared with the Scientific Committee; she described the exchanges as ongoing and constructive. The representative of the San Paolo Dolphin Refuge informed that the project is conducted in close collaboration with relevant Italian authorities, and that part of

the required formal authorizations have already been granted. She emphasized that no cetaceans will be hosted in the facility before obtaining all the required authorizations. The representative of the San Paolo Dolphin Refuge highlighted the specific regulatory and institutional context in Italy, characterised by fragmented competencies and complex administrative procedures, underlining the need for clearer coordination among national authorities and relevant stakeholders to support the development of such initiatives within the existing legal framework.

113. Aurélie Moulins (CIMA Foundation) expressed concerns regarding the San Paolo Dolphin Refuge project in the Gulf of Taranto, particularly regarding issues of animal welfare, conservation coherence, and public messaging. It has been indicated that whale-watching activities will not be associated with the refuge; however, it is crucial that the project maintains a strict separation between the retirement facility and any tourism-oriented activities. In accordance with EU animal welfare principles and ACCOBAMS recommendations, such refuges must provide conditions that minimize stress, disturbance and repeated human exposure. Moulins emphasized that any direct or indirect link between the refuge and vessel-based activities, including initiatives like "Research for One Day" promoted by Jonian Dolphin Conservation—which is not certified under the ACCOBAMS High Quality Whale-Watching® standard or other relevant standards—should be carefully avoided to ensure alignment with welfare objectives and internationally recognized best practices for responsible cetacean observation. In response, the representative of the San Paolo Dolphin Refuge clarified that "Research for a Day" is a scientific and citizen science programme supervised by a committee coordinated by the University of Bari, not a whale-watching activity, and confirmed that once animals are hosted, public access will be prohibited and a strict separation between research activities and the refuge will be ensured.

114. The ACCOBAMS Advisory Committee on Semi-enclosed Facilities (AACSF), along with the participants of the Scientific Committee meeting, acknowledged the participation of the two organizations leading the establishment of dolphin refuges and sanctuaries in Italy and Greece—Ionian Dolphin Conservation and the Archipelagos Institute of Marine Conservation, respectively—at the SC17. They welcomed the organizations expressed willingness to maintain an open channel of collaboration and communication with ACCOBAMS.

115. As stated in the Letter of Concern, the AACSF considered that, at an appropriate time and once the relevant documentation from both organizations is available, an ad hoc workshop and on-site visit involving relevant national environmental and veterinary authorities, and international experts nominated by the ACSF, are strongly recommended to ensure that these facilities are fully aligned with the ACCOBAMS Guidelines, as well as with applicable national and international regulations.

116. The ACSF noted the significant responsibility borne by all parties involved in the establishment of these pioneering facilities and stressed the importance of ensuring that all actions are undertaken properly and with due consideration of all aspects of the ACCOBAMS Guidelines, as these first dolphin refuges are likely to set an important precedent and serve as a reference for future similar initiatives.

Conclusion 37.
The Scientific Committee recommended that the ACCOBAMS Secretariat, with the Scientific Committee and relevant working group, provide detailed information about the Guidelines on genetic passport and requirements for captivity and semi-captivity facilities with relevant scientific advice, primarily and especially those which have been adopted by MOP9, to Parties to facilitate their implementation at national level and, if needed, to provide their informal translation into national languages.

Conclusion 38.
The Scientific Committee:
- endorsed the recommendations of the ACCOBAMS Advisory Committee on Semi-enclosed Facilities (ACSF), relating the two initiatives establishing dolphin refuges/sanctuaries in Greece and Italy, as reflected in its Letter of Concern (**Annex IX**),
- recommended that the ACCOBAMS Secretariat, with the Scientific Committee and the ACSF, inform Parties about the results of the work, assessments and conclusions made by ACSF on the cases throughout the ACCOBAMS area and, if needed, to provide their informal translation into national languages, as well as to widely disseminate the available (aforementioned) updates of the state of the art in order to increase public awareness
- recommended maintaining close collaboration between the Scientific Committee and the Advisory Committee to ensure an adequate follow-up to the issue of the two refuge initiatives.

5.4 Area-based measures for cetacean conservation

117. The Chair, referring to the relevant section in document ACCOBAMS-SC17/2026/Doc**07** and to the actions required by Resolution 9.20, presented the main actions already completed or planned within this topic.

118. Concerning the action to "regularly update areas of Cetacean Cooccurrence & Human Activities (CCH) and Important Marine Mammal Areas (IMMAs)", the Chair emphasized the importance of utilizing area-based conservation to implement concrete conservation measures. An example provided was the North-Western Mediterranean PSSA, which is largely based on the North-Western Mediterranean Sea IMMA identified during the Regional Workshop organized by ACCOBAMS and the IUCN Species Survival Commission (SSC) and World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA) Marine Mammal Protected Areas task Force in October 2016. The IMMA concept offers biocentric information on why certain areas are vital for marine mammals, supported by a set of criteria and a peer-reviewed process. The CCH process combines pressures and non-pressures affecting these areas, suggesting specific locations for *ad-hoc* mitigation or conservation measures.

119. Discussions focused on graphically representing these pressures through maps that can assist policymakers and stakeholders in making informed decisions regarding mitigation measures. Significant effort was invested in ensuring the accuracy and precision of these maps, which could be displayed on NETCCOBAMS, which would allow for consideration of buffer zones and various coefficients of variation or confidence intervals within the pressures. This careful approach aims to avoid oversimplification, ensuring that areas are effectively utilized without creating complications.

120. Several priority actions for further development were identified: (i) Continuing to identify CCH while considering existing recommendations, mechanisms, and tools; (ii) Further exploring the mapping of uncertainty and integrating data on cetaceans and human activities with relevant experts; (iii) Encouraging the IUCN Joint SSC/WCPA Marine Mammal Protected Areas Task Force, in collaboration with the ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee, to reassess the Mediterranean region for identifying IMMAs based on ASI-II survey results; and (iv) Integrating national marine habitat mapping efforts and developing conservation measures for Natura 2000 sites within a broader regional framework for marine spatial planning.

121. Léa David expressed concerns about the challenges associated with mapping risk areas, noting that different methods will likely produce various maps addressing issues such as noise, whale watching, and bycatch. She suggested the need for coordination among all groups involved in map production, advocating for a comprehensive review of the different methodologies used. A SWOT analysis could be beneficial to evaluate

the strengths, weaknesses, and uncertainties of these methods, helping to clarify what tools and data are available for effective decision-making.

122. Supporting her points, Greg Donovan emphasized the importance of linking these efforts with NETCCOBAMS, where the maps will eventually be made available to the public. He noted that the NETTCCOBAMS Terms of Reference include discussions about uncertainties within the maps. Greg Donovan recommended that the leaders of the working groups take a closer look at the various issues and review the methodologies employed to address these uncertainties effectively.

123. The SPA/RAC Representative informed the meeting that SPA/RAC will contact the ACCOBAMS Secretariat and Scientific Committee to contribute to the evaluation of the Post-2020 Regional Strategy for Marine and Coastal Protected Areas (MCPAs) and Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures (OECMs) in the Mediterranean. A monitoring framework has been adopted for this purpose, which will be shared with Contracting Parties and key partners that could contribute. Additionally, information from NETCCOBAMS may be utilized to enhance this evaluation, which is scheduled for completion in 2026. The findings will be presented at the 17th Meeting of Focal Points for SPA/BD in May 2027 and subsequently at COP 25 at the end of 2027.

Conclusion 39.
The Scientific Committee recommended liaising between different groups working on risk assessment maps on noise, vessel strike, etc., to coordinate and harmonize mapping and approaches for risk evaluation.

Conclusion 40.
The Scientific Committee stressed the necessity to create special links with the NETCCOBAMS Working Group and Task Manager in order to improve data exchange through the platform.

5.5 Cetacean culture

124. The Chair reminded the participants that this topic is relatively new within the ACCOBAMS Work Programme. He presented the recommendations endorsed by the ECS-ACCOBAMS Workshop on Cetacean Culture: Navigating Change in the ACCOBAMS Region and Beyond, which took place during the 36th Conference of the ECS in Ponta Delgada, Azores, and online on 13 May 2025. The full report of the workshop is available at the following link: DOI: https://doi.org/10.70978/BVLQ1605.

125. Participants were informed that there is a Joint ASCOBANS-ACCOBAMS Working Group on Culture and Social Learning, which held its first meeting on 8 January 2026.

Conclusion 41.
The Scientific Committee endorsed the report from the First meeting of the ACCOBAMS/ASCOBANS Working Group on Cetacean Culture and Social Learning, including the Recommendations to ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee from the ECS-ACCOBAMS workshop “Cetacean Culture: Navigating Change in the ACCOBAMS Region and Beyond” that appear in **Annex X** to this report.

6. COLLABORATIONS

6.1 Sub Regional Coordination Units

(a) Sub-regional Coordinating Unit for the Mediterranean

126. The SPA/RAC Representative reported on the implementation of the joint work programme SPA/RAC-ACCOBAMS for 2025, which supported the Egyptian Environmental Affairs Agency in evaluating and updating the 2012 National Action Plan for the conservation of marine mammals along the Mediterranean coast of Egypt. In this context, a national consultative workshop was held in Port Said, Egypt, on 28 January 2026. During this workshop, a gap analysis on the implementation of the National Action Plan was presented, accompanied by key recommendations for its update.

127. As part of the Ecosystem Approach/IMAP process, SPA/RAC is closely collaborating with national institutions to aid in the implementation and updating of national IMAP monitoring programmes, which include cetacean monitoring across six countries: Egypt, Israel, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia. This effort is supported through the EU-funded SEMPA (Bolstering Mediterranean biodiversity and marine and Coastal Protected Areas for nature) and EcAp MED PLUS (Supporting the Southern Mediterranean Contracting Parties in implementing Ecosystem Approach to achieve GES) projects. Ongoing discussions between UNEP/MAP-SPA/RAC and the ACCOBAMS Secretariat aim to establish concrete collaboration and synergy in implementing the SEMPA project alongside ASI-II for cetacean monitoring efforts.

128. Regarding the review and update of common indicator factsheets related to Biodiversity (EO1) and Fisheries (EO3), the meeting agreed that the Scientific Committee and the ACCOBAMS Secretariat would support this update, which will be presented during the Biodiversity CORMON Meeting in June 2026.

129. On another note, SPA/RAC will initiate an assessment of the collective implementation of two important regional strategies: the Post-2020 Strategic Action Programme for the Conservation of Biodiversity and Sustainable Management of Natural Resources in the Mediterranean Region (Post-2020 SAPBIO), an action-oriented programme of the Barcelona Convention focusing on startup activities and monitoring tables for national and regional actions, and the Post-2020 Regional Strategy for Marine and Coastal Protected Areas (MCPAs) and Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures (OECMs) in the Mediterranean. This assessment will be conducted under a specific monitoring framework for each strategy, utilizing measurable indicators that align with the Kunming-Montreal GBF of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). This process will occur in close consultation with the Post-2020 SAPBIO Advisory Committee and the Ad Hoc Group of Experts for Marine Protected Areas in the Mediterranean (AGEM), with ACCOBAMS represented in both.

130. Furthermore, the Action Plan for the conservation of cetaceans in the Mediterranean Sea, last updated at COP 22, in Antalya, Türkiye, in December 2023, will be evaluated and updated in the upcoming biennium (2026–2027) in collaboration with the ACCOBAMS Secretariat and submitted for adoption at the forthcoming COP 25, scheduled for late-2027.

131. Lastly, SPA/RAC actively participated in the ASI-II side events organized throughout 2025 and is a member of its Steering Committee, expressing a commitment to support capacity-building efforts.

(b) Sub-regional Coordinating Unit for the Black Sea

132. The Representative of the Black Sea Commission reported that during the reported period, efforts continued in their capacity as the sub-regional coordinating unit for the Black Sea and member of the ASI-II Steering Committee. She mentioned that her organization attended and contributed to all relevant meetings, including the MOP9, ASI-II and other side events held during UNOC3 in Nice and the Barcelona Convention COP24 in Cairo.

133. She emphasized that the implementation of the Memorandum is progressing slowly, as they are still waiting for activities to be unblocked. She underscored the commitment to ensure that all outstanding issues on their agenda and work plan are integrated into the new GEF project being implemented in the Black Sea, known as the Black Sea Large Marine Ecosystem (LME) Project, which encompasses three countries: Georgia, Türkiye and Ukraine. The project, which inception meeting is scheduled for March 2026, focuses on MPAs, invasive species, and includes activities aligned with the implementation of the Black Sea Biodiversity and Landscape Conservation Protocol (CBD Protocol) to the Bucharest Convention, specifically addressing cetacean-related assessments.

134. Furthermore, she expressed optimism about contributions to the ASI-II, including potential financial support. Ongoing negotiations with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the implementing agency, are in place, and coordination with the ACCOBAMS Secretariat continues.

