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**Draft Updated Action Plan for the conservation of Cetaceans in the Mediterranean Sea**

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## **Draft Updated Action Plan for the conservation of Cetaceans in the Mediterranean Sea**

### **FOREWORD**

The Action Plan for the conservation of cetaceans in the Mediterranean Sea was adopted by the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention in 1991. It aims at ensuring the recovery of cetacean populations in the Mediterranean. The Action Plan was prepared using the information available about the cetacean populations and the threats hanging over them as known in 1991. However, aware that many important aspects of cetacean biology, behaviour, range and habitats in the Mediterranean were poorly known, the contracting Parties agreed that the Action Plan should be amended where necessary.

The objective of the amendments proposed in this document is to revise the list of “Additional Points for the Implementation of the Action Plan” (Appendix to the Action Plan, adopted by the Focal Points for SPAs in October 1992). The revised Appendix proposed hereinafter aims at providing new orientations for the Action Plan that are in line with the evolving regional context regarding cetacean conservation and with the new challenges and priorities as identified by the most recent scientific knowledge. Given the strong linkages between the Action Plan and the implementation of ACCOBAMS<sup>1</sup> in the Mediterranean, RAC/SPA collaborated closely with the Secretariat of ACCOBAMS in elaborating the revised Appendix.

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<sup>1</sup> Agreement on the Conservation of Cetaceans in the Black Sea Mediterranean Sea and Contiguous Atlantic Area, concluded under the auspices of the Bonn Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS)

## **ACTION PLAN FOR THE CONSERVATION OF CETACEANS IN THE MEDITERRANEAN SEA**

### 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:
  - bycatch 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)
- 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.
- RAC/SPA 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 RAC/SPA 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.
- RAC/SPA 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 acoustic pollution

- 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 stockholders in the shipping sectors.
- Considering the increasing number of seismic surveys in the Mediterranean Sea, RAC/SPA 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.