

Agenda Item 20

Options for Future Meetings of
the Advisory Committee

Document 20

**Options for Future Meetings of
the Advisory Committee**

Action Requested

- Consider options presented
- Advice on any follow-up

Submitted by

Secretariat



Note:

Delegates are kindly reminded to bring their own document copies to the meeting, if needed.

Options for Future Meetings of the Advisory Committee

1. The purpose of this document is to present options looking at the periodicity and content of ASCOBANS Advisory Committee meetings and other approaches to working, as requested by the 24th Meeting of the Advisory Committee (AC24).
2. ASCOBANS has an AC meeting every year, with the North Sea Group meeting usually back-to-back, a day prior. The AC meetings include both scientific and institutional sessions and involve all Parties. Preparations for the meeting uses considerable Secretariat capacity and funds provided by the Parties. The meeting cycle is heavy compared with some other CMS instruments.
3. To compare the meeting cycle with that of some other instruments in the CMS Family, Table 1 below illustrates five examples. Each system has been developed independently by each instrument and tailored to suit its specific needs. It should be noted, however, that there has been no review of the effectiveness of these cycles.

Table 1. CMS Family instruments and their meeting schedules

Instrument	Governing body	Institutional committee	Scientific / Technical committee
CMS	COP every three years	StC twice intersessionally ¹ (2/3 years)	ScC twice intersessionally
AEWA	MOP every three years	StC “at least once every two years”, usually in conjunction with MOP	TC “at least twice between” MOPs (four meetings in the past five years)
EUROBATS	MOP every four years	StC annually	AC annually
ASCOBANS	MOP every four years	AC (institutional & scientific sessions) annually	
Sharks MOU ²	MOS every three years	None	AC twice intersessionally
IOSEA MOU	MOS; periodicity may be revised at any MOS. Owing to lack of funds, MOS has convened once in the last five years.	None	AC meets only in conjunction with the MOS

ScC = Scientific Council; StC = Standing Committee; COP = Conference of the Parties; MOP = Meeting of the Parties; AC = Advisory Committee; TC = Technical Committee.

4. Of all the CMS instruments, EUROBATS resembles ASCOBANS the most closely, being a small, legally binding Agreement. It has three full-time equivalent staff, compared to one-and-a-half in ASCOBANS. Its averaged annual budget is € 400,000 compared with € 200,000 in ASCOBANS, including Programme Support Costs.
5. Because EUROBATS has a broad work plan, it is deemed essential that scientific sessions be held annually. The Agreement used to have both scientific and institutional sessions in one AC meeting, but when the EUROBATS grew and there was a great demand for scientific discussion, it was decided these two sessions be separated. However, the Secretariat does not prepare substantive documents to the annual scientific sessions (apart from a two-page report on key activities). Exceptionally in MOP years,

¹ CMS Standing Committee also meets immediately prior to and following the COP. However, these are largely procedural meetings, causing minimal extra preparation or cost.

² Both MOUs funded through voluntary contributions only.

EUROBATS aims to hold both sessions back-to-back and an additional Standing Committee meeting in conjunction with MOP, a procedural meeting similar to that of CMS prior to the COP.

6. At AC24, there was a discussion about the possibility of not holding the institutional session of the AC at every other meeting to reduce the above-mentioned workload and cost (Option 2), and so the Secretariat was instructed to undertake this analysis.
7. Table 2 below outlines three options regarding the frequency that Parties may consider for future meetings. In order to illustrate how these options would play out. Table 3 further below outlines how the meetings could be distributed over the quadrennium for each of the options.

Table 2. Options for future AC meetings in non-MOP years.