135. Regarding the post-war plan for Ukraine, she expressed gratitude for its adoption and thanked Pavel Gol'din for his efforts in advancing related documents. She noted that a meeting in Sofia, supported by the Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission - Helsinki Commission (HELCOM), facilitated discussions on munitions, as they have been addressing this issue for many years. Currently, they are involved in at least five different munitions-related projects, including the "Clearance Activities for Marine Munition through Efficient Remediation Approaches" (CAMMera) project, which examines the environmental impact of munitions. Last week, various representatives from the Black Sea region—including the navy, port authorities, and environmental ministries—gathered to discuss munitions from multiple perspectives. This collaboration has led to a solid list of contact points, allowing for more effective communication during calls with Pavel, the ACCOBAMS Secretariat and other stakeholders.

136. Looking ahead, she mentioned an upcoming large symposium in Bucharest, where she has agreed with the Vice Mayor of Bucharest University to discuss the introduction of a cetacean conservation module. She emphasized the need for more Black Sea universities to get involved, expressing hope that concrete proposals would emerge from these discussions.

137. Lastly, she brought attention to climate change, noting that the next United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) COP31 will be held in Türkiye, specifically in Antalya, in November 2026. Given their experience in organizing side events with various regional seas and organizations, Iryna Makarenko suggested the possibility of hosting an event focused on assessing the impact of climate change on cetaceans during this meeting. She assured that they would remain in touch with the Secretariat regarding this initiative.

6.2 ACCOBAMS Partners

138. The Chair invited ACCOBAMS Partners to present relevant activities in line with the ACCOBAMS objectives.

139. Alessandra Leanza, from Marecamp Association, conveyed that her organization has long operated in Sicilian waters, primarily in the Ionian Sea, and that this was their first in-person Scientific Committee meeting. She highlighted ongoing work in monitoring the presence and behaviour of cetaceans in the Gulf of Catania, alongside expanded field activities aimed at reducing interactions with professional fisheries. The goal is to lower dolphin bycatch and to test practical solutions such as acoustic alert systems to protect nets. She thanked the ACCOBAMS Secretariat and FAO-GFCM for their support, noting that their collaboration has enabled the successful completion of the third edition of the Depredation Project, with hopes to continue this work in the future. She emphasized the importance of national and international cooperation to advance the objectives of the ACCOBAMS agreements

140. Simone Niedermuller, WWF Mediterranean, outlined the organization's regional structure, noting a regional programme—the Mediterranean Marine Initiative—that coordinates strategy across two sub-regional offices (the Adriatic and North Africa) and five national offices. She emphasized that field-level stakeholder engagement lies at the core of WWF's approach, complemented by national and regional work, and expressed strong appreciation for the ACCOBAMS partnership. Looking ahead to the current triennium, she highlighted continued support for activities including ASI-II, with a focus on spatial management and threat reduction in key areas, citing the Hellenic Trench as an example. She also mentioned involvement in the Pelagos Initiative and Pelagos Consortium through WWF Italy. Further, she praised the collaboration with GFCM and recalled successful project experiences such as MedBycatch (noting cooperation with SPA/RAC) and expressed gratitude for these synergies and a desire to build on them.

141. Nicola Clemente, representing Jonian Dolphin Conservation, introduced his organization as a recently ACCOBAMS-accredited partner. Jonian Dolphin Conservation was founded in 2009 as a non-profit organization registered with the National Registry of Research Institutions. Their research concentrates on cetacean distribution in the Gulf of Taranto, including aspects of distribution, abundance, habitat use, population dynamics, photography, and bioacoustics. With more than 80 scientific publications, Jonian Dolphin Conservation actively participates in numerous national and international projects, particularly EU-funded, and maintains strong links with former Albanian and Montenegrin partners. Nicola expressed his pleasure at joining ACCOBAMS, and conveyed eagerness to learn from the network and to contribute to cetacean conservation, including efforts to protect dolphins and whales.

142. Nicolas Entrup, representing OceanCare, affirmed that the organization remains a committed partner and will intensify efforts to explore synergies and synchronize activities across multiple international bodies, including UNEP/MAP, ACCOBAMS, IMO and GFCM. He described this collaborative approach as central to OceanCare's work programme and highlighted close partnerships with organizations such as Tethys, Morigenos, Green Balkans, Alnitak and several others, expressing enthusiasm about advancing these collaborations in the years ahead.

143. Anastasia Miliou, representing Archipelagos, highlighted that Archipelagos' conservation work in Greek waters is expanding its monitoring at sea with four vessels and a multidisciplinary research team. The organization is collecting extensive data on cetaceans, monk seals and other protected species and habitats, and is committed to sharing information in real time. With field presence year-round, Archipelagos collaborates with fisheries and fishers to focus on interactions between humans and marine mammals. Beyond the various topics discussed,

Miliou stressed the importance of communicating field data from different parts of the region and expressed readiness to be more actively involved as a partner, contributing to the joint effort to conserve marine mammals and cetaceans.

144. Aurélie Moulins, representing the CIMA Foundation, reported that during the next Work Programme 2026–2028, CIMA will contribute through several major projects:
    - SeaSteMar (March 2024 – February 2027) is funded under the Interreg Italy-France Maritime Programme and led by the Regional Agency for Environmental Protection Ligure (ARPAL). It is dedicated to developing and strengthening strategies for managing navigation risks, particularly those associated with the presence of large cetaceans and sensitive species, as well as the unpredictable meteorological-marine phenomena and climate change in the cross- border area. Sustainable whale-watching (October 2025 – June 2027) is funded by the Italian Ministry of Environment and Energy Security. The project aims to strengthen the dissemination of the HQWW® Certificate within waters under Italian jurisdiction.
    - JASON (October 2025 – September 2028) is funded under the Interreg Italy-France Maritime Programme and led by the Ligurian Region. The JASON project aims to capitalize the results of previous projects in the fields of environmental protection and maritime-port security and analyze issues related to autonomous ships and maritime-port cybersecurity, taking 2050 as the reference time horizon.

145. Under this agenda item, a partner asked about the timing of Partner Reports, specifically whether the next report must be submitted to the Bureau before the MOP. The Executive Secretary confirmed that this is the case, referencing Resolution 9.9: ACCOBAMS Partners are required to report twice—first, within two months after the initial Scientific Committee meeting as part of a programme of collaboration, and second, prior to each MOP. Partners should report on the use of the ACCOBAMS logo and on the implementation of relevant activities.

146. The Scientific Committee took note of the activities implemented by ACCOBAMS Partners.

6.3 Other Organizations

147. The Chair of the Scientific Committee invited any other organizations to present relevant activities in line with the ACCOBAMS objectives.

148. Lorenza Babbini, Director of the Information and Communication Regional Activity Centre (INFO/RAC) of UNEP/MAP, reaffirmed the commitment to the memorandum of understanding between ACCOBAMS and INFO/RAC, stressing a strong focus on data integration, knowledge sharing, and support to regional decision-making. In line with the new IMAP cycle and following the approval of underwater noise indicators, INFO/RAC will develop new data standards and data dictionaries to be implemented in the IMAP information system, working closely with relevant MAP Components and ACCOBAMS to assist countries in data reporting. The organization will continue collaborating with the ACCOBAMS Secretariat and Scientific Committee to integrate NETCCOBAM datasets into the MAP knowledge management platform in accordance with UNEP/MAP data policy and IMAP requirements, reaffirming availability to participate in the NETCCOBAMs working group.

149. For the 2026–2027 biennium, INFO/RAC will focus on consolidating the UNEP/MAP Knowledge Management Platform (KMAP) operations and strengthening interoperability, with emphasis on data quality, usability, and uptake for regional assessments. Notably, the platform presented to the 16th ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee is now fully operational, containing over 16,000 elements and serving as the central access point to UNEP/MAP knowledge; KMAP already supports data management, analysis, and visualization through interactive maps, dashboards, and statistics, and is designed to interoperate with partner platforms such as NETCCOBAMs.

Through this collaboration, ACCOBAMS data will be capitalized, made accessible, and translated into clear evidence to support policy, monitoring and conservation efforts for citizens across the Mediterranean and Black Sea regions.

150. Maria Betti, Executive Secretary of the Pelagos Agreement, emphasized the importance of ongoing collaboration with ACCOBAMS for protecting marine mammal habitats. She highlighted High Quality Whale-Watching® as a flagship activity developed through close cooperation, now registered by ACCOBAMS and successfully implemented within the Pelagos sanctuary. Maria Betti stressed that numerous other issues require joint action to ensure the effective implementation of both agreements, a point reaffirmed at MOP10 of the Pelagos Agreement last November and echoed during this meeting. She expressed confidence that collaboration will continue to be productive and that the Pelagos scientific and management communities can work together with ACCOBAMS on shared priorities.

151. Greg Donovan, speaking on behalf of IWC, noted that the collaboration between IWC and ACCOBAMS has a long and fruitful history, with joint work on many items on the agenda. He expressed strong optimism that this cooperation will continue and highlighted the IWC Secretary's readiness to engage with the ACCOBAMS Executive Secretary to enhance collaborative efforts.

7. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

152. Léa David informed the meeting that members of the Fixed Line Transect Mediterranean Network, via the LIFE Conceptu Maris project (https://www.lifeconceptu.eu/en/project-documents/), reported results suggesting the possible presence of a new cetacean species in the Mediterranean: the pygmy sperm whale (*Kogia breviceps*). Among 393 environmental DNA (eDNA) samples, five collection events yielded DNA from this species (Valsecchi et al., 2026 : https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/mam.70028), and a recent sighting north of the Balearic Islands may corroborates its presence in the Mediterranean Sea. She recommended that ASI-II experts be alerted and trained to recognize this species at sea, as it could be easily misidentified as a bottlenose dolphin.

153. Scientific Committee members noted that the work of the Scientific Committee during its meeting has increasingly become less focused on presenting and discussing cetacean science and more on practical/logistical aspects, such as reviewing progress reports and planning future activities. While this is important and understandable to some degree, it also diminishes the depth of discussions surrounding the relevant information on the status of cetacean populations in the ACCOBAMS area, which is and should be the main basis of the work of the Scientific Committee.

Conclusion 42.
The Scientific Committee recommended that the Chair and Vice-Chair, together with Task Managers, deliberately source specific focused information on key topics (inter alia, new population abundance estimates, newly identified threats, etc.) from relevant experts, in line with the agenda, to be presented and discussed during Scientific Committee meetings.
The Scientific Committee also recognized the limited amount of time allocated to its meeting, and the increasing number of topics on the agenda, in response to the MOP adopted programme of work. Acknowledging budget limitations, the Scientific Committee invited the Secretariat and the Bureau, to consider extending one or both Scientific Committee meetings within the triennium by a full day or half a day.

8. DATE AND VENUE OF THE EIGHTEENTH MEETING OF THE SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE

Conclusion 43.
The Scientific Committee suggested that the Eighteenth Meeting of the ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee would be held between mid-October and mid-November 2027.

9. ADOPTION OF CONCLUSIONS

Conclusion 44.
The Scientific Committee adopted the conclusions as they appear in the report.

10. CLOSURE OF THE MEETING

154. After the customary exchange of courtesies, the Chair of the Scientific Committee closed the meeting at 6.15 p.m. on Thursday 5th February 2026.

ANNEXES

ANNEX I - LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

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ANNEX II - AGENDA

1. OPENING OF THE MEETING

2. ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

3. FUNCTIONING OF THE SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE

- **3.1** Election of the Chair of the Scientific Committee 2026/2028
- **3.2** Election of the Vice-Chair of the Scientific Committee 2026/2028
- **3.3** Designation of Task Managers of the Scientific Committee 2026/2028
- **3.4** Update on the internal Scientific Committee Handbook

4. INSTITUTIONAL ISSUES

- **4.1** Implementation of, and compliance with, ACCOBAMS Resolutions, and progress monitoring
- **4.2** Update on ongoing projects
  - *4.2.1 ACCOBAMS Survey Initiative*
  - *4.2.2 Projects under the ACCOBAMS Supplementary Conservation Funds*
  - *4.2.3 Other regional projects (Pelagos Consortium, GFCM…)*
- **4.3** NETCCOBAMS

5. CONSERVATION ACTIONS

- **5.1** Reporting by Scientific Committee Experts from Regions
- **5.2** Knowledge about state of cetaceans
  - *5.2.1 Cetacean population estimates and distribution*
  - *5.2.2 Population Structure*
  - *5.2.3 Monitoring cetacean's status (including CMPs and Black Sea post war plan)*
  - *5.2.4. Functional stranding networks and responses to emergency situations*
- **5.3** Human pressures on cetaceans
  - *5.3.1 Interaction with fisheries / aquaculture*
  - *5.3.2 Anthropogenic underwater noise*
  - *5.3.3 Vessel strikes*
  - *5.3.4 Cetacean watching*
  - *5.3.5 Marine litter & chemical and biological pollution*
  - *5.3.6 Climate change*
  - *5.3.7 Captivity related issues*
- **5.4** Area-based measures for cetacean conservation
- **5.5** Cetacean culture

6. COLLABORATION

- **6.1** Sub Regional Coordination Units
- **6.2** ACCOBAMS Partners
- **6.3** Other Organizations

7. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

8. DATE AND VENUE OF THE EIGHTEENTH MEETING OF THE SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE

9. ADOPTION OF THE CONCLUSIONS

10. CLOSURE OF THE MEETING

ANNEX III - TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR THE ELECTION OF THE CHAIR AND VICE-CHAIR OF THE SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE

Background

During MOP9, Parties adopted Resolution 9.4 which amended the Rules of Procedure of the ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee (SC).

