

ACTION PLAN FOR THE CONSERVATION OF CETACEANS IN THE MEDITERRANEAN SEA



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Mediterranean Action Plan
Barcelona Convention

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Decision IG.22/12

Updated Action Plans Concerning “Cetaceans”, “Coralligenous and Other Calcareous Bio-concretions”, and “Species Introductions and Invasive Species”; Mandate for update of the “Action Plan on Marine and Coastal Birds” and revision of the “Reference List of Marine and Coastal Habitat Types in the Mediterranean”

The 19th Meeting of the Contracting Parties to the Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment and the Coastal Region of the Mediterranean, hereinafter referred to as “the Barcelona Convention”,

Recalling Articles 11 and 12 of the Protocol concerning Specially Protected Areas and Biological Diversity in the Mediterranean, hereinafter referred to as the “SPA/BD Protocol”, on national measures for the protection and the conservation of species and on the formulation and implementation of action plans for their conservation and recovery respectively;

Recalling Decision IG.19/12 of COP 16 (Marrakesh, Morocco, November 2009) related to the Amendments of the list of Annexes II and III of the SPA/BD Protocol and more particularly the marine and coastal bird species included then in Annex II to the SPA/BD Protocol “List of endangered or threatened species”;

Recalling Decision IG.20/4 and IG.21/3 of COP 17 (Paris, France, February 2012) and COP 18 (Istanbul, Turkey, December 2013) respectively adopting Ecological Objectives, Operational Objectives, GES and related targets ;

Recalling Decision IG.21/17 on the Programme of Work of COP 18 (Istanbul, Turkey, December 2013) on the update of the Action Plan for the Conservation of Cetaceans in the Mediterranean Sea and the Action Plan for the Conservation of the Coralligenous and Other Calcareous Bio-concretions in the Mediterranean Sea;

Having considered the report of the 12th Meeting of SPA/RAC Focal Points (Athens, Greece, May 2015);

1. **Adopts** the Updated Action Plan for the Conservation of Cetaceans in the Mediterranean Sea, as contained in Annex I to this Decision;
2. **Adopts** the Updated Action Plan for the Conservation of the Coralligenous and Other Calcareous Bio-concretions in the Mediterranean Sea, as contained in Annex II to this Decision;
3. **Adopts** the Updated Action Plan concerning Species Introductions and Invasive Species in the Mediterranean Sea, as contained in Annex III to this Decision;
4. **Requests** the Contracting Parties to take the necessary measures for the implementation of the updated Action Plans and report according to the cycle and format of the MAP/Barcelona Convention reporting system;
5. **Requests** SPA/RAC to provide support to the full implementation of the updated Action Plans;
6. **Requests also** SPA/RAC to update the Action Plan for the Conservation of Bird Species listed in Annex II to the SPA/BD Protocol including all 25 target species, and to revise the Reference List of Marine and Coastal Habitat Types in the Mediterranean for consideration by COP 20, taking in full account the biodiversity-related MAP Ecological Objectives, IMAP, and GES targets.

INTRODUCTION

1. The Contracting Parties to the Convention for the Protection of the Mediterranean Sea against pollution and its related protocols, included among their priority targets for the period 1985-1995 the protection of marine endangered species (Genoa Declaration, 1985).
2. When the Genoa Declaration in which these priority targets were included was adopted, the monk seal and the sea turtles were mentioned as examples of endangered marine species in the Mediterranean. Action plans for these species were adopted in 1987 and in 1989.
3. There is now clear evidence that some cetacean populations in the Mediterranean Sea Area are also endangered. Consequently, measures to enhance their protection should be considered a priority within the Mediterranean Action Plan.
4. Many important aspects of cetacean biology, behaviour, range and habitats in the Mediterranean are poorly known, but the actual degradation of the populations is such that action plan can no longer be postponed, in line with the precautionary principle adopted by the Contracting Parties in 1989. Using the available information, it is possible to prepare an Action Plan for the conservation of Mediterranean cetaceans. This Plan will be adjusted, as necessary, when more information becomes available.
5. Concrete protection measures, co-ordinated programmes for scientific research and public awareness campaigns can ensure the survival and assist in the recovery of cetacean populations.
6. Effective and durable cetacean protection in the Mediterranean Sea Area implies the cooperation with existing programmes and plans, such as:
 - at the international level: the global conventions regarding the protection of the marine environment (in particular the 1973/78 MARPOL Convention and London Dumping Convention), the conventions on endangered species [i.e. UN Environment Global Plan of Action for Conservation of Marine Mammals, adopted in 1984, the Bonn Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals and CITES (Washington Convention)] and fisheries management plans.
Furthermore, considering the relevant work carried out within the framework of the International Whaling Commission (IWC), the Contracting Parties agree to address an appeal to the IWC to designate the Mediterranean Sea Area as a Whale sanctuary;
 - at the regional level: all relevant regional agreements (in particular FAO General Fishery Council for the Mediterranean, FAO/GFCM and the Bern Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats);
 - at the national level: the measures adopted, or to be adopted, by the Mediterranean States.
7. The most serious threats to cetaceans are :
 - taking, defined as to harass, hunt, capture or kill or attempt to harass, hunt, capture or kill any cetaceans;
 - pollution, as defined by the Convention for the Protection of the Mediterranean Sea against Pollution;
 - reduction or depletion of food resources;
 - incidental catches in fishing gear;
 - degradation and disturbances of habitats caused by other factors.
8. This Action Plan for conservation of cetaceans in the Mediterranean Sea Area outlines objectives, priority actions, and co-ordinating structures. These different components are mutually reinforcing and must be taken together to have the best chance of success.

