

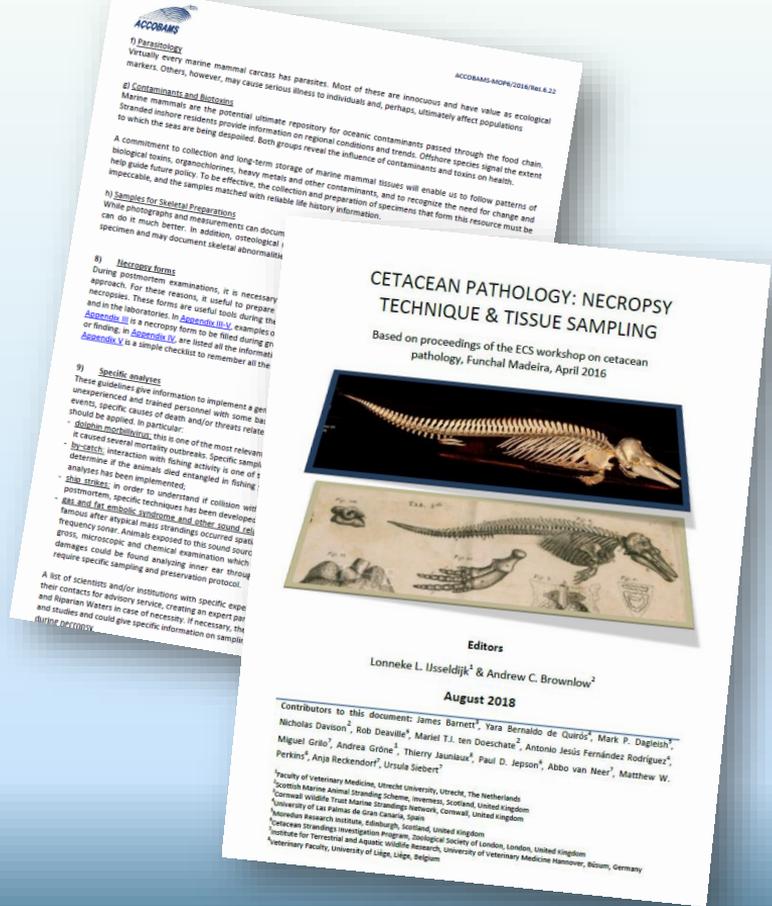
**Update on ASCOBANS/ACCOBAMS cetacean  
pathology harmonization protocol**

**25th ASCOBANS Advisory Committee Meeting**  
Stralsund, 17-19 September 2019

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UK Cetacean Stranding Investigation Programme

# Context

- At ASCOBANS AC24 two different protocols/best practices for the postmortem analyses on cetaceans were presented.
- Both used a **multi-tier approach** but needed an harmonization and a coordination in order to develop a unified document outlining European best practice on cetacean necropsy.
- A harmonization workshop, funded by ASCOBANS and ACCOBAMS was organized by Sandro Mazzariol (Italy), Lonneke Ijsseldijk (NL) and Andrew Brownlow (UK) and held 24-25 June 2019 in Padua, Italy.
- 22 invited participants from across Europe undertaking cetacean necropsy and investigations
  - Limited funds, small group to aid discussions



## **Terms of references for the workshop**

### **a) Harmonize multi-tier best practice for basic necropsy procedure**

AIM: create an accessible document comprising a harmonization of existing post mortem procedures within the two agreement areas

### **b) Setting up diagnostic frameworks for specific threats**

AIM: Define and harmonize specific diagnostic approaches and interpretation of findings among the veterinary pathologists and other scientists performing necropsies within the two agreement areas.

### **c) Composing a list of experts/laboratories for technical support and advice**

AIM: Provide appropriate contacts for specific issues, methodologies and techniques within the two agreement areas.



- **ASCOBANS & ACCOBAMS**

- (Germany, UK, Netherlands, Belgium, France, Italy, Spain, Israel)

- **IWC**

- **OIE** - World Health Organization (WHO) collaborating center for Health of Marine Mammals

- **MARCET**

# Key themes from workshop

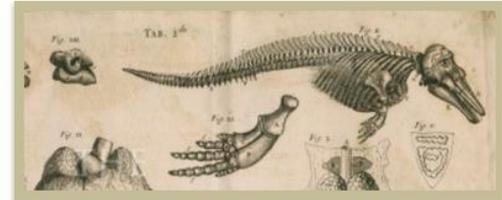
- Emphasis that the document is to augment rather than replace existing protocols
- Agreement that consistency was necessary to enable data sharing and this update was needed
- Emphasis that the assessment of the cause of death and health status is a **veterinary procedure** requiring a full post mortem investigation with additional examinations.
- Detailed investigation of fresh carcasses by experienced **veterinary pathologists** remains the **gold standard** and an absolute requirement for assessing overall health.
- There is **no shortcut** to a complete and throughout necropsy in order to evaluate and eventually rule out all the possible causes of death.
- Not all networks have that **capacity** however, and strandings networks, run by experienced non-veterinarians, can, and have, operated successfully.
- Collection of data and samples can however be invaluable to gain information on some threats, pollutants and important biological and life-history parameters.
- Sampling and testing should be complete and throughout and interpretation should be based on the best existing literature and protocols available.

# Final document

- To provide a **reference document** for veterinarians and biologists currently engaged in cetacean post-mortem investigation, summarising a recognised approach to stranding investigation across European networks;
- To highlight areas where **harmonisation of data** from existing networks could allow for analysis and inference to be made **between networks**, of particular relevance for the transboundary, mobile species;
- Provide a **start-up guide** for researchers attempting to instigate new stranding monitoring programmes, particularly in regions of the world with limited resources for extensive, top-down surveillance programmes.

Best practice for cetacean post mortem  
investigation and tissue sampling

Joint ACCOBAMS and ASCOBANS document



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# What the document is... and what it is not

- A **basic document** for post mortem investigation and tissue sampling. ✓
- Arranged in tier structure depending on resources available
  - **Tier 1:** Basic measurements ✓
  - **Tier 2:** Detailed investigation and sampling ✓
  - **Tier 3:** Post-mortem examination with diagnostic aims ✗
- A instruction guide for veterinary investigation of **specific causes of death** ✗



Refer to online resource on specialist techniques and methodologies

## Next steps...

- Finalisation of online repository for specialist techniques, reference centres and contact details of experts
  - recommend publication of these products in a related page of the ACCOBAMS and ASCOBANS agreement.
- Generation of a DOI number
- Final draft of the document presented here at AC25 with aim the final version is presented for adoption at the MOP
- Document presented at HELCOM
- Further opinion will be asked to the International Whaling Commission Expert Panel within the ACCOBAMS MoP as a general assessment on the quality of the document.
- Presentation of document at dedicated workshop of the World Conference on Marine Mammals in Barcelona next December.