

Agenda Item 4.2

Reports

Report of the Secretariat

Document 4.2

Report of the ASCOBANS Secretariat

Action Requested

- Take note
- Give guidance

Submitted by

Secretariat



Note:

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

REPORT OF THE ASCOBANS SECRETARIAT

1. Pursuant to Article 4.3 of the Agreement, the Secretariat is presenting a summary report on progress made and difficulties encountered since the last Meeting of the Parties (MOP) in 2016. The report takes into account the functions of the Secretariat as outlined in Resolution 8.2 on the ASCOBANS Work Plan 2017-2020. Issues relating to the Agreement's finances and administration are reported upon separately in ASCOBANS/MOP9/Doc.7.1a.

Meetings

2. One of the core functions of the Secretariat is to organize meetings of the bodies of the Agreement, as well as any working group meetings or workshops as instructed by Parties. The following 16 meetings and workshops were prepared and/or serviced by the Secretariat since the 8th Meeting of the Parties (MOP8):
 - Expert Workshop 'Unacceptable Interactions' and Bycatch, 22-23 February 2017, Bonn, Germany
 - ECS/ASCOBANS/ACCOBAMS Best Practice Workshop: Fostering Inter-regional Cooperation in Underwater Noise Monitoring and Impact Assessment in Waters around Europe, 29 April 2017, Middelfart, Denmark
 - 6th Meeting of the North Sea Group, 19-20 June 2017, Wilhelmshaven, Germany
 - 13th Meeting of the Jastarnia Group, 20-22 June 2017, Wilhelmshaven, Germany
 - 23rd Meeting of the Advisory Committee, 5-7 September 2017, Le Conquet, France
 - 14th Meeting of the Jastarnia Group, 12-14 March 2018, Copenhagen, Denmark
 - Joint ACCOBAMS/ASCOBANS/ECS/SPA-RAC Workshop on Marine Debris and Cetacean Stranding, 6 April 2018, La Spezia, Italy
 - 7th Meeting of the North Sea Group, 24 September 2018, Vilnius, Lithuania
 - 24th Meeting of the Advisory Committee, 25-27 September 2018, Vilnius, Lithuania
 - Workshop of the Intersessional Working Group on National Reporting, 7-8 February 2019, Bonn, Germany
 - 15th Meeting of the Jastarnia Group, 18-20 March 2019, Turku, Finland
 - Joint ACCOBAMS and ASCOBANS Workshop on Harmonization of the Best Practices for Necropsy of Cetaceans for the Development of Diagnostic Frameworks, 25-26 June 2019, Padua, Italy
 - 8th Meeting of the North Sea Group, 15 September 2019, Stralsund, Germany
 - 1st Meeting of the Common Dolphin Group, 16 September 2019, Stralsund, Germany
 - 25th Meeting of the Advisory Committee, 17-19 September 2019, Stralsund, Germany
 - 16th Meeting of the Jastarnia Group, 8-9 June 2020, online
3. Reports of most meetings and workshops listed above are available on the ASCOBANS website under [Advisory Committee](#) and [Other meetings](#). The Workshop on Management of MPAs for Small Cetaceans, planned for April 2020, was postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Similarly, the 1st Meeting of the Joint Bycatch Working Group of ACCOBAMS and ASCOBANS, planned for May 2020, was postponed. The 9th Meeting of the North Sea Group was scheduled to take place in conjunction with the Jastarnia Group meeting in June 2020, but since that meeting was moved online there was no urgency for the group to meet at the same time. New dates for these three events are to be determined.

National Reports

4. Article 4.2 of the Agreement instructs the Secretariat to "present to the Coordinating Authorities, each year no later than 30 June, a summary of the Party reports submitted in

accordance with Article 2.5 [...]”. However, following [Resolution 8.1](#) adopted at MOP8, annual national reports cover only certain topics, and all topics are covered only in a MOP year. Therefore, national report compilations were not developed in this intersessional period. All the available national reports can be found on the [ASCOBANS website](#).