¹ in the Mediterranean, RAC/SPA collaborated closely with the Secretariat of ACCOBAMS in elaborating the revised Appendix.

OBJECTIVES

9. The objectives of this Action Plan are:
- a) Protection and conservation of cetacean habitats including feeding, breeding and calving grounds, without however, being restricted to these aspects.
 - b) Protection, conservation and the recovery of cetacean populations in the Mediterranean Sea Area.

PRIORITIES

10. The following general priorities are recommended:
- prohibition of deliberate taking;
 - prevention and elimination of pollution;
 - elimination of incidental catches in fishing gear;
 - prevention of over-exploitation of fishery resources;
 - protection of feeding, breeding and calving grounds;
 - monitoring, research and data collection and dissemination with regard to biology, behaviour, range and habitats of cetaceans;
 - educational activities aimed at the public at large and fishermen

OBLIGATIONS

11. The Contracting Parties shall take all the necessary measures to ensure a favourable conservation status for cetaceans by protecting them and their habitats from induced and cumulative effects resulting directly or indirectly from activities under national jurisdiction or control.

Such measures should include:

- the prohibition of any deliberate taking of cetaceans as well as ensuring enforcement of existing laws;
- the adoption of fishery policies that avoid the adverse effects of fisheries on the conservation status of cetaceans in the Mediterranean Sea Area.
- the regulation of fishing gear and practices in order to eliminate by-catches and to prevent fishing gear from being lost or discarded at sea;
- a ban on the use of large-scale driftnets;
- the safe release of any cetaceans incidentally caught in fishing gear;
- the adoption of national and regional strategies to phase-out the discharge of toxic compounds in the Mediterranean Sea Area, giving priority to those substances contained in the black and grey lists of the Protocol for the Protection of the Mediterranean Sea Against Pollution from Land-Based Sources;
- the establishment of port reception facilities for the collection of ship generated garbage and of bilge and ballast waters;
- the development of scientific research and monitoring, using non-destructive and non-invasive procedures in order to :
 - a) assess the status, dynamic and seasonal movements of the populations concerned
 - b) identify present and potential threats to the various species
 - c) make full use of the information that becomes available by establishing an efficient system for reporting by-catches and stranded specimens and carry out full autopsies in order to collect issues for further studies and reveal possible cause of death, with special regard to contaminant loads, stomach contents, disease incidents and any physiological or anatomical abnormalities.

- the creation of a network of marine protected areas, including feeding, breeding and calving grounds for cetaceans;
- the development of widespread campaigns to increase public and fishermen awareness to support the conservation measures and to encourage the establishment of voluntary observer programmes to report sightings and strandings.

The conservation status will be taken as «favourable» when:

- population dynamic data indicate that cetaceans in the Mediterranean Sea Area are maintaining themselves on a long-term basis as a viable component of the ecosystem;
- the range of cetaceans in the Mediterranean Sea Area is neither currently being reduced, nor is likely to be reduced on a long-term basis.
- there is, and will be in the foreseeable future, sufficient habitats in the Mediterranean Sea Area to maintain cetaceans on a long-term basis

12. The Contracting Parties shall apply the conservation measures prescribed in this Action Plan and co-operate closely to achieve and maintain a favourable conservation status for cetaceans.

CO-ORDINATING STRUCTURE

13. It is necessary to co-ordinate the activities envisaged in this Action Plan. It is considered that the Specially Protected Areas/Regional Activity Centre (SPA/RAC) of the Mediterranean Action Plan is the most appropriate centre for this coordination in co-operation with other bodies concerned.

14. Its major function will be

- a) collect and evaluate data relating to the conservation status of cetaceans in the Mediterranean Sea Area;
- b) disseminate and exchange information;
- c) assist and/or organise expert meetings on specific topics regarding cetaceans in the Mediterranean Sea Area;
- d) contribute to the identification, selection and establishment of marine protected areas for cetaceans;
- e) prepare recommendations for the Contracting Parties aimed at the protection and Conservation of cetaceans in the Mediterranean Sea Area as well as a timetable and financial proposals for their implementation;
- f) organize training courses in this field.

15. The conservation status of cetaceans in the Mediterranean Sea Area, the content of this Action Plan and its implementation shall be reviewed every four years.

AMENDED APPENDIX:

ADDITIONAL POINTS FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ACTION PLAN FOR THE PERIOD 2016-2020

Taking into account

- (i) the work done at national level for the conservation of cetacean species in the Mediterranean since the adoption of the Action Plan in 1991,
- (ii) the progress made so far in the implementation of the provisions of ACCOBAMS in the region and
- (iii) the available knowledge about the status of the Mediterranean cetacean populations, the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention are invited to orient their action regarding the implementation of the Action Plan towards the following priorities during the period 2016-2020.