The amendments agreed by MOP9 aim at ensuring a wider participation of ACCOBAMS Parties in the Scientific Committee, as a subsidiary key body to the ACCOBAMS work. The enhancement of its institutional role was envisaged, as well as its alignment with fundamental principles and universal values - transparency, geographic and gender representation, cooperation, inclusion – while mindful of the necessary balance between contrasting factors like the quality of the scientific and technical advice *vs*. the comprehension of institutional work, and the preservation of the institutional memory of the organisation *vs.* the need for generational change.

Based on these objectives, the MOP9 changed the rules on the composition of the SC, the designation of their members and the election procedures, as follows:

a) up to 3 experts from each region as defined in the Appendix of the ROP of the SC.
b) the MOP designates all the members of the Scientific Committee, although some of them still continue to be proposed by CIESM, IUCN, CMS, IWC & ECS.
c) The Chairperson and the Vice-Chairperson of the SC shall be elected by and among the members of the Scientific Committee appointed under paragraph 1 of this Article at the first Meeting of the triennium.
d) The Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson of the SC shall not be experts nominated by the same organisation. Gender, geographical balance, and alternation in all roles of the SC should be considered.
e) Starting from 2026, all leading roles (Chairperson, Vice-Chairperson and Task Managers) shall have a maximum of two consecutive terms.
f) Members of the SC shall exercise their functions in their personal capacity and shall not represent any ACCOBAMS Party, group of ACCOBAMS Parties or organisation. This applies to all members, including any expert that a Party designates on a voluntary basis.

The role and responsibilities of the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Scientific Committee are summarised in Appendix 1 to these Terms of Reference.

Election procedure

Pursuant to Resolution 9.4, the Scientific Committee needs to appoint, at its first Meeting of the triennium, a Chair and a Vice-Chair among the experts designated as members to the Scientific Committee by CIESM, IUCN, CMS, IWC and ECS and experts from regions.

1. At the first SC Meeting of each triennium, a list of all experts designated as members of the Scientific Committee is provided in Appendix 2 to these Terms of Reference.
2. The ACCOBAMS Executive Secretary, together with another staff member of the ACCOBAMS Secretariat, will facilitate the election procedure of the Chair and Vice-Chair.
3. At the beginning of the election procedure, SC members will be invited to inform the meeting in case they do not wish to be considered as candidates to serve as Chair or/and as Vice-Chair.
4. Then the Secretariat provides to each SC member present in the room a secret ballot containing the list of experts who may be considered to serve as Chair of the Scientific Committee, and requests each SC member to circle the name of the expert they wish to elect for this position.
5. In case there are SC members who cannot attend in person and are participating online, they may delegate

their vote to another SC member present in the room and should inform the Secretariat in writing of that decision, well in advance of the meeting. In such case, the SC member with the delegated vote will be given a supplementary secret ballot.

6. Once the voting procedure is concluded and after collecting all secret ballots in the room, the Secretariat immediately counts the votes, in the presence of all SC Members, and announces the results of the voting procedure.
7. Once the voting procedure for the election of the SC Chair is successfully concluded, a second voting procedure is carried out to elect the SC Vice-chair, taking into account that the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Scientific Committee shall not be experts nominated by the same Organization, and that gender and geographical balance, as well as alternation in all roles of the Scientific Committee, is to be considered.
8. Each member of the Scientific Committee will be given one vote for the SC Chair and one vote for the SC Vice-Chair.
9. In case any voting procedure fails to obtain a majority in the first ballot, a second ballot on the two most voted candidates shall be taken, until the voting procedure is concluded.

Appendix 1 - Summary of the role and responsibilities of the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Scientific Committee

Coordination and representation of the SC

The Chair and Vice-Chair**:**

1. in addition to their role as members of the Scientific Committee, will coordinate the work of the Scientific Committee concerning the topics that have been assigned to them by the Scientific Committee.
2. shall submit to each ordinary Meeting of the Parties and to each meeting of the Bureau a written report on the Scientific Committee's work since the previous ordinary Meeting of the Parties.
3. together with other members of the Scientific Committee, the Secretariat and the Bureau, the Sub-Regional Coordinating Units, ACCOBAMS Partners and international and national non-governmental Organizations, will contribute to promote and facilitate the implementation of the ACCOBAMS Work Program, bearing in mind the Resolutions adopted by the Meeting of the Parties.
4. may be requested to attend meetings on behalf of the ACCOBAMS Secretariat, in relation to their field of expertise.

Collaboration

The SC Chair and SC Vice-Chair:

1. together with other Scientific Committee members, will further contribute to promote cooperation with scientific Institutions in the ACCOBAMS area.
2. will conduct their work in close collaboration with the Secretariat, the Bureau and, when actions are interconnected, with relevant ACCOBAMS working groups, as appropriate.
3. will mainly work through exchange of email.

Scientific Committee Meetings

1. The Chair and Vice-Chair elected for the previous 3-years period will assist the Secretariat in the preparation of the first Meeting of the Scientific Committee of the following 3-years period.
2. During the Scientific Committee meeting, the Chair and Vice-Chair will assist the Secretariat by providing conclusions on each agenda item, which will be reflected in the Meeting report.
3. The Chair shall preside over the meetings of the Scientific Committee, support the Secretariat in the preparation of the provisional agenda, and liaise with SC members between meetings of the Committee. The Chair may represent the Committee as required and carry out other any other functions delegated to him/her by the Committee, within the limits of the SC scope of work.
4. The Vice-Chair shall assist the Chair. In the absence or incapability of the Chair, the Vice-Chair will preside over the Scientific Committee meetings and exercise the powers and duties prescribed for the Chair.

Assistance on the composition of the Scientific Committee

1. The Chair and Vice-Chair will assist the Extended Bureau in the selection of Scientific Committee members by providing an evaluation of the background and *Curricula* of the candidates, which will also be submitted to the Meeting of the Parties.

Consultative role & consultation procedure

1. In application of Article II, paragraph 2, of the Agreement, when a Party asks for advice on exceptions to the prohibition on deliberate taking of cetaceans, the Secretariat shall immediately consult the Chair and other

Scientific Committee members to get their advice on such request.

2. Within 30 days, the Chair takes a decision on the request, also considering the advice received from the other Scientific Committee members, and conveys such decision to the Secretariat for immediate communication to the requesting Party.
3. Between sessions, any member of the Scientific Committee or the Sub-Regional Coordination Units, through the Secretariat, or the Secretariat directly, may submit a written proposal to the Chair for a decision within the limits of the functions of the Scientific Committee.
4. The Chair shall forward the proposal to the Scientific Committee members. Their comments shall be submitted within 30 days from the date of that communication to all members of the Scientific Committee and to the Secretariat.
5. When, in the opinion of the Scientific Committee, an emergency arises, requiring the adoption of immediate measures to avoid deterioration of the conservation status of one or more cetacean species, the Chair may ask the Secretariat to urgently contact the relevant Parties.

Appendix 2 – List of all experts designated as Members to the Scientific Committee

Members nominated by CIESM	**Loriane MENDEZ** Mediterranean Science Commission Research Assistant 16 boulevard de Suisse 98000 Monaco Tel: +33629414208 lmendez@ciesm.org
	Ayaka Amaha OZTÜRK Turkish Marine Research Foundation Advisor Fistikli Yali Sok. N°34/5 Beykoz, 81650 Istanbul – TURKEY Tel: +90 216 3239050 ayakamaha@hotmail.co.jp
	Simone PANIGADA Tethys Research Institute Viale G.B. Gadio 2 20 121 Milan – Italy Tel: (+39) 02 7200 1947 – (+39) 02 6694 114 panigada69@gmail.com
Members nominated by IUCN	**Rimel BENMESSAOUD** Assistante d'enseignement Supérieur- Département de Génie Halieutique et environnement Institut National Agronomique de Tunisie (INAT) 43 Avenue Charles Nicolles, Tunis, 1082 Tunisie Tel : +216 29 08 36 31 benmessaoud_rimel@yahoo.fr
	Léa DAVID EcoOcéan Institut Dr écologie marine cétologie/ornithologie 18 Rue des Hospices - 34090 Montpellier FRANCE Tel : +33 4 67 84 28 87 - Mob : +33 6 09 49 68 39 lea.david2@wanadoo.fr
	Maria Cristina FOSSI Dipartimento di Scienze Fisiche, della Terra e dell'Ambiente Università di Siena Via P.A. Mattioli, 4 53100 Siena - Italy fossi@unisi.it
Representative for CMS	**Mark Peter SIMMONDS** CoP-Appointed Councillor C/o OceanCare Gerbestrasse 6 CH-8820 Waedenswil – Switzerland Tel: +44 7809 6430 00 mark.simmonds@sciencegyre.co.uk

Representative for ECS	**Tilen GENOV** Chair Place du Vingt-Août 7 4000 Liège, Belgium Tel: +38631771077 tilen.genov@gmail.com
Representative for IWC	**Greg DONOVAN** Beannacht, 4 High Street Haddenham, Cambs CB63XA, UK Tel: +44 759 326 0638 corkblue1o@gmail.com

EXPERTS FROM REGIONS	
Region	**Member**
Western region & contiguous Atlantic area	**Souad LAMOUTI** Chercheuse CNRDPA 11 boulevard Colonel Amirouche, Bou-Ismail w. de Tipaza – Algérie Tel: +213-24-32-64-10 souad.lamouti@gmail.com
	Vincent RIDOUX Professor Emeritus at *La Rochelle Université* 4 rue Jean-Pierre Pigot, Bellecroix, 17139 Dompierre sur Mer, France Tel: + 33 (0) 5 46 50 76 69 Cell phone +33 (0) 6 84 46 89 77 vridoux@univ-lr.fr
Central region	**Martina DURAS** Full Professor Department of Anatomy, Histology, Embryology Faculty of Veterinary Medicine University of Zagreb Ulica Dragutina Albrechta 4 Zagreb, 10000, Croatia martina.duras@vef.unizg.hr martina.duras4@gmail.com
	Giancarlo LAURIANO Senior Researcher Italian National Institute for Environmental Protection and Research (ISPRA) via Vitaliano Brancati 60 00144 Rome, Italy giancarlo.lauriano@isprambiente.it

Eastern region	**Anastasia KOMNENOU** University Hospital, Department of Clinical Sciences, School of Veterinary Medicine, Faculty of Health Sciences, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, AUTH, 11 St. Voutyra str, 54627, Thessaloniki Greece Tel: +30 2310 994443 -mob. +30 6945 531850 natakomn@vet.auth.gr natakomn@gmail.com
	Céline MAHFOUZ National Centre for Marine Sciences 189 Jounieh / Jounieh - Lebanon Tel: +961 349 6680 celine.mahfouz@gmail.com celine.mahfouz@cnrs.edu.lb
Black Sea region	**Pavel GOL'DIN** Schmalhausen Institute of Zoology National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine & Ukrainian Center of Ecology of the Sea vul. Bogdana Khmelnytskogo 15 01030, Kyiv - Ukraine Tel: +380673900118 pavelgoldin412@gmail.com
	Natia KOPALIANI Head Program for the Ecology and Conservation of Large Mammals Ilia State University 3/5 Cholokashvili Ave. Tbilisi, 0162. Georgia Tel. (+995 99) 55 29 94 natia_kopaliani@iliauni.edu.ge

ANNEX IV - TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR THE NETCCOBAMS EXPERT WORKING GROUP AND ITS TASK MANAGER WORK

NETCCOBAMS is a major asset to ACCOBAMS that has been evolving consistently over the years. In accordance with Resolution 9.8, the Scientific Committee **agrees** the following updated Terms of Reference for the Expert Working Group (originally from Resolution 8.7) and appoints a Task Manager to lead this work.

The main Objectives of the Expert Working Group are to:

(1) develop general guidelines on how NETCCOBAMS can most effectively be used for each user type (to be defined but include the general public, scientists, industry, ACCOBAMS and partners, government departments);
(2) review maps, data and information in light of platform analytical options;
(3) identify, by user type, access to new maps, data and information;
(4) assist the NETCCOBAMS developers on analytical and presentational matters; and
(5) assist the Secretariat to publicise the platform to maximise its use in assisting cetacean conservation.

In particular, the Expert Working Group will advise on and oversee (in association, as appropriate, with other scientific working groups including those related to distribution and abundance, noise, vessel strikes, CCH and habitat identification):

(1) the selection and incorporation of appropriate validated data and information, including conditions of uploading and use by different user types;
(2) the analytical tools to be used by dataset, reviewing and updating these where necessary taking into account new developments in techniques, data sources and legislation and documenting strengths and weaknesses of the tools;
(3) appropriate visualisation approaches by topic, use and uncertainty measures, providing associated advice to Parties and other relevant subjects on the interpretation of the outputs; and
(4) the future development of the NETCCOBAMS online platform *inter alia*, taking into account:
    a. data on additional environmental stressors and new distribution and abundance data (e.g. ASI-II)
    b. facilitated data entry, validation and extraction (e.g. by time periods, geographical area and combined stressors and/or cetacean information;
    c. ease of use;
    d. conservation needs expressed by user types, especially Parties and the Scientific Committee;
    e. linkage and collaboration with other platforms in use (e.g., INFO/RAC KMaP), including considering them as possible sources of data/maps at the regional or subregional level (e.g., species distribution, traffic, noise, marine litter, etc.).