5. A comprehensive national reporting form presented in [ASCOBANS/MOP9/Inf.5.1](#), including questions for all sections listed in Resolution 8.1, was developed in advance of MOP9. The overarching form was developed thanks to a voluntary contribution from the Netherlands. An intersessional working group developed the questions for sections timed for AC24. The form includes introductory text under each sub-section to describe the aim of the section and relevance of the questions. This approach continues in the current form. Questions for the current form were compiled – and amended, as needed – from forms used in 2017, 2018 and 2019. A draft form was circulated to Parties, experts, and Non-Party Range States for comments, and finalized by a consultant in close cooperation with the Secretariat. There were no resources for inputting the questions online in time for reports to be submitted to MOP.
6. At the time of writing this document, seven national reports – covering data from 2016 to 2019 as instructed by Resolution 8.1 – had been submitted to the Secretariat. If Parties agree to use the current questions for next year, the Secretariat can make the form available in Word format soon after the meeting. If Parties wish for the questions to be in an online format, this will take some time, depending on the Secretariat’s capacity.

Representation of ASCOBANS

7. Since MOP8, the Secretariat and its consultants were able to represent the Agreement at the following 40 conferences and meetings:
 - 67th Meeting of the CITES Standing Committee, 23 September 2016, Johannesburg, South Africa
 - 17th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP) to CITES, 24 Sept - 5 October 2016, Johannesburg, South Africa
 - 45th Meeting of the CMS Standing Committee, 9-10 November 2016, Bonn, Germany
 - 6th Meeting of the Parties to ACCOBAMS, 22-25 November 2016, Monaco, Monaco
 - 29th Meeting of the CITES Animals Committee, 18-22 July 2017, Geneva, Switzerland
 - 31st Annual Conference of the European Cetacean Society (ECS), 29 April - 3 May 2017, Middelfart, Denmark
 - 2nd Meeting of the Sessional Committee of the CMS Scientific Council, 10-13 July 2017, Bonn, Germany
 - 12th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to CMS, 23-28 October 2017, Manila, Philippines
 - 3rd Session of the UN Environment Assembly (UNEA3), 4-6 December 2017, Nairobi, Kenya
 - 32nd Annual Conference of ECS, 8-10 April 2018, La Spezia, Italy
 - 3rd Meeting of the Sessional Committee of the CMS Scientific Council, 29 May - 1 June 2018, Bonn, Germany
 - 30th Meeting of the CITES Animals Committee, 16-21 July 2018, Geneva, Switzerland
 - 28th Symposium on the Marine Environment of the German Federal Maritime and Hydrographic Agency, 11-13 June 2018, Hamburg, Germany
 - UN Consultative Process on Oceans and the Law of the Sea (ICP-19), 18-22 June 2018, New York, USA
 - 48th Meeting of the CMS Standing Committee, 23-24 October 2018, Bonn, Germany
 - 18th Meeting of the CITES COP, 17-28 August 2019, Geneva, Switzerland

- International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) Working Group on Bycatch of Protected Species (WGBYC), 5-8 March 2019, Faro, Portugal
 - Symposium 'Marine Mammals in Changing Environment, 7-8 March 2019, Hamburg, Germany
 - Scientific Symposium 'Bright Future? Harbour Porpoises in the Wadden Sea', 11 April 2019, Wilhelmshaven, Germany
 - 10th Meeting of the HELCOM Working Group of the State of the Environment and Nature Conservation, 6-10 May 2019, Hamina, Finland
 - International Whaling Commission (IWC) Workshop on Bycatch Mitigation Opportunities in the Western Indian Ocean and Arabian Sea, 8-9 May, Nairobi, Kenya
 - IWC Technical Workshop on Bycatch Mitigation Opportunities in the Western Indian Ocean and Arabian Sea, 8-9 May 2019, Nairobi, Kenya
 - The EU Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries (STECF) Expert Working Group Meeting on the implementation of Regulation (EC) 812/2004, 21 June 2019, Ispra, Italy
 - 72nd Meeting of the CITES Standing Committee, 28 August 2019, Geneva, Switzerland
 - Joint OSPAR-HELCOM workshop to examine possibilities for developing indicators for incidental bycatch of birds and marine mammals, 3-5 September 2019, Copenhagen, Denmark
 - 13th Meeting of HELCOM Expert Group on Marine Mammals, 24-26 September 2019, Helsinki, Finland
 - ACCOBAMS Workshop on Sonars and Cetacean Interactions, 8-9 October 2019, Toulon, France
 - 7th Meeting of the Parties to ACCOBAMS, 5-8 November 2019, Istanbul, Turkey
 - 4th Meeting of the Sessional Committee of the CMS Scientific Council, 12-15 November 2019, Bonn, Germany
 - 49th Meeting of the CMS Standing Committee, 19 November 2019, Bonn, Germany
 - IWC Workshop III on Marine Debris, 3-5 December 2019, La Carriga, Spain
 - Meeting of the Marine Expert Group (MEG) under the EU Birds and Habitats Directives, 4 December 2019, Brussels, Belgium
 - Workshop 'Harmonizing Global Strandings Response', 7 December 2019, Barcelona, Spain
 - Workshop 'Incentivizing Consistent Data Collection and Transparent Reporting of Marine Mammal Bycatch in Fisheries', 8 December 2019, Barcelona, Spain
 - 2nd World Marine Mammal Conference and 33rd Annual Conference of ECS, 9-12 December 2019, Barcelona, Spain
 - 13th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to CMS, 17-22 February 2020, Gandhinagar, India
 - 13th Meeting of the ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee, 26-28 February 2020, Cap d'Ail, France
 - ICES WGBYC, 10-13 March 2020, Den Helgen, the Netherlands and remotely
 - IWC Scientific Committee Meeting (SC68B), 12-24 May 2020, online
 - Roundtable on preventing bycatch of Common Dolphins and Harbour Porpoises in fisheries, 26 June 2020, online
8. It should be noted that in many cases, ASCOBANS representation came at no or much reduced cost, since staff members were travelling also on behalf of CMS and no extra charge was made to the Agreement.