LEGAL AND INSTITUTIONAL MEASURES

- To ratify the ACCOBAMS Agreement, if they have not already done so, and to implement its Resolutions and Recommendations of relevance for the Mediterranean Sea. As agreed during the 14th Ordinary Meeting of the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention (Portoroz, Slovenia, November 2005), the common obligations relating to cetaceans under the SPA/BD Protocol are fulfilled by the implementation of ACCOBAMS. In this context, close cooperation at the national level between the SPA/RAC National Focal Points and the ACCOBAMS Focal Points is highly recommended.
- To ensure that cetaceans are covered, at national level, by appropriate regulation measures providing for the elimination of deliberate killing and for the mitigation of the adverse impacts from their interactions with human activities, in particular in relation to:
 - by catch and depredation in fishing gears,
 - seismic surveys and other marine noise generating activities,
 - harassment by leisure boating and scientific activities and
 - collisions with ships (ship strikes)
- Ensure, through regulation or other appropriate approaches, that whale-watching activity is environmentally sound and sustainably conducted, using, as appropriate, high quality certification systems for whale-watching.
- Where relevant for cetacean conservation, to support the use of the compliance mechanisms set for the Barcelona Convention and the ACCOBAMS Agreement, in particular by encouraging the notification of non-compliance and of non-follow-up cases.
- SPA/RAC should pursue its collaboration with the Secretariat of ACCOBAMS, by facilitating the implementation of the Annex 2 (Conservation Plan) of ACCOBAMS, in particular in fulfilling its function of the Regional Coordination Unit for the Mediterranean of the ACCOBAMS Agreement.

IMPROVING THE KNOWLEDGE ABOUT CETACEAN POPULATIONS

- Considering the urgent need of obtaining reliable estimates of cetacean populations and data about their distribution, a special effort should be done in the period 2016-2020 to undertake the comprehensive survey of abundance and distribution of cetaceans being planned by ACCOBAMS (ACCOBAMS Survey initiative). Their contribution (funding, equipment, vessels, planes, etc.) and the involvement of their scientists in all the survey phases (planning, field work and data analysis) being a key factor for the success of the Survey, the Contracting Parties should facilitate and support the Survey Initiative and liaise closely with SPA/RAC to ensure that the data collected by the Survey serve also as baseline data for the Good Environmental Status concerning cetacean species as defined by the contracting Parties under the Ecological Objective 1 of the EcAp process.

REDUCING CETACEAN-FISHERIES INTERACTIONS

- To assess the cetacean bycatch and depredation in their fisheries and adopt mitigation measures taking into account the requirements for cetacean conservation and the need for the development of sustainable and responsible fishing activities. In this context, the Contracting Parties are invited to conform to the recommendations from ACCOBAMS and GFCM on this issue.
- SPA/RAC should strengthen its collaboration with the Secretariats of ACCOBAMS and GFCM to provide assistance to the Mediterranean countries in mitigating the impacts of the interactions occurring between cetacean species and fishing activities, through investigating innovative and environmentally sound mitigation measures and by disseminating information on relevant best practices and successful initiatives.

MITIGATING THE IMPACT OF UNDERWATER NOISE

- Pursue the development and the implementation of a basin-wide strategy for underwater noise monitoring in the Mediterranean, as proposed by the ACCOBAMS/ASCOBANS/CMS Joint Noise working group, under the Ecological Objective 11 of the EcAp process.
- Development of acoustic mapping using standardised methodologies to build a comprehensive picture of the spatial and temporal distribution of anthropogenic noise sources. Mapping effort should be deployed in the noise hotspot areas identified in the Mediterranean by ACCOBAMS, taking into account the available knowledge regarding the distribution of cetacean species, including areas that are affected at different levels of noise.
- Promote awareness of the anthropogenic noise impacts on cetaceans, targeting in particular decision makers, key players in the industry organisations and the stakeholders in the shipping sectors.
- Considering the increasing number of seismic surveys in the Mediterranean Sea, SPA/RAC should liaise closely with the Secretariat of ACCOBAMS, the national authorities of the Mediterranean countries and relevant companies to promote the collection and dissemination of cetacean data from MMOs (Marine Mammal Observers) during seismic surveys.

HABITAT CONSERVATION

- In addition to implementing the provisions of the relevant international and regional agreements related to combatting pollution and eliminating sources of degradation of the marine environment (IMO regulations, relevant Protocols of the Barcelona Convention, Convention on Biological Diversity, etc.), each Contracting Party should establish a list of marine areas under its jurisdiction identified as of special importance for cetaceans, using as appropriate the tools developed at regional and international levels for inventorying sites of conservation interest, in particular the list of areas of special importance for cetaceans in the ACCOBAMS area .
- The areas of special importance for cetaceans should be granted a protection status that ensures the long term preservation of the species and the sustainable management of human activities having impacts on cetaceans.



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