Modus operandi

The work will be led by the Task Manager who will regularly inform the Secretariat, Chair and Vice-Chair on progress. As deemed necessary the Working Group will meet virtually or in person to address topics identified above (if funds are required this will be at the discretion of the Secretariat). The Task Leader and others may also meet with the developers to discuss specific issues.

Members: to be decided but to include chairs of other relevant working groups.

ANNEX V - TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR THE WORKING GROUP ON NATIONAL REPORTS AND REGIONAL SYNTHESIS STANDARDIZED TEMPLATES

Chair: Vincent Ridoux

Members: Souad LAMOUTI, Martina DURAS, Lobna BEN NAKHLA, Celine MAHFOUZ, Giancarlo LAURIANO, Pavel GOL'DIN, Natia KOPALIANI, Simone Panigada, Anastasia KOMNENOU, Maÿlis SALIVAS

1- To clarify the target and role of the documents in question: National Report, Regional Synthesis, Review of cetacean basin-wide conservation status. Deadline: by early May

2- To advise on the possibility to update and simplify the National Report template according to (1), paying attention to existing discrepancies about how it is currently being filled in by the different Member States (perhaps envision an online workshop with NCPs – possibly relevant researchers as well - of the Agreement area to exchange on expectations and difficulties met in gathering the information and filling the template in):

3- To redefine the format of the regional syntheses according to (1) (sub-regional or country by country; with explicit information or restricted to the meta-data type of information collected in the National Reports; other aspects...); adapt the expectation and timing specifically for the first and the second SC meeting within a triennium.

4- To elaborate from scratch how to proceed with this document according to (1).

ANNEX VI - WORK PROGRAMME 2026–2028 WITH PRIORITIES IDENTIFIED BY PARTIES AT MOP9

MANAGEMENT OF THE AGREEMENT (MA)	
MA3	**Implementation of and Compliance with ACCOBAMS**
MA3a	**Improve the level of implementation of and compliance with ACCOBAMS Resolutions as well as the monitoring of its progress**

Expected outcomes	

Proposed Action(s)	**Means of implementation**	**Action requested in MOP9 Resolution(s)**	**Objectives to be achieved before SC18**
Propose remedy actions in cases of non-follow-up with ACCOBAMS Resolutions and infringements	• Convening a Follow up Committee meeting (*online*) • Applying Follow up Procedures	**Resolution 9.6.A** (Follow-up submission by OceanCare on the failure by Spain to update the conservation status of the sperm whale (Physeter macrocephalus) and the fin whale (Balaenoptera physalus) in the mediterranean from the current category of 'vulnerable' to 'endangered' according to the IUCN red list status of cetacean species and the ACCOBAMS resolution 8.12) • *Entrusts* the ACCOBAMS Secretariat with the task of asking all the ACCOBAMS Parties to provide information about the procedure being followed for modifying the conservation status of cetacean species under national legislation and about the existence of a time-schedule for completing the procedure and to circulate such information to the Meeting of the Parties and to the Follow-up Committee; • *Invites* the Scientific Committee to consider this information in the relevant ACCOBAMS/IWC Conservation Management Plans; **Resolution 9.6.B** (Follow up of submission by OceanCare on the failure by some ACCOBAMS members to implement the ACCOBAMS conservation plan for Mediterranean common dolphins)	- Review the draft review to be produced by OceanCare on the information provided by several Range States under the procedure of the Follow-up Committee, in the context of the implementation of specific measures taken for the implementation of the Conservation Plan for Short-beaked Common Dolphins in the Mediterranean Sea. The Scientific Committee will review the draft, including the original information from the States, for consideration to develop specific recommendations, including within the new conservation management plan (CMP) for this species.

MA1	**Involvement of key stakeholders**
MA1a	**Strengthen involvement of all key stakeholders in ACCOBAMS's operations**

Expected outcomes	

Proposed Action(s)	**Means of implementation**	**Action requested in MOP9 Resolution(s)**	**Objectives to be achieved before SC18**
Enforce communication within the ACCOBAMS community and strengthen exchanges of information on national and regional projects / activities / initiatives	Using NETCCOBAMS platform as sharing/consultation tool - Exchange of information on national reports and regional projects / activities / initiatives	**Resolution 9.8** • *Requests* the Scientific Committee to review and update the Terms of Reference of the expert Working Group on NETCCOBAMS; • *Asks* the NETCCOBAMS Working Group to: - Develop Guidelines on NETCCOBAMS use, including specifications on access to maps, data and information, according to different types of users, in order to guarantee the safe use of sensitive data; - Organise dedicated meetings (Terms of Reference to be prepared), as appropriate, to review maps, data and information present on the platform, and to agree on the best use of the platform's options; - Periodically meet, as appropriate, in order to determine which type of users can access the new material added into the platform (maps, data, and information); • *Asks* the Secretariat to disseminate information on the value of the NETCCOBAMS online platform, including its contribution to achieved mitigation measures, among national and international fora, managers and stakeholders (such as the International Maritime Organisation, port authorities, shipping companies), to increase the visibility of the work done and encourage the use of NETCCOBAMS and the submission of data on this platform.	- Establish a Working Group and a Task Manager to increase the value of NETCCOBAMS for the Scientific Committee's work and all relevant actors.

CONSERVATION ACTIONS (CA)

CA 1 a	Cetacean population estimates and distribution	Person in charge identified by SC17: Giancarlo Lauriano (Task Manager)

Expected outcomes	Improved knowledge of cetacean populations in the ACCOBAMS Area Global distribution and abundance of cetaceans in the Mediterranean Sea and Black Seas established, based on results of surveys

Proposed Action(s)	Means of implementation	Action requested in MOP9 Resolution(s)	Objectives to be achieved before SC18
Promote the implementation of the Long-Term Monitoring Programme, taking into consideration monitoring and reporting obligations of countries (MSFD, Barcelona Convention, Bucharest Convention)	• Secure funds for implementing ASI2, including investigating the existence of possible funding at national / regional levels • Continue with the development and implementation of a simulation framework to examine the performance of different future survey strategies (synoptic, regional/national) - contract • Undertake synoptic basin-wide surveys in the ACCOBAMS Area with a focus on abundance and trends in 2026/2027 (ASI-II) with the support of the ASI Steering Committee, the LTMP Contact Group (Res 8.10) and of the SC to review and update as necessary the field and analytical protocols • Promote synchronisation and standardisation of existing monitoring efforts to contribute to LTMP purpose (coordination meetings at the sub-regional level, Working Group on cetaceans monitoring…) • Collaborate with relevant organisations, such as the UNEP/MAP Barcelona Convention System (EcAp/IMAP, QSR), the Bucharest Convention and the European Commission (MSFD) • Utilise advanced statistical methods and machine learning techniques to integrate and analyse data from various sources, ensuring robust and accurate abundance estimates and distribution models.	**Resolution 9.11** • *Mandates* the Executive Secretary, in collaboration with the Chair of the Scientific Committee and the support of the Bureau, to urgently contact the Parties to: - reiterate in a practical manner their commitment to Resolution 8.10; - secure the necessary financial contributions, or at least formal commitments, to allow the necessary planning time for a summer 2026 survey; • *Mandates* the Executive Secretary, in collaboration with the Chair of the Scientific Committee and the support of the Bureau, to further approach potential donors to consider contributing to the implementation of ASI-II; • *Requests* the Secretariat, in collaboration with the Scientific Committee, to review the relevant 2017 Integrated Monitoring and	- Dedicate a Task Manager to Cetacean population estimates and distribution - Contribute to the process being launched by SPA/RAC to update the Guidance Factsheets of Common Indicators for Ecological Objectives EO1 on Biodiversity. With the support of the ACCOBAMS Secretariat, the Scientific Committee will: - develop a methodological note and workplan detailing the proposed approach and timeline for the update process. - conduct a critical analysis of the 2017 IMAP Common Indicators 3, 4 and 5 factsheets related to the Mediterranean monk seal, and prepare a diagnostic report summarizing the findings, methodological gaps and recommendations for improvement. - produce a draft updated version of the IMAP Common Indicators 3, 4 and 5 factsheets related to cetaceans.
Promote the use of ASI-I data by increasing the visibility of ASI-II (and future) datasets and related results and encourage further analyses	• Implement a centralised data repository to facilitate data sharing and collaboration among different organisations and stakeholders. • Use the NETCCOBAMS Activity on “ACCOBAMS Survey Initiative” to handle the sharing of ASI Data		

	• Promote ASI-II data and results in relevant fora • Share ASI-II data following received requests in accordance with ASI Terms of use and archiving/monitoring of the requests • Collect outputs of work and analysis conducted following ASI-I & II full dataset requests to be used by the SC to give best scientific advice • Submit ASI-II results to the IWC SC	Assessment Programme (IMAP) factsheets and to present their updates to the Biodiversity CORMON (Ecosystem Approach Correspondence Group on Monitoring) meeting in June 2026.	
Promote data collection at sub-regional and national levels (in coherence with ACCOBAMS survey methodologies)	• Continue facilitating exchanges and coordination between Parties on sub-regional surveys • Continue organising training activities on monitoring methods/protocols and data analysis for smaller-scale surveys (at local, national and sub-regional levels) • Update handbooks on standardised monitoring methods (aerial surveys, boat-based surveys, acoustic surveys…) • Collaborating with relevant organisations, such as UNEP/MAP Barcelona Convention System (EcAp/IMAP, QSR), the Bucharest Convention and the European Commission (MSFD)		
Promote data collection from multidisciplinary surveys (such as fisheries / acoustic surveys), innovative technologies (UAV, satellite) and of platforms of opportunity (ferries, whale watching vessels, navy vessels, etc..)	• Review results from activities in pilot areas to collect data using multidisciplinary surveys (such as fisheries/acoustic surveys), innovative technologies (UAV, satellite) and platforms of opportunity (ferries, whale watching vessels, navy vessels, etc..) based on recommendations of previous studies • Review collaboration with existing regional fisheries surveys (MEDITS, MEDIAS) and relevant organisations such as GFCM and ICCAT • Review collaborations with relevant existing initiatives/projects/networks on platforms of opportunity • Organise meetings/workshops to discuss possible synergies and shared methodology and data analysis – ToR • Develop, update and standardise protocols for multidisciplinary surveys • Review & Update the "Guidelines for the Monitoring of the Range of Cetaceans, Abundance and Demographic Characteristics of Populations" in synergy with IMAP • Regularly review « Best Available Technologies » and assess potential contribution to LTMP		

CA 1 b	Population Structure	Person in charge identified by SC17: Pavel GOL'DIN & Pauline GAUFFIER (Working group's chairs)

Expected outcomes	Improved knowledge on population structure in the ACCOBAMS Area and species conservation management plans completed Exchange of samples is facilitated for joint analysis Data exchange is facilitated for basin wide analysis

Proposed Action(s)	Means of implementation	Action requested in MOP9 Resolution(s)	Objectives to be achieved before SC18
Improve photo ID data collection and dissemination: - Update and harmonise protocols on data collection for photo ID - Share photo ID data	• Organise experts meeting for best practices guide on how to collect data for comparison – ToR • Organise regional experts' trainings on analysis on photo ID (including drone photo ID), including AI (Artificial Intelligence)– ToR • Facilitate data sharing and the creation of large-scale photo-id catalogues for in-depth analysis (see CMP actions)– ToR	**Resolution 9.12** • *Encourages* Parties to: - collect updated information regarding research results on population genetics and to include it in their National Report; - register their scientific institutions following the provisions of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) and/or the Nagoya Protocol on Access to Genetic Resources and the Fair and Equitable Sharing of Benefits Arising from their Utilization to the Convention on Biological Diversity (Nagoya protocol) to facilitate scientific exchange of specimens needed to conduct taxonomic and species-conservation research, and to conduct wildlife forensic research; • *Urges* Parties to contact scientists and scientific institutions in the territory under their jurisdiction to facilitate greater understanding of the scientific exchange provisions of Article VII, paragraph 6, of the CITES and /or the requirements of the Nagoya Protocol on the non-commercial loan, donation or exchange of scientific specimens; • *Calls upon* Partners to conduct sample collection and research on population genetics, to apply the ACCOBAMS Best Practices on Cetacean Population Genetics in their work and to regularly provide the Secretariat with relevant information to update the online cetacean sample database, as well as the list of suitable genetics laboratories and new scientific publications;	- Dedicate a working group to population structure
Improve data collection on cetacean populations genetic in the ACCOBAMS Area Development of genetical identification of population structure (particularly for Mediterranean), including e.g., eDNA	• Promote the ACCOBAMS Best practices on data collection on cetacean populations genetic • Facilitate analysis of existing tissue samples (including those from biopsies) to address questions on stock structure and genetic diversity • Harmonise procedures for samples exchanges among CITES scientific and forensic institutions in the ACCOBAMS area • Collaborate with relevant organisations (CITES, ABS Nagoya Protocol…) • Promote the use of new technics such as genomics and proteomics		
Other ecological markers	• Organise a workshop on the incorporation of ecological markers in the definition of population structure (Ecological Management Units) for cetaceans in the framework of international scientific events or meetings, in collaboration with ICES, IWC – ToR • Promote studies of age structure and population demography		