9. In addition, AC Members and Observers kindly reported back from many other key meetings and conferences to AC23 ([ASCOBANS/AC23/Inf.7.1a](#)). Such summaries were not produced for AC24 nor AC25. Parties are requested to consider whether *Reports from Relevant Meetings back to ASCOBANS* should be produced for future AC meetings or not (see [ASCOBANS/MOP9/Doc.5.2/Rev.1](#), Activity 67). This activity is highly dependent on AC Members' and Observers' reporting to the Secretariat.

Outreach

10. The Secretariat has produced reports on its outreach activities for each meeting of the Advisory Committee: [AC23/Doc.7.1](#), [AC24/Doc.10.1](#), [AC25/Doc.8.1](#).
11. The highlight of the outreach activities in the past quadrennium was the 25th Anniversary of ASCOBANS in 2017. It marked 25 years since the Agreement was first open for signature at the United Nations Headquarters in New York in March 1992, where it remained open for signature until its entry into force in March 1994. The Secretariat issued a press release and Executive Secretary congratulated Parties and ASCOBANS stakeholders on the occasion with a video message. The Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme also issued a message on the occasion, available on the [ASCOBANS website](#). In addition, the Secretariat placed a number of special articles on the website highlighting the history of the Agreement and key issues, and launched the *People behind ASCOBANS* series, published on the ASCOBANS news page and Facebook page.
12. The ASCOBANS anniversary book *European Whales, Dolphins and Porpoises: Marine Mammal Conservation in Practice* was published in December 2019 by [Elsevier](#), to mark 25 years since the Agreement entered into force. This book was commissioned for ASCOBANS and written by Peter Evans (Chair of the North Sea Group, and Co-chair of the Joint Bycatch Working Group of ACCOBAMS and ASCOBANS) as requested by the Advisory Committee some years ago. The book aims to be the most authoritative review of northern European cetaceans and the threats they face, whilst also giving insights into how ASCOBANS, an international Agreement was created, functions, and can meet obstacles to progress. The book includes contributions from several people who have been involved in the work of ASCOBANS throughout its existence, which also makes the book an interesting read.
13. To mark the 15th celebration of the International Day of the Baltic Harbour Porpoise in May 2017, the Secretariat issued a special anniversary edition of the '[Hello, little whale](#)' video in all the languages of the countries around the Baltic Sea, as well as in English. The video campaign had more than 50,000 views on Facebook.
14. The [ASCOBANS website](#) continues to be the most important outreach tool at the disposal of the Secretariat. In the period from 1 January 2017 to 30 June 2020, it had nearly 135,000-page views. Content updates are required on an ongoing basis, but dependent on staff capacity. At the time of writing this document, the ASCOBANS Kids webpage was not available for technical reasons: the webpage is hosted outside the ASCOBANS domain, and the joint CMS and AEWA Information and Communications Team is now assessing whether the webpage could be hosted in the ASCOBANS domain. A CMS Family-wide website upgrade is scheduled for 2021 to improve functionality and enhance security.

