

Guidance for the Development of ASCOBANS Species Action Plans

Cetacean populations face a suite of contemporary and emerging threats. For effective management and protection of populations, it is important to understand the impacts of these threats on cetaceans, evaluate them and, where necessary, develop and implement mitigation measures and monitor the success of these is crucial to the conservation of cetaceans and their habitats.

Species Action Plans,¹ such as the Recovery Plan for Baltic Harbour Porpoises (Jastarnia Plan), which was first agreed in its original version in 2002, the Conservation Plan for Harbour Porpoises in the North Sea, and the Conservation Plan for the Harbour Porpoise Population in the Western Baltic, the Belt Sea and the Kattegat, have long been a key feature of the efforts under ASCOBANS to improve the conservation status of small cetaceans.

ASCOBANS' sister Agreement in the Mediterranean and Black Seas, ACCOBAMS, also uses Conservation Plans² for cetaceans, as does the International Whaling Commission (IWC), which in 2008 introduced Conservation Management Plans (CMPs)³ to provide the Commission with an adaptive, flexible, tailored management tool that can be applied to improve conservation outcomes for the most at risk cetacean populations through the targeted management of human activities.

This document is based on the work undertaken and guidance developed by IWC, as well as on a document by Donovan and Panigada presented to the 10th Meeting of the ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee (ACCOBAMS-SC10/2015/Doc16 & Doc18). Only minor adjustments in content and terminology have been made to suit the needs and customs of ASCOBANS, but the basic structure and content recommended for Species Action Plans is identical.

Frameworks for International Collaboration

A key component of Species Action Plans (SAPs) is that they provide a framework for international collaboration to address threats to populations that occur within the waters of more than one country and on the high seas, i.e. they are complementary to national initiatives alone.

Based on the best available science and management expertise, SAPs should focus on reasonable, practical and achievable management actions that have the greatest chance of achieving measurable improvements in the conservation status of cetacean populations, including the necessary levels of protection for critical habitats. SAPs are living documents that must be reviewed regularly in the light of new scientific findings on both species and habitats, assessment against measurable milestones, and compliance with and enforcement of agreed measures.

SAPs require agreement from the relevant national authorities and must complement existing international conventions and agreements, as well as current national legislation and management regimes in participating range states. SAPs are designed to address, in a coordinated and collaborative way, transboundary gaps in existing conservation measures, and to provide guidance on shared priorities to be addressed through national processes. An essential component is the active involvement of key stakeholders – including those whose actions contribute to the threats.

¹ [ASCOBANS Species Action Plans](#)

² [ACCOBAMS Conservation Plans](#)

³ [IWC Conservation Management Plans](#)

Basic Requirements for Species Action Plans

Since they are management tools, SAPs require:

- (1) Clear, achievable goals and objectives
- (2) Practical, prioritized mitigation actions
- (3) Regular monitoring and reporting
- (4) Clear governance structures to coordinate the engagement of key stakeholders

Conservation management planning requires a balance between information and action. All plans should be informed by rigorous science, while at the same time adhering to the principles of the precautionary approach. They should also be normally multilateral in scope – that is: plans should be developed and implemented by more than one range state, along with relevant stakeholders.

The focus should be on practical and achievable actions that have the greatest chance of resulting in improved conservation status. Actions fall broadly under a number of headings, all of which must be driven by the need for positive conservation outcomes, and form the key component of any SAP. While there may be overlap, these can generally be incorporated under the following categories:

- (1) Coordination
- (2) Research essential for providing adequate management advice or filling knowledge gaps
- (3) Public awareness and capacity building
- (4) Monitoring
- (5) Mitigation measures

The following issues should be considered in the selection/implementation process:

- (1) A summary of the underlying science supporting the need for the plan to address threats to a population/populations and/or to a critical habitat
- (2) Overall objectives and anticipated short, medium and long term outcomes in terms of anticipated recovery or conservation benefits, and their relationship with aims and objectives of ASCOBANS
- (3) Potential mitigation measures, including any critically urgent measures that may need to be pursued in parallel to development of a full plan
- (4) Agreed and anticipated partners in the development and implementation of the planned SAP
- (5) Key elements of the process to be adopted in developing the plan
- (6) Anticipated timeframe for the development and implementation of a plan

Appropriate attention must be given to the clear articulation of goals (short, medium and/or long term) against which progress milestones can be effectively measured and reported. To this end, agreed actions arising from identified mitigation measures need to be clearly aligned with goals and objectives and a monitoring programme incorporated, as an integral part of the SAP.