CA 1 c	Monitoring cetaceans' status	Person in charge identified by SC17: TM Simone Panigada, Pavel GOL'DIN + CMP leader

Expected outcomes	Regional conservation plans (Med and BS) for cetacean are promoted at the national level Relevant conservation management plans are developed and implemented National Action Plans are developed and implemented in several Countries

Proposed Action(s)	Means of implementation	Action requested in MOP9 Resolution(s)	Objectives to be achieved before SC18
Support in implementing Regional Conservation Plans for cetaceans (in Black Sea and in Mediterranean Sea)	• Support the BSC in the revision of the Regional Conservation Plan for cetacean in Black Sea, taking into consideration the IWC/ACCOBAMS Conservation Management Plan framework • Support the SPA/RAC in the implementation, assessment and update of the Mediterranean Action Plan for Cetaceans adopted by Parties to the Barcelona Convention	**Resolution 9.10** *Invites* Black Sea Parties and experts to consider, *inter alia*, the areas, topics, activities and measures listed in the Annex to this Resolution during the work on the Conservation Management Plan for the Black Sea cetaceans and the Post-war Plan for the Black Sea;	- Establish an ad-hoc group to finalize the specific agenda for the CMP development workshop, including: - Identify key stakeholders needed, based upon identified priority threats. - Select a suitable venue -Prepare background documentation and introductory presentations for each item. - Coordinate with National Focal Points to invite voluntary contributions in support of CMPs stakeholders' workshop // Secretariat - Coordinate with National Focal Points to invite voluntary contributions in support of the Black Sea post-war plan.
Develop/ revise/ implement relevant Conservation Management Plans for cetacean species	• Organise Experts Workshops to develop CMPs for sperm whales and Ziphius, taking into account all national conservation plans – ToR • Organise stakeholders Workshops to finalise CMPs for fin whales, Risso's, bottlenose and common dolphins, taking into account all national conservation plans - ToR • Support the implementation of relevant actions of the approved CMPs for cetacean species, emphasising coordination actions • Consider the development of killer whales CMP, taking into account the existing national conservation plans		
Facilitate the Development/ revision/ implementation of National Action Plans for cetaceans	• Supporting the revision / development of National Action Plans for cetaceans in collaboration with SRCUs and national authorities, through participatory process involving all relevant organisations (NGOs, associations, national partners…) • Establishment of national Working Groups or Councils in the framework of National Actions Plan		
Facilitate the Development/ revision/ implementation of National Action Plans for cetaceans	• Supporting the revision / development of National Action Plans for cetaceans in collaboration with SRCUs and national authorities, through participatory process involving all relevant organisations (NGOs, associations, national partners…) • Establishment of national Working Groups or Councils in the framework of National Actions Plan		

CA 1 d	Functional stranding networks and responses to emergency situations	Person in charge identified by SC17: Co-Chairs of the AETFS (Sandro Mazzariol and Thierry Janiaux) + Anastasia KOMNENOU and Pavel GOL'DIN

Expected outcomes	Official National Stranding networks are established and operating Information on stranding events is regularly exchanged among national networks

Proposed Action(s)	Means of implementation	Action requested in MOP9 Resolution(s)	Objectives to be achieved before SC18
Set up /Reinforce official national stranding networks (with all national institutions concerned and relevant international agreements)	• Disseminate studies on legal/institutional status of National stranding networks in order to assist experts in the establishment of official national stranding network when relevant – Parties • Provide assistance in the preparation of a legislative framework to settle the national coordination network- Parties • Organise trainings on necropsies, response to live strandings and emergency situations, including mass strandings, in the ACCOBAMS Area, and on the use of relevant databases – ToR	**Resolution 9.13** • *Requests* the two co-chairs of the AETFS to update the terms of reference (ToR) for AETFS by taking into consideration other existing initiatives in terms of objectives and to establish a prioritisation system to provide support in case of capacity-building request and emergency response; • *Requests* the Secretariat, in collaboration with the AETFS: - to keep a continuously updated list of existing stranding experts and stranding networks contact points or coordinators, to be included in the ACCOBAMS website, to facilitate reporting and communication; - to keep updated lists of tissue banks, responsible institutions designed by the Parties and laboratories registered as CITES scientific or forensic institutions, including the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH) collaboration centers, for facilitating transboundary exchange of samples and investigations; - to update existing ACCOBAMS documents related to strandings management and investigations (best practices, guidelines and protocols), when needed,	- Include, in National Reports, specific information on unusual and / or mass stranding events, indicating the outcomes of the intervention and the type of protocol that was used, in order to identify areas where there is a need for training. - Support the use ASCOBANS-ACCOBAMS protocols on stranding monitoring, and the mention in National Reports of whether these protocols were followed. - Call for voluntary contributions from National Focal Points and other relevant stakeholders to support the dedicated fund for emergency situations. - [for the ACCOBAMS emergency Task Force] Review the available material relating to emergency and stranding responses to determine if there are other documents that should be disseminated. - Ensure that the most up-to-date documents related to stranding protocols
Encourage collaboration among national networks of Parties	• Disseminate the procedures on Best Practices on cetacean post-mortem investigation and tissue sampling resulted from the harmonisation process in ACCOBAMS and ASCOBANS • Update the Terms of Reference (ToR) for the ACCOBAMS Emergency Task Force for Stranding events (AETFS) by considering other existing initiatives, prioritising support for capacity building requests and emergency responses		

	• Maintain and Update List of existing stranding experts and stranding networks contact points/coordinators • Update ACCOBAMS Documents related to strandings management and investigations (best practices, guidelines, and protocols) through regular meetings/workshops among experts. • Promote Technologies for remote assistance during investigations • Implement Capacity Building through training modules targeting veterinarians and biologists involved in post-mortem investigations using new technologies (e.g., virtual/augmented reality, metaverse, 3D printing) and tele-necropsy • Create an Emergency Fund through voluntary contributions by Parties, international organisations, and public and private donors	through regular meetings among experts to include novel findings and analyses, and to promote harmonisation in interpreting post mortem findings; - to implement capacity building through training modules targeting veterinarians and biologists involved in post mortem investigations, using novel technologies (i.e., virtual and augmented reality, metaverse, 3D printing) and including principles of forensic photographs and tele-necropsy; • *Invites* the AETFS and the ACCOBAMS Secretariat to develop the procedures for requests of funding, and *asks* the Secretariat to submit them to the ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee and to the ACCOBAMS Bureau for approval.	and relevant Resolutions are available on the ACCOBAMS website and NETCCOBAMS, and accessible to relevant actors and organizations across the ACCOBAMS area.
	• Enter relevant national data into relevant regional databases, such as MEDACES • Support and finance of MEDACES		
	• Reinforce a network to exchange information on sampling though NETCCOBAMS Platform		

CA 2 a	Interactions with fisheries / aquaculture	Person in charge identified by SC17: JBWG + Dimitar POPOV (JBWG Co-Chair), Pavel GOL'DIN, Ayaka AMAHA ÖZTÜRK, Joan GONZALVO, Rimel BENMESSAOUD

Expected outcomes	Impacts of cetaceans' bycatch and depredation are assessed and reduced Ecotourism activities (whale watching and pescatourism) are proposed as an alternative income source to fishermen impacted by depredation

Proposed Action(s)	Means of implementation	Action requested in MOP9 Resolution(s)	Objectives to be achieved before SC18
Support countries in monitoring and mitigating depredation and bycatch situations	• Maintain and support the work of the ACCOBAMS/ASCOBANS Joint Bycatch Working Group • Organise workshops to share experience and results, including from past projects on interactions with fisheries – ToR • Improve data collection on interactions with fisheries (implementation of on-board observers' programs whenever it is possible and port questionnaires…) and testing mitigation measures • Use of stranding data to assess bycatch mortality (using drifting models and/or necropsy findings) • Collaborate with relevant entities, in particular with GFCM, EC (DG MARE and DG Environment), UNEP/MAP Barcelona Convention System (EcAp/IMAP, QSR) and IWC BMI, ICCAT, ICES • Support the network with EC, GFCM and BSC to address the critical issue of harbor porpoise bycatch in the Black Sea • Implement active awareness-raising programs among fishermen to encourage	**Resolution 9.14** • *Requests* the Scientific Committee to approach FAO-GFCM/SAC to assess the feasibility for the revision of the 2019 FAO-GFCM Guidelines for bycatch monitoring, noting that while the 0.5% coverage for onboard observation is a recommended minimum, it may not be sufficient to fully understand the extent of cetacean bycatch, and that regional differences and legal frameworks should be taken into account • *Requests* the ACCOBAMS Secretariat: - to strengthen the collaboration with GFCM in addressing the impacts of several fisheries on cetaceans, their prey, and habitats; • to strengthen the collaboration with GFCM and ICCAT to address illegal driftnets' continued use in some parts of the ACCOBAMS Area.	- Build on discussions held at previous meetings, including SC16, and further strengthen cooperation with FAO-GFCM and its relevant bodies (Commission, SAC, WGVUL, ACBS/WGBS) in order to improve monitoring and mitigation of interactions between cetaceans and fisheries or aquaculture activities. Particular attention should be given to revise the 2019 FAO-GFCM Guidelines for bycatch monitoring, particularly in relation to the 0.5% minimum coverage for onboard observation.

	reporting of bycatch events, improving data collection and assessing the extent of this threat more precisely • Conduct training programs for local and regional stakeholders on advanced monitoring techniques, data analysis, and the use of new technologies • Promote the importance of cetacean conservation in relevant international fora and policy discussions • Establish a robust monitoring and evaluation framework to assess the effectiveness of implemented strategies and make necessary adjustments • Regularly review and update guidelines and protocols related to bycatch monitoring and mitigation measures, as well as to safe release of bycaught animals, to incorporate the best available advice and practices		

CA 2 b	Anthropogenic underwater noise	Person in charge identified by SC17: Joint Noise Working Group

Expected outcomes	Main anthropogenic activities generating underwater noise are monitored in the ACCOBAMS Area Use of mitigation measures for anthropogenic activities generating underwater noise

Proposed Action(s)	Means of implementation	Action requested in MOP9 Resolution(s)	Objectives to be achieved before SC18
Encourage the monitoring of anthropogenic activities generating underwater noise	• Organise an in-person meeting of the CMS/ACCOBAMS/ASCOBANS JNWG • Raise awareness amongst countries by organising an awareness & consultation workshop at national level with different stakeholders, especially at ministerial level • Invite Port authorities to develop incentive programmes to encourage the monitoring of and reduction in underwater noise emissions, and to report regularly all activities generating noise to improve the mapping for Noise Hotspots Report • Organise trainings for national entities on noise monitoring, including analyses of PAM collected data in some identified priority areas – ToR • Keep managing the regional noise register • Keep feeding data on impulsive noise generating sources from the entire ACCOBAMS Area into the regional noise register managed by ACCOBAMS • Promote the use of NETCCOBAMS to gather data • Provide necessary data to update risk maps and generate maps for the Black Sea by considering relevant target species • Complete the Noise Hotspots Report II • Revise and updating the ACCOBAMS Guidelines on underwater noise taking into account outcomes from recent projects • Prepare a study on the effects of underwater noise generated by the projected increase of wind farms in the ACCOBAMS Area – ToR • Continue developing the concept of “quiet zones,” updating noise models in NETCCOBAMS, comparing noise modelling results with *in situ* recordings, monitoring	**Resolution 9.15** • *Requests* the ACCOBAMS Secretariat and the Joint CMS/ACCOBAMS/ASCOBANS Noise Working Group (JNWG), to continue supporting the UNEP/MAP in the development of the IMAP EO11 on energy including underwater noise and its related common indicators 26 and 27 as well as in the preparation of the related chapter within the next MED QSR; • *Requests* the ACCOBAMS Parties, the Scientific Committee, and the Secretariat to contribute to the development and implementation of the Post-War Plan for Black Sea Cetaceans Resolution 9.10, with particular focus given to the removal of all types of underwater explosives, both floating and sunk, including mines; • *Encourages* the JNWG to continue its work, including: - the further development of the concept of “quiet zones”, as outlined in Recommendation 10.5 of the ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee; - the updating of the noise models available in NETCCOBAMS, securing their compliance with evolving guidance from the European Union Technical Group on Underwater Noise under the European Union Marine Strategy Framework Directive; - the comparison of the results of noise modelling with appropriate in situ	- Organize an in-person meeting for the JNWG to facilitate progress on complex issues, while enabling hybrid participation. Draft objectives and terms of reference for this Meeting. Organize series of targeted, cost-effective online workshops, or in-person if funds become available in the future, involving members of the JNWG, to address specific technical and strategic issues. These would include: - Discussions on calibration and verification methods for noise maps, which drafting has already started, ideally to be held in 2026. - Mitigation-related topics: (a) the update of the guidelines for impulsive noise, the development of a EO11/D11 assessment process for future IMAP/MSFD cycles (including clarification of the role of the Industry Advisory Group -IAG-), and the preparation of a post-conflict plan for the Black Sea. - A third workshop focusing on navy and sonar issues is also suggested, taking into consideration the conclusions of the last workshop with Navies (2024). For this set of activities, a preliminary meeting among existing JNWG members might be needed to agree on priorities.