Cooperation with Parties, Non-Party Range States, International Organizations, NGOs

Parties

15. The Secretariat has regular and productive contacts with the coordinating authorities of all Parties, as well as members of the Advisory Committee.
16. The effectiveness of intersessional work partly depends on the time the Coordinators and AC members can devote to the Agreement, which generally constitutes only one of many dossiers

they deal with. Due to the heavy non-ASCOBANS workload of the people involved, deadlines for reports or comments to be submitted to the Secretariat are not always observed, causing delays in the work of the Agreement. The Secretariat would like to reiterate its call to Parties to ensure that National Coordinators and Advisory Committee members are able to dedicate the required time in order to progress work intersessionally.

17. The importance of scientific expertise at the meetings of the regional working groups, as well as at the Advisory Committee, cannot be overemphasized. The advice given to Parties through these fora should be of the highest technical quality and scientifically sound, so that it can be a good basis for the decisions to be made by policy-makers. The Secretariat therefore urges all Parties to ensure that scientists are able to participate fully in these meetings and any intersessional work to be carried out.

Non-Party Range States

18. Throughout the intersessional period, the Secretariat has made efforts to keep in touch with non-Party Range States (Estonia, Ireland, Latvia, Norway, Portugal, Russia, Spain, and the European Union), inviting them to meetings, informing them of meeting outcomes and encouraging dialogue and engagement.
19. Resources do not allow personal visits by members of the Secretariat to non-Party Range States in order to encourage accession, but regular efforts are made in the margins of other conferences to speak to delegates from these countries and hand over information material on the Agreement and its activities. Parties' support in the efforts to recruit new Parties for ASCOBANS, for example through their bilateral contacts with neighbouring States or EU fora, remain crucial.

International Organizations

20. Cooperation with and active participation of relevant international and Intergovernmental Organizations remains a priority for the Agreement. Representation at their meetings is one important way in order to facilitate close contacts, and as outlined above reports both by the Secretariat and members of the Advisory Committee are presented annually to the AC.
21. The Secretariats of ASCOBANS and ACCOBAMS strive to cooperate as closely as possible and keep each other informed of relevant developments and initiatives. They also encourage coordination and synergies in scientific intersessional work carried out by working groups and regularly hold joint workshops (for details see above). In the cases of CMS and ASCOBANS, shared staff ensures maximum synergies. Wherever appropriate, members of the scientific advisory bodies get invited to the meetings of the bodies of the other agreements. This pertains specifically to CMS, ACCOBAMS and ASCOBANS. Staff members frequently represent the whole CMS Family at meetings of other multilateral environment agreements.
22. The Secretariat submits a progress report to each IWC meeting. ASCOBANS benefits from cooperation between CMS and the IWC, e.g. through the possibility of occasional representation at the Commission Meetings and the good working relationship between the Secretariats, which since 2000 have had a Memorandum of Understanding. The Secretariats are regularly in touch regarding areas for cooperation.
23. There is also mutual exchange of information as opportunities and needs arise with the HELCOM Secretariat, the OSPAR Secretariat, the NAMMCO Secretariat and the European Commission. Given the limited time and financial resources available for cooperation, ASCOBANS has especially benefited from the participation of the CMS Secretariat in many conferences and meetings.

Non-governmental Organizations

24. The Secretariat continues to collaborate with a number of NGOs, such as Cetacean Strandings Investigation Programme, Coalition Clean Baltic, Humane Society International, the German NGO Nature and Biodiversity Conservation Union (NABU), OceanCare, Sea Watch Foundation, Whale and Dolphin Conservation, Wild Migration, World Wide Fund for Nature and the Zoological Society of London. Representatives of other NGOs so far not directly involved with the Agreement have agreed to participate in working groups when approached by the Secretariat.
25. Many NGO representatives play a key role in the implementation of the work plan of the Advisory Committee, chairing and participating in ASCOBANS working groups, taking part in drafting groups, organizing or supporting workshops, developing and submitting reports and papers, and engaging in important outreach and education activities. Without this support, much less progress would have been possible on many tasks assigned to the Advisory Committee and Secretariat. Further, close links with the European Cetacean Society are maintained, including regular attendance at their meetings and organization of joint workshops.

Conclusion

26. The report above illustrates that the small Secretariat team has done a great deal, delivered on the mandates given by the Parties and maintained the profile of the Agreement. Further details regarding implementation of the 2017-2020 Work Plan (Resolution 8.2) can be found in the Secretariat's reports to the Advisory Committee: [AC23/Doc.1.3](#), [AC24/Doc.1.3](#), [AC25/Doc.10](#).