	Frequency of Scientific Sessions	Frequency of Institutional Sessions	Comments
Option 1	Yearly	Yearly	Status Quo.
Pros:	Momentum in scientific and instructional sessions maintained.		
Cons:	Requires significant Secretariat capacity for preparation, particularly regarding meeting documents.		
Option 2	Yearly	Every four years	Institutional session would be held once in between MOPs. End of term and mid-term budget reports could be sent to Parties by mail. If institutional issues arose intersessionally, the Secretariat could seek advice in writing via email.
Pros:	Momentum on scientific issues maintained. Not quite as heavy on document preparation as Option 1. Parties could focus attendance on expert rather than policy participation. More time available to scientific discussions.		
Cons:	Would still require considerable Secretariat capacity for preparation. Potential loss of oversight on institutional issues.		
Option 3	Every two years	Every two years	Meetings to be held the year after and the year before MOP. Intersessional work could be driven via the ASCOBANS online workspace, online meetings (Skype, Zoom, etc.) and email correspondence. Consider how to respond to urgent developments.
Pros:	More Secretariat capacity to devote to supporting substantive work. Savings in travel costs for Parties, AC Host Government and the Secretariat. Potentially more funds available for scientific and conservation work on the ground.		
Cons:	Potential loss of momentum on both scientific and institutional issues. Reduced Party engagement. NSG would need to convene on its own, incurring additional travel costs.		

Table 3. Potential frequency of meetings over a quadrennium.

	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Option 1	MOP	AC-S + AC-I	AC-S + AC-I	AC-S + AC-I	MOP
Option 2	MOP	AC-S	AC-S + AC-I	AC-S	MOP
Option 3	MOP	AC-S + AC-I		AC-S + AC-I	MOP

MOP = Meeting of the Parties; AC-S = Advisory Committee Scientific Session; AC-I= Advisory Committee Institutional Session.

Discussion

8. The Meetings of Parties (MOP) to ASCOBANS are held less frequently than in most other Agreements, but Advisory Committee meetings with scientific and institutional oversight occur every intersessional year. This is more frequently than AEWA and CMS Memoranda of Understanding, and as frequently as CMS and EUROBATS.
9. While the CMS Sharks MOU does not have an institutional committee, the Secretariat provides financial reports to Signatories annually via email. If the AC so recommended, the same method could be applied for ASCOBANS, diminishing the need for institutional sessions at AC meetings. Option 2 presents a scenario with reduced frequency of institutional sessions at AC meetings. This may bring some savings for the Parties sending representatives to AC meetings specifically to cover institutional matters.
10. If the Parties wished, the MOP could decide to reduce the frequency of AC meetings (Option 3). Per meeting, this would mean approximately € 6,400 savings on the Secretariat's travel, depending on location. Also, the Host Government of the AC meeting would not have to pay a potential over-expenditure of the AC budget line (which would be approximately € 2,645³). These savings, however, are relatively small.
11. Options 2-3 in Table 2 and 3 above present some very minor cost savings. However, the hidden cost is in secretariat time, the time spent preparing both documents and logistics for the meetings. Reducing an entire AC meeting per quadrennium would save weeks of secretariat time, freeing staff up to work, for example, on following up on Action Points from AC meetings, liaising with relevant stakeholders, following up on potential projects and funding, and better supporting Working Groups.
12. However, reducing an AC meeting or sessions might reduce the momentum of the Agreement, as described in Table 2. Parties, observers and the Secretariat would also need to commit to making better use of online working methods, such as the ASCOBANS Workspace⁴.
13. If the AC would like to continue meeting annually, another option would be to consider removing some documents from its agenda. The standard documents that the Secretariat prepares are:
 - **Core:** Provisional Agenda, Provisional Annotated Agenda and Schedule.
 - **Work Plan elements:** Report of the Secretariat on Outreach and Education Activities, Activities Requiring Funding, ASCOBANS Work Plan Overview, Draft List of Dates of Interest to ASCOBANS.
 - **Institutional:** Report on Administrative Issues, End of Term Report on Budgetary Issues, Mid-Term Report on Budgetary Issues and Status of Accession and Acceptance of the Agreement's Amendment.

Additional documents are produced according to requests from the AC and in line with the Work Plan.

14. Finally, the AC may wish to advise the MOP to continue the existing arrangements and to keep them under review, proposing *ad hoc* changes to address perceived shortcomings and to make improvements to efficiency.

Action requested:

The AC is requested to consider the options presented above, on the frequency and nature of its future meetings; and advise the Secretariat on any follow-up in preparation for MOP9.

³ This excludes the fee of the report writer supplied by the Secretariat (ca. € 1,050).

⁴ <https://workspace.ascobans.org/>