	anthropogenic noise activities, and developing new mitigation measures • Continue cooperation on underwater noise issue with other international Organisations, such as CMS, ASCOBANS, IWC, UNEP/MAP Barcelona Convention System (EcAp/IMAP, QSR), IMO, REMPEC and EU (MSFD) and collaboration with other regional projects on noise issues • Support investigation of impacts of underwater noise on health status and prey	anthropogenic noise recordings made throughout the Agreement Area, taking account of the diverse sensitivities of the different cetacean species; - the continued efforts to monitor anthropogenic activities generating underwater noise; - the further encouragement of the use of mitigation measures for anthropogenic activities generating underwater noise; - the further efforts to develop and assess the effectiveness of new mitigation measures; and - the improved exchange, among the competent authorities, of relevant information related to military activities and exercises, from planning to assessment of impacts.	[Secretariat] Further coordinate and collaborate with the International Maritime Organization (IMO), through participation in the Intersessional Working Group on underwater noise from ships (IWG-Noise) established in the framework of the Regional Marine Pollution Emergency Response Centre for the Mediterranean Sea's (REMPEC). - Reinforce existing collaboration with UNEP/MAP through the participation in the next CORMON meetings. - Review the draft note to be provided by OceanCare which will elaborate the concept of "Quiet Zones" to support the achievement of marine restoration objectives, and in particular those relating to cetaceans, within the Agreement area, in the context of internationally agreed objectives for marine ecosystem restoration (Global Biodiversity Framework -GBF), including the EU Nature Restoration Law.
Encourage the use of mitigation measures for anthropogenic activities generating underwater noise	• Improve enhanced training of regulators on the appropriate application of the CMS Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) and ACCOBAMS Noise Guidelines • Promote the ACCOBAMS Highly qualified MMO/PAM operators' certificate • Support the development and update of the ACCOBAMS HQMMO/PAM training tools • Revise and update the ACCOBAMS "Guide for Parties to use mitigation measures " • Continue developing joint project/initiatives for simulating mitigation measures such as speed reduction and related benefits, as well as considering results • Develop cooperation on underwater noise issues with other International Organisations		
Exchange of relevant information with competent authorities related to military activities / exercises	• Regular information letter from the Secretariat to NATO and to national Navy forces to raise attention of impacts on noise on cetaceans and to propose mitigation measures • Continue organising regular joint ACCOBAMS/ASCOBANS workshops with national Navy forces and NATO members – ToR • Support research backing demining activities in the Black Sea: development and implementation of the "Post-War Plan for Black Sea Cetaceans" with a focus on the removal of all types of underwater explosives, including mines, with the minimal impact on cetaceans and marine ecosystem.		

CA 2 c	Vessel strikes	Person Identified by SC17: Joint ACCOBAMS-Pelagos Vessel Strike Working Group.

Expected outcomes	Reduction of ship strikes in high-risk areas

Proposed Action(s)	Means of implementation	Action requested in MOP9 Resolution(s)	Objectives to be achieved before SC18
Monitor / assess high-risk areas for vessel strikes (CCH) in the Mediterranean Sea and adjacent Atlantic Area	• Create a joint Ship Strikes Working Group with the Pelagos Agreement • Continue the entry of vessel strikes data in relevant databases, such as the IWC central database on vessel strikes • Identify high risk areas for vessel strikes by encouraging studies that improve understanding of temporal and spatial distribution of shipping and of cetaceans (IMMAs), and support interactive maps of areas with high risk of strikes for crews of relevant ships • Enhance efforts to quantify ship strike occurrences through necropsies and photo-identification studies • Promote the use of the IWC ship strikes database and of NETCCOBAMS • Support efforts to improve access to the temporal and spatial distribution of shipping, particularly vessels that do not transmit AIS information • Continue cooperation on ships strike issue with other International Organisations, such CMS, IHO, IWC, EMSA (EU) / REMPEC / IMO and Pelagos Agreement and contributing in any other relevant initiatives, projects and workshops in the ACCOBAMS Area	**Resolution 9.16** • *Asks* the Chair of the Scientific Committee to cooperate with the Scientific and Technical Committee of the Pelagos Agreement to create a joint Ship Strikes Working Group with agreed Terms of Reference, including: a) liaison with riparian States, the IWC and other stakeholders to continue and improve the collection of information on cetaceans and vessel traffic, to enable better identification of actual or potential high-risk areas for cetaceans, especially fin and sperm whales, by incorporating information on whale and vessel distribution into risk models; b) incorporating the results of the IWC-IUCN-ACCOBAMS workshop (Messinia, 2019) and work on Important Marine Mammal Areas (IMMAs); c) investigation of ways to support the integration and updating of cetacean risk information (e.g., IMMAs) into Electronic Charts Systems used for maritime navigation; d) improving efforts and approaches to quantifying ship strike occurrence; e) promotion and use of the IWC ship strikes database and appropriate modules within NETCCOBAMS; f) elaboration of improved methods to evaluate the effectiveness of mitigation measures and especially of recent or new PSSAs and associated protective measures; g) review of the results of relevant studies being undertaken in the region; h) review of the results of existing efforts and encouragement of the development of new real time	- Strengthen coordinated efforts to reduce the risk of vessel strikes, particularly in identified high-risk areas. Further enhance cooperation with relevant partners, including IMO, IWC and the Pelagos Agreement, to improve the integration of scientific information into maritime navigation and to support the implementation and evaluation of effective, science-based mitigation measures across the ACCOBAMS area. Strengthen the activities of the Joint ACCOBAMS-Pelagos Vessel Strike Working Group. - Review the draft document to be produced by OceanCare which will develop standards and accelerate the process for nautical charts to be updated and reflect the areas crucial for the protection of cetaceans, particularly in high-risk areas. The document shall assist developing a homogeneous approach by Hydrographic Offices for informing mariners about the presence of whales and known whale habitats within the Agreement area.
Promote the use of mitigation measures	• Review the results of existing efforts and encouragement of the development of new real time cetacean localisation projects, which are designed to be complementary		

	tools in avoiding ship strikes; and review of the progress on the development of a whale-safe certificate • Strengthen cooperation between countries that share marine areas with high risk of collision for cetaceans in order to develop a joint and coherent management for these areas • Foster the development of incentive systems to shipping compagnies adopting suggested mitigation measures • Support national or regional projects in order to reduce the risk of collision • Evaluate the effectiveness of implemented or proposed new mitigation measures (such as the APMs in the North-Western Mediterranean PSSA) • Support development of standards and accelerate the process for nautical charts to be updated and reflect the areas crucial for the protection of marine life	cetacean localization projects, which are designed to be complementary tools in avoiding ship strikes; i) review of the progress on the development of a reward for "best practitioners" (Whale safe certificate) given to identified vessels who follow ACCOBAMS' best practices to be initially tested in the North-Western Mediterranean Particularly Sensitive Sea Area. • *Requests* Parties and the Secretariat to: a) promote communication with stakeholders (e.g., navies, port authorities, shipping companies, whale-watching organisations, etc.) on the issue of vessel strikes, including mitigation approaches and reporting to the IWC ship strikes database; b) encourage and support regional data collection and mitigation initiatives and foster the development of incentive systems to shipping companies that adopt appropriate mitigation methods; c) continue to work within IMO and its Marine Environment Protection Committee on relevant initiatives that include mitigation approaches, such as shipping lanes; d) foster and improve collaborative efforts with the Barcelona Convention Secretariat and other bodies working on this issue; e) support efforts to improve access to the temporal and spatial distribution of shipping, particularly merchant vessels steaming at high speed, and vessels that do not transmit Automatic Information System (AIS) data; f) support, when appropriate, activities within the framework of ongoing projects in particular for the definition of criteria for the identification of high-risk areas; g) offer support to the Greek Authorities for reducing the risk of ship strikes in the Hellenic Trench, including strengthening collaboration with the International Hydrographic organisation (IHO) and the Hellenic Hydrographic Office to develop standards and accelerate the process for the updating of nautical charts to locate the area crucial for the protection of marine life;	

CA 2 d	Cetacean watching	Person identified by SC17: Whale Watching Working Group; Aurélie Moulins, Aurélie & Pauline Gauffier, Joan Gonzalvo

Expected outcomes	Cetacean watching activities are properly conducted in the ACCOBAMS Area

Proposed Action(s)	Means of implementation	Action requested in MOP9 Resolution(s)	Objectives to be achieved before SC18
Monitoring status of whale watching activities in the ACCOBAMS Area and their potential adverse impacts on individual cetaceans and on populations	• Implement a pilot study to define the whale watching "carrying capacity" in a targeted geographical area where commercial whale watching is intensively practiced • Conduct an analysis of existing national legislations related to cetacean watching to support the work of experts and coordinate with the Pelagos WG • Collaborate with relevant organisations, such as CMS, IWC and Pelagos Agreement • Update the list of WW operations	**Resolution 9.17** • *Requests* the Secretariat, in collaboration with the Scientific Committee and Sub-Regional Coordination Units, to carry out the analysis of existing national legislation related to whale watching, which should be done in coordination with the Pelagos Working Group "Lois"; • *Encourages* the Secretariat and the Scientific Committee to further collaborate with relevant organisations on issues related to whale watching activities;	Continue efforts to ensure that cetacean watching activities in the ACCOBAMS area are conducted in a sustainable manner. Prioritize actions under the Work Programme, strengthening coordination through the Whale Watching Working Group, and promote the implementation of the HQWW label and harmonised monitoring approaches, in close cooperation with relevant partners.
Promote the use of whale watching vessels as platforms of opportunity	• Continue testing and updating the IlogWhales App that incorporates the common procedure for data collection by whale watching operators, making sure that there is compatibility with other similar programmes running on collaborative platforms (eg.: OBSenMER) • Organise photo-ID and data collection training for whale watching operators, with the final goal of sharing the collected data		
Support the implementation of the HQWW certificate in the ACCOBAMS Area	• Promote the implementation of the HQWW certificate by Parties and in areas -based management measures in collaboration with relevant projects/organisations • Organise Trainings on HQWW • Revise the regulations governing the use of the collective certification mark "High Quality Whale Watching®" (HQWW) with the objective of simplifying the implementation at the national level and facilitate replication in other geographical areas" • Liaise with relevant tourism organisations		

CA 2 e	Marine litter	Person identified by SC17: Cristina FOSSI, Mark SIMMONDS, Tilen GENOV

Expected outcomes	Improved monitoring of marine litter in relation with cetaceans.

Proposed Action(s)	Means of implementation	Action requested in MOP9 Resolution(s)	Objectives to be achieved before SC18
Monitor the impacts of marine litter (ingested marine litter / microplastics / entanglements in ghost nets) on cetaceans	• Support actions to implement the best practice guidelines for cetacean *post-mortem* investigation, including the assessment of ingested marine litter and entanglement in ghost nets • Promote/support/liaise with projects and research activities to develop standardised methods to detect the occurrence and effects of marine litter, including micro-plastics, in cetacean species • Standardise diagnostic methods to evaluate the presence of marine litter in marine mammals' gastrointestinal tracts, categorise and quantify identified marine litter, detect plastic additives and absorbed contaminants, and develop risk, impact, and mortality index • Facilitate regional collaboration between tissue banks to exchange tissue samples for joint analyses and retrospective studies • Identify hot-spot areas for marine litter accumulation and identify threat to cetacean species occurring in those areas • Develop a proposal to use cetacean species as indicators of marine litter in the ACCOBAMS Area • Collaborate with relevant organisations (ASCOBANS, IWC, MEDPOL, IMO, FAO) including through joint activities • Promote cetacean species as indicators for microplastics and macro-litter pollution at the ACCOBAMS scale and encourage their inclusion as indicator species within the IMAP candidate indicator 24 and MSFD descriptor 10 • Promote campaigns on the ban of single-use plastics	**Resolution 9.18** • *Requests* the Secretariat and the Scientific Committee to liaise with relevant technical groups on the subject matter and consider sharing data with relevant platforms, such as The Global Plastics Hub of the UNEP Global Partnership on Plastic Pollution and Marine Litter (GPML) and others; • *Encourages* the Scientific Committee to: a) strengthen coordinated effort to better understand the toxicological effect on cetaceans of macro- and micro-litter ingestion, considering chemical, ecotoxicological, and physical effects; b) prepare a harmonised diagnostic methodology that includes: - evaluation of the presence of marine litter in marine mammals' gastro-intestinal tract; - categorization and quantification of identified marine litter through the determination of polymers by spectroscopy technique; - detection of plastic additives and absorbed contaminants to plastics in organism tissues; - development of risk, impact, and mortality indexes; c) continue encouraging joint efforts in the Adriatic Sea to merge data on bottlenose dolphin-human interactions (including set net interactions and marine debris ingestion) and mitigation efforts, as well as the creation of a multi-level and multi-disciplinary model to identify hotspot risks; d) propose:	Include in ASI-II the collection of data on marine litter and fish aggregating devices (FADs), in order to improve the identification of hotspots and better assess cumulative pressures on cetaceans

		- the definition and development of new methods to evaluate the exposure to plastics and plastic additives in free-ranging organisms, including new approaches that could reveal the exposure to a plethora of stressors (micro-plastics, emerging chemicals, legacy chemicals, etc.) and drive the identification of new end-points; - the investigation on multiple stressors and the development of new diagnostic techniques to understand the effects of cumulative stressors on cetaceans, on both: i)stranded organisms, investigating the potential ecotoxicological effects caused by the ingestion of marine litter, and emerging and legacy chemicals, through biomarker identification and analysis of tissues; ii)in vitro experiments, assessing the effects of micro- and nano-plastics (combined with emerging and legacy chemicals) through new technologies applied on cetacean cell lines, organoids and 'organ-on-chip' technology;	

CA 2 f	Chemical & biological pollution	Person identified by SC17: Cristina FOSSI, Mark SIMMONDS, Tilen GENOV

Expected outcomes	Improved monitoring of chemical & biological pollution on cetaceans.

Proposed Action(s)	Means of implementation	Action requested in MOP9 Resolution(s)	Objectives to be achieved before SC18
Monitor the impact of chemical & biological pollution (such as pathogens, invasive species) on cetaceans	• Develop an inventory of institutions or laboratories within the ACCOBAMS Area able to analyse samples for legacy and emerging pollutants • Establish a common database on diseases and chemical burdens • Assess cumulative effects and multiple stressors, including chemicals, marine litter, climate change, and emerging pathogens, on cetaceans in ACCOBAMS Area – Ideally through a dedicated workshop – ToR • Disseminate the best practices to assess the impact of chemical pollution on cetaceans with a focus on emerging contaminants • Organise trainings on the best practices to assess the impact of chemical pollution – ToR • Collaborate with relevant organisations, initiatives and projects to better understand the toxicological effects of macro and micro-litter ingestion in cetaceans, considering chemical, ecotoxicological, and physical effects • Define and develop new methods to evaluate exposure to plastics and plastic additives in free-ranging organisms, using approaches like -omics to reveal exposure to various stressors and identify new endpoints • Develop new diagnostic techniques to understand the effects of cumulative stressors on cetaceans, both through the examination of stranded animals and in vitro experiments using new technologies		

CA 2 g	Climate change	Person identified by SC17: Mark SIMMONDS

Expected outcomes	ACCOBAMS cooperates with regional initiatives on climate change, taking into account cetacean conservation

Proposed Action(s)	Means of implementation	Action requested in MOP9 Resolution(s)	Objectives to be achieved before SC18
Contribute to regional initiatives on climate change	• Receive and consider the report from CMS workshop • Assess the carbon footprint of bottom trawl fisheries in the Mediterranean Sea in terms of their contribution to climate change, including both direct and indirect greenhouse gas emissions		- [Secretariat] Strengthen collaboration with the newly established Climate Change Regional Activity Centre (CC/RAC) of the UNEP/MAP-Barcelona Convention, as well as the CMS and GFCM, on issues relating to climate change. - As part of the contribution to the process launched by SPA/RAC to update Guidance Factsheets, incorporate climate change considerations, which requires further clarification within the Guidance Factsheets (EO1 Biodiversity) and GES definitions. Its impacts should be integrated into existing indicators and methodologies, particularly in the establishment of baseline and threshold values. - Collect information relating to bio-invasion as an issue related to climate change. - Review the concept note to be developed by OceanCare, that will assess the carbon footprint of bottom trawl fisheries in the Mediterranean Sea in terms of their contribution to climate change, including both direct and indirect greenhouse gas emissions”

CA 2 i	Captivity related issues	Person identified by SC17: Advisory board: Joan Gonzalvo

Expected outcomes	All specimens held in captivity in the ACCOBAMS Area are listed Advisory Committee on captivity issues and semi-enclosed facilities is operational

Proposed Action(s)	Means of implementation	Action requested in MOP9 Resolution(s)	Objectives to be achieved before SC18
Identify specimens held in captivity in the ACCOBAMS Area	• Continue the work of the ACCOBAMS Advisory Committee on semi-enclosed facilities • Continue updating the overview of specimens held in captivity in the ACCOBAMS Area in collaboration with international organisations (such as CITES) • Reinforce collaboration with NFP/NGO/ACCOBAMS Partners/CITES authorities in each country • Implement the cetacean genetic passport process, including genetic and biological data for cetaceans in aquaria and dolphinaria • Disseminate Guidelines for Best Practices during the Installation and Management of Semi-enclosed Facilities for Cetacean Species in the ACCOBAMS area, as well as the Procedural Steps for Requesting Advice from the ACCOBAMS Advisory Committee on Semi-Enclosed Facilities when considering initiatives related to semi-enclosed facilities, by organising one workshop	**Resolution 9.19** • *Adopts* the process towards cetacean genetic passport as presented in ACCOBAMS-MOP9/2025/Inf34, especially by mandating the Secretariat, in collaboration with the Scientific Committee, to: - identify reference laboratories within the ACCOBAMS Agreement area capable of analysing the proposed genetic markers; - collaborate with the European Association of Zoos and Aquaria (EAZA) to exchange and harmonise procedures, protocols, and information on existing captive cetacean populations; - establish a genetic reference library using tissue samples already preserved in existing tissue banks, in order to define a baseline set of genetically characterised individuals for comparison in future analyses; - create a centralised database with limited access to store genetic information on characterised animals, enabling comparison and validation of future genetic passports;	- Provide detailed information about the Guidelines on genetic passport and requirements for captivity and semi-captivity facilities with relevant scientific advice, primarily and especially those which have been adopted by MOP9, to Parties to facilitate their implementation at national level and, if needed, to provide their informal translation into national languages. - Inform Parties about the results of the work, assessments and conclusions made by the ACSF on the cases throughout the ACCOBAMS area and, if needed, to provide their informal translation into national languages, as well as to widely disseminate the available (aforementioned) updates of the state of the art in order to increase public awareness - Maintain close collaboration between the Scientific Committee and the Advisory Committee to ensure an adequate follow-up to the issue of the two initiatives establishing dolphin refuges/sanctuaries in Greece and Italy

CA 3 a	Area-based measures for cetacean conservation	Person Identified by SC17: Simone Panigada, Léa David, Tilen Genov

Expected outcomes	CCH are updated IMMAs are updated and new ones are identified Implementation of relevant measures are initiated in some pilot CCH

Proposed Action(s)	Means of implementation	Action requested in MOP9 Resolution(s)	Objectives to be achieved before SC18
Regularly update Cetacean Co-occurrence & Human activities (CCH) and Important Marine Mammal Areas (IMMAs), as appropriate, including by identifying priority areas for action to mitigate the known threats (bycatch…) / area-based management measures	• Strengthen links through meetings and workshops with Duke Marine Lab., MSP group or authorities, other relevant scientific groups working on SDM, human mapping and overlapping maps – ToR • Organise workshops within the SC to review and revise existing maps of SDM modelling exercises or human pressure maps • Organise workshop considering some trials in pilot areas of the overlapping process to identify CCH • Participate/collaborate to the upcoming IMMA workshop • Reinforce collaboration with the "Strategical Alliance among the Secretariats of ACCOBAMS, GFCM, IUCN-Med, UNEP/MAP through SPA/RAC and in collaboration with MedPAN" and the Pelagos Agreement for spatial-based protection and management measures • Liaise with INFO/RAC and PAP/RAC, and their mapping platform KMAP and explore the facilities of the NETCCOBAMS network	**Resolution 9.20** • *Requests* the Scientific Committee to: a) continue to identify CCH taking into account the recommendations of the relevant workshops, as well as existing mechanisms and tools related to area-based cetacean conservation presented in the Annex to the relevant workshop's report; b) further explore with relevant experts the appropriate consideration and mapping of uncertainty and the integration of data on cetacean and human activities; • *Strongly encourages* the IUCN Joint SSC/WCPA Marine Mammal Protected Areas Task Force, in collaboration with the ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee, to undertake a re-assessment of the Mediterranean region for the identification of Important Marine Mammal Areas (IMMAs) which is a priority action for the 2026-2028 triennium; • *Encourages* integration of national marine habitat mapping efforts, and the development of conservation measures for Natura 2000 sites, where relevant, into a broader regional framework for marine spatial planning;	- Liaise between different groups working on risk assessment maps on noise, vessel strike, etc., to coordinate and harmonize mapping and approaches for risk evaluation. - Create special links between these groups and the NETCCOBAMS Working Group and Task Manager in order to improve data exchange through the platform.
Support implementation of relevant measures for adequate management in CCH	• Identify and promote relevant management measures in pilot CCH, in collaboration with all stakeholders, including network of MPAs managers • Collaborate with other Organisations, such as UNEP/MAP Barcelona Convention System (EcAp/IMAP, QSR), SPA/RAC (AGEM), BSC, IMO, IWC, GFCM, IUCN and the Pelagos Agreement • Define threat based Ranking protocol of CCH		

CA 4 a	Information /Communication / Awareness about cetaceans

Expected outcomes	All ACCOBAMS Bodies, national focal/contact points, Partners and other relevant national institutions, Organisations and experts are familiar with activities implemented by or relevant for ACCOBAMS and share accurately information General public and other relevant stakeholders are aware about cetaceans and need for their conservation through activities supported by or linked to ACCOBAMS

Proposed Action(s)	Means of implementation	Action requested in MOP9 Resolution(s)	Objectives to be achieved before SC18
Maintain regular information/ communication about ongoing activities, cooperation and funding possibilities, cetacean conservation scientists and experts operating in the region and other relevant information; facilitate communication among cetacean conservation actors of the ACCOBAMS Area, in particular in Southern Mediterranean countries	• Parties & Sec: Implement the ACCOBAMS Communication Strategy: - upgrading communication products - improving presence on social networks - assessing the effectiveness of the Communication Strategy • Development of NETCCOBAMS Platform (*see MA1a*) • Promote the use of ACCOBAMS certificates and all ACCOBAMS Best Practices • Update ACCOBAMS Guidelines and promote them - ToR • Link conservation with human culture activities (UNESCO/Ocean decade) by initiating joint natural history exhibitions and offering expertise and knowledge eg identify heritage sites • Promote knowledge about importance of museum collections • SC: Provide advice to the Secretariat on scientific aspects of the Communication strategy		
Promote citizen sciences uses	• Provide and overview of initiatives and tools already in place/in order to mutualise efforts in particular at the level of young people • Organise a Workshop on how to collect data and data exchanges through citizen science - ToR		
Introduce in a new Country / Disseminate the ACCOBAMS Teaching Module courses	• Promote updated ACCOBAMS teaching module in universities dealing with cetacean conservation - ToR • Translation of the Teaching Module to national languages of ACCOBAMS Parties		
Promote and disseminate public awareness tools	• Organise a Conference on cetacean conservation in South Mediterranean Countries - CSMC – ToR • Disseminate public awareness tools in national languages • Support publications by national experts in international journals		

CA 5 a	Cetacean culture	Person identified by SC17: Joint ASCOBANS-ACCOBAMS Working Group on Cetacean Culture and Social learning ; Laetitia Nunny

Expected outcomes	The potential importance of social learning and culture for cetacean conservation in the ACCOBAMS region is considered

Proposed Action(s)	Priority	Action led by and in cooperation with	Means of implementation	Action requested in MOP9 Resolution(s)	Objectives to be achieved before SC18
Promote Cetacean culture	Medium	Secretariat Parties Scientific Committee Non-Party Range States, CMS & ASCOBANS, Partners, SRCUs	• Receive and discuss the report of the ACCOBAMS working group on Culture and Social learning • Create a joint ASCOBANS/ACCOBAMS Working Group on Culture and Social learning		

ANNEX VII - TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR THE WORKING GROUP ON POPULATION STRUCTURE

Working Group on Population Structure
Terms of reference and tasks
Mandate Period: 2026-2028

Objectives
The Working Group on Population Structure aims to:
• Advance understanding of cetacean population structure, connectivity, and demographic parameters in the ACCOBAMS Area
• Provide scientific evidence to support conservation management decisions and policy development
• Foster regional collaboration and capacity building in population genetics research
• Integrate population structure information into conservation frameworks
• Support the identification and protection of distinct populations and management units

Specific Tasks
Database Management and Sample Coordination
• Update the ACCOBAMS database of existing cetacean samples and genetic laboratories
• Promote standardized protocols for sample collection, storage, and analysis based on ACCOBAMS Best Practices on Cetacean Population Genetics and relevant updates
• Provide technical advice to Parties to facilitate sample exchanges between institutions for collaborative analyses, ensuring compliance with CITES and Nagoya Protocol requirements
• Coordinate with tissue banks and stranding networks to optimize sample collection and exchange
• Promote use of emerging sampling techniques including environmental DNA

Priority Species Population Structure Assessments
• Support genetic analyses for priority species identified in CMPs, cooperative research in population structure and demography to support stock identification and trends in abundance
• Support and, when needed, initiate assessments of population structure, genetic diversity, and connectivity patterns across Mediterranean and Black Sea sub-regions
• Summarize and disseminate knowledge on assessments of demographic parameters

Scientific Collaboration and Coordination
• Facilitate contributions of population structure data to MSFD D1C3 and IMAP common indicator 5 assessments (population demographic characteristics)
• Support MSP and MPA initiatives with population structure data
• Collaborate with CMP development for relevant species
• Liaise with IWC Scientific Committee, IUCN Cetacean Specialist Group on population structure assessments and updates to guidelines
• Collaborate with the Joint Bycatch Working Group and GFCM on population structure and demography of species affected by fisheries interactions, promote relevant sampling and analyses
• Support the Long-Term Monitoring Programme (LTMP) through sampling protocols

Capacity Building and Knowledge Transfer
• Promote collaboration between established and developing laboratories within the ACCOBAMS Area
• Support early-career researchers through training opportunities
• Facilitate knowledge exchange through online platforms

Recommendations
• Update ACCOBAMS Best Practices on Cetacean Population Genetics as needed
• Produce ACCOBAMS Best Practices on Cetacean Age Studies

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

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

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

1. BACKGROUND

2.1. Policy Framework

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

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

2.2. Context

The war in the Black Sea region has adversely impacted all riparian countries to varying degrees. The impacts on the Black Sea environment and its biodiversity, including cetaceans, extend beyond direct combat activities and include:

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

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

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE WORKSHOP

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

Specific objectives include:

3.1. Assessment Framework Development

- Review existing data and methodologies for assessing warfare impacts on cetaceans, their habitat, and prey species;
- Large-scale aerial survey (CeNoBS replication) to assess changes on abundance and distribution;
- Enlargement of BlackCeTrends coverage;

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

3.2. Action Planning

- Identify best practices for minimizing environmental impact for demining operations and the ways for their future development and improvement;
- Provide recommendations for new marine protected areas;
- Develop recommendations for enhanced stranding response and investigation capacity;
- Propose bycatch mitigation measures in light of potential post-war effects;
- Provide recommendations for education and public awareness campaigns for general public. Identify opportunities for involvement of local communities and fishers in planned activities.

3.3. Coordination and Collaboration

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

3.4. Road Map and Implementation

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

4. WORKSHOP STRUCTURE AND METHODOLOGY

4.1. Workshop Format

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

4.2. Working Sessions

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

Session 1: Assessment Methodologies and Monitoring Frameworks

The session will cover:

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

Session 2: Priority Actions and Mitigation Measures
The session will include but not limited to:

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

Session 3: Regional Cooperation and Implementation Strategy
The session will cover:

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

Session 4: Road Map Development and Finalization
The session will cover:

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

4.3. Outputs
The workshop will produce:
a) A road map for the Post-war Plan for the Black Sea, including:

- Situation assessment and baseline information;
- Priority areas, topics, activities, and measures;
- Implementation timeline with phased actions;
- Roles and responsibilities of stakeholders;
- Monitoring and evaluation framework;
- Budget estimates;

b) Technical recommendations for consideration by the Scientific Committee and Meeting of the Parties;
c) A two-year work plan for immediate implementation priorities;
d) Recommendations for capacity building and training needs;
e) Proposals for collaborative projects and partnerships.

5. WORKSHOP COMPOSITION

5.1. Core Participants
The workshop will include experts from:

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

5.2. Required Expertise
The workshop should include experts with knowledge and experience in:

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

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

5.3. Invited Organizations and Stakeholders

The workshop should seek participation from:

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

5.4. Steering Group

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

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

6. LOGISTICS

6.1. Proposed steps

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

6.2. Location

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

6.3. Funding

The workshop will be funded through:

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

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

- Hosting facilities;
- Technical support.

7. PREPARATORY WORK

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

a) Compile relevant background documentation, including:

- Compilation of available data on warfare impacts in the Black Sea;
- Review of existing assessments and scientific literature;
- Review of applicable international guidelines and frameworks;
- Summary of relevant ACCOBAMS Resolutions and recommendations;

b) Develop a workshop agenda;

c) Prepare template documents for working groups;

d) Conduct preparatory consultations with key stakeholders as needed.

8. POST-WORKSHOP ACTIVITIES

Following the workshop, the Secretariat will:

a) Compile and edit the workshop report and road map;

b) Circulate draft outputs to participants for review and comments;

c) Finalize the Post-war Plan road map;

d) Present the road map and recommendations to the Scientific Committee;

e) Submit the Plan for consideration and prompt adoption by the Parties;

f) Support Parties in implementation of applicable activities and measures.

9. LINKAGES WITH OTHER INITIATIVES

The workshop will ensure coordination with:

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

10. EXPECTED OUTCOMES

The workshop is expected to:

a) Provide a clear, evidence-based road map for addressing warfare consequences on Black Sea cetaceans;

b) Establish priorities for immediate, short-term, and long-term action;

c) Strengthen regional cooperation on cetacean conservation;

d) Build capacity for monitoring, assessment, and mitigation of warfare impacts;

e) Support the recovery of Black Sea cetacean populations toward favorable conservation status;

f) Provide a model for post-war marine conservation planning in other regions.

ANNEX IX - LETTER OF CONCERN FROM THE ACCOBAMS ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON SEMI-ENCLOSED FACILITIES REGARDING TWO DOLPHIN REFUGES / SANCTUARIES IN ITALY AND GREECE

Dear colleagues at the ACCOBAMS Secretariat,

The ACCOBAMS Advisory Committee on Semi-enclosed facilities would like to call to your attention the need for an inquiry regarding two cases that are presented to the public as Dolphin refuges / Sanctuaries. The *Guidelines for Best Practices During the Installation and Management of Semi-enclosed Facilities for Cetacean Species in the ACCOBAMS Area*, initially presented at the 16th meeting of the ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee (Dec 2024), were formally adopted by the Parties during the MOP9 in Cyprus 18-21 November 2025 (ACCOBAMS-MOP9/2025/Doc34/Annex14/Res9.19 https://doi.org/10.70978/SEYQ9739). Following up on this formal adoption by the Parties, we bring to your attention the two initiatives listed below as cause for concern, due to their apparent failure to comply with these guidelines. These cases are:

1. The San Paolo Dolphin Refuge (Jonian Dolphin Conservation, Gulf of Taranto, Italy)
   Link: https://www.joniandolphin.it/san-paolo-dolphin-refuge/
2. The Aegean Marine Life Sanctuary (Archipelagos Institute of Marine Conservation, Lipsi Island, Greece)
   Link: https://archipelago.gr/fields-of-action/aegean-marine-life-sanctuary-amls/

Based on the documentation available online and the criteria defined in the referenced ACCOBAMS and GFAS (Global Federation of Animal Sanctuaries) guidelines, we provide a preliminary technical assessment (no on-site visit has been conducted) highlighting compliance gaps, missing information, and aspects requiring clarification before any potential recognition or endorsement by ACCOBAMS should occur.

1. San Paolo Dolphin Refuge

Overview:
Presented as the "first European sea refuge for dolphins retired from captivity," located near San Paolo Island in the Gulf of Taranto, with an estimated area of approximately seven hectares. The project foresees a 1600 m² sea enclosure and a 16 m² veterinary pool, monitoring systems, on-site accommodation, veterinary and storage facilities, and a remote-control room for environmental monitoring. The Italian Ministry for the Environment has visited the facility but there is no official feedback on what kind of authorization procedures should be followed.

Key observations:
- Habitat and dimensions: insufficient details on depth, variability, habitat enrichment, and swimming range; in case of authorization as zoological establishment, no information

on the material of construction of pools, any shadowing or separation of different water bodies to allow social segregation or quarantine;
- Water quality: no information on water exchange systems, filtration, monitoring frequency, or water quality parameter thresholds; no information on the soundscape and any measures to mitigate underwater noise, considering that the area is close to Navy activities;
- Safety, biosafety and containment: unclear contingency protocols for storms, power failures, or animal escapes (i.e., double fencing and enclosures); in case enclosures are limited by heavy netting or some alternative gear, no information on cleaning procedures or to the possibility of small marine organisms entering the enclosures (no safety and secure control on food); the area is endemic for morbillivirus: no information on biosafety measures to avoid contact with animals; no information on microbiological and toxicological examination of incoming and outgoing waters and related contingency plan;
- Veterinary and quarantine: lack of published protocols and facilities for animal health management, preventive medicine, and biosecurity; lack of 24/7 veterinary personnel on site or within an hour distance able to intervene in case of emergencies;
- Public interaction: absence of defined regulations for visitor access or educational engagement, as well as surrounded restricted area;
- Governance and sustainability: missing information on long-term funding and operational budgeting essential for the facilities running costs; no information on the interaction with local authorities including public veterinary services for inspections according to current regulations
- Environmental impact: no evidence of environmental impact assessments or corresponding national authorizations.

2. Aegean Marine Life Sanctuary (AMLS)

Overview:
Located in a sheltered bay on Lipsi Island (Greece), this project aims to provide a rehabilitation and permanent-care refuge for stranded or formerly captive dolphins and other marine species. The initiative emphasizes sustainability, renewable energy use, minimal human-animal interaction, and alignment with the GFAS “Standards for Cetacean Sanctuaries”.

Key Observations:
- Development stage: Unclear time-frame for its execution. The project appears to be under construction or in early operational phase;
- Water quality: insufficient data on currents, water quality monitoring, and seasonal variability in these;

- Barrier design: limited information on net mesh size, depth, maintenance, and risk of entanglement;
- Veterinary and quarantine facilities: protocols and infrastructure not fully described or published;
- Governance and transparency: financial sustainability and management structure not disclosed;
- Environmental and legal compliance: missing published environmental impact assessments or formal permits.

Based on the numerous uncertainties on critical aspects above-mentioned, we manifest our strong concern about the preparedness of both facilities to safely house cetaceans and other marine species. Hence, we recommend that information be gathered from the concerned entities and national authorities, asking for detailed evidence demonstrating compliance with the minimal mandatory criteria before any consideration is given to the possibility of a formal recognition as marine refuges within the ACCOBAMS area.

Both initiatives are probably well-intended, but the documentation currently available is insufficient to demonstrate full compliance with ACCOBAMS, GFAS, and associated EU legal frameworks.

Thank you for your consideration.
We remain at your disposal for further collaboration.

Joan Gonzalvo, PhD.
ACCOBAMS Advisory Committee on Semi-enclosed facilities; Chair

Reference documents

1. ACCOBAMS-MOP8/2022/Inf52. Scientific perspective on "potential marine semi-enclosed facilities" In the ACCOBAMS area. 18th meeting of the parties to ACCOBAMS, Malta, 29 November - 2 December 2022.

2. ACCOBAMS-MOP9/2025/Doc34 - Report of the Ninth Meeting of the Parties to ACCOBAMS 18-21 November 2025, Limassol, Cyprus
https://doi.org/10.70978/XQVZ1685

   RESOLUTION 9.19. CETACEAN PASSPORT AND SEMI-CAPTIVITY GUIDELINES
ACCOBAMS-MOP9/2025/Doc34/Annex14/Res9.19
https://doi.org/10.70978/SEYQ9739

3. Global Federation of Animal Sanctuaries. Standards for Marine Mammal Sanctuaries; Global Federation of Animal Sanctuaries: Phoenix, AZ, USA, 2023; pp. 1–41.

ANNEX X - RECOMMENDATIONS TO ACCOBAMS SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE FROM THE ECS-ACCOBAMS WORKSHOP "CETACEAN CULTURE: NAVIGATING CHANGE IN THE ACCOBAMS REGION AND BEYOND" (PONTA DELGADA, AZORES AND ONLINE, 13 MAY 2025).

- Include consideration of culture in the Sperm Whale Conservation Management Plan,
- Include consideration of culture in the Fin Whale Conservation Management Plan,
- Encourage researchers in the region to consider whether their focal populations demonstrate indicators of social learning and/or culture,
- Encourage consultation with the CMS Expert Group when there is doubt about whether a behaviour is socially learned,
- Consider how threats (underwater noise, habitat loss, prey reduction, etc.) could impact the transmission of cultural behaviours important to survival or reproduction of cetaceans in the ACCOBAMS area,
- Conservation actions should ensure that cultural transmission routes and social structure are maintained and should aim to protect holders of ecological knowledge (e.g., often, older individuals),
- Mapping of migratory routes along with threats for migratory cetacean species in the region, e.g., fin whales, may provide greater detail on risk and could indicate where specific conservation actions should be taken,
- Conservation actions should consider the species-specific habitat requirements for different cultural behaviours to be expressed e.g. the impacts of noise on the ability for cetaceans to be able to hear/communicate, will differ,
- Knowledge of cultural behaviour in specific species/populations is an important educational tool and can be used to explain to the public/decision-makers why this particular species / population needs protecting.