Serious consideration should be given, early in the development process, to the involvement of stakeholders including the timing and nature of engagement opportunities. These may include ASCOBANS Parties, non-Party Range States of the Agreement and/or the species, inter-governmental organizations, non-governmental organizations, scientists, industries, local communities and civil society more generally.

In order to ensure SAPs are progressed effectively, it is essential that there is a designated coordination position, supported by a steering committee.

Components of a Species Action Plan (SAP)

1) Scientific Rationale

(a) Information on the cetacean population(s)

A summary of the underlying scientific rationale for developing a SAP must be provided. This should include relevant information in the following areas: taxonomy and biological data of the species/population, distribution and population estimates, trends and structure (if available), specific habitat use and characteristics and migration.

(b) Information on known and suspected threats to the population

A summary of the threats affecting the target species/population and, to the extent possible, an assessment of their relative importance at the population level must be provided. Where possible, this should also include a summary of information on known or potential mitigation measures to identified threats.

2) Objectives and Outcomes

This section should outline the overall objectives of the SAP and anticipated short, medium and long term outcomes in terms of anticipated recovery or conservation benefits, where short, medium and long-term will normally be of the order of 5, 10 and 15 years. Include a description on the relationship between the SAP objectives and outcomes and the ASCOBANS objectives.

3) Delivery partners

The proponents should provide information on the agreed (and any anticipated) stakeholders who will be involved in developing and implementing the plan. These should include relevant range states, either within or outside of ASCOBANS, and stakeholders who are involved in the threats.

4) Process

A draft or final SAP should provide an outline of the procedural steps that will be undertaken by relevant range states (and others) when developing and implementing the plan.

5) Timeframe for SAP Development and Implementation

A timeframe should be provided for the development and implementation of the SAP (as far as is possible).

6) Resources

Where feasible and applicable, the SAP should assign a budget to proposed actions.

Template

In order to assist in the development of a SAP and ensure a harmonized approach within ASCOBANS, and with ACCOBAMS and IWC, the template provided in the Annex should be used.

Annex

Template for an ASCOBANS Species Action Plan (SAP)

Table of Contents

Executive Summary

Provide a general overview of the plan. This section should include:

- Why a SAP is needed: Scene setting for a SAP – including a brief description of the target population, its habitat, and threats that impact the population.
- An overall goal of the SAP which would act as the mission statement for the plan.
- An overview of how the SAP is structured and what is detailed in each section.
- A Summary Table of High Priority Actions could also be included. High priority actions usually fall into the following categories:
 - Coordination (COORD)
 - Public awareness and capacity building (PACB)
 - Research essential for providing adequate management advice or filling in knowledge gaps (RES)
 - Monitoring (MON)
 - Mitigation measures (MIT)

1. Introduction

This section should briefly address the following questions:

- Why is active management needed for the identified cetacean population, threat or critical habitat?
- Why is a SAP the most appropriate management tool to achieve the stated conservation objectives?

This section should include:

- The scope, context and policy setting of the SAP.
- A detailed map of the known distribution of the population/critical habitat
 - If a SAP is being designed for a particular threat the map should include an outline of the area where the threat is encountered by the target cetacean population.
 - If the SAP is being designed for a particular critical habitat, the map should include the extent of the critical habitat.
- This section should also reference any current or previous conservation management actions relating to the draft SAP including conservation plans, legislation as well as any relevant peer reviewed papers or related documentation.

1.1 Overall Objectives of the SAP

To maximise the success of a plan and ensure that required changes are identified promptly; the measurable short, medium and long-term objectives should be identified. Thus, the monitoring of the target population, human activities affecting it, mitigation measures, and the effectiveness of those measures is essential.

Objectives of a SAP will not only relate to the conservation of the population but also to the interests of relevant stakeholders.

Insert the overall short, medium and long term objectives of the SAP.

2. Legal Framework

Insert a list of relevant international conventions, agreements and legislation and management arrangements that the plan may relate to. Supporting information can be contained in Appendices.

[Please note that the below are examples only]

2.1 International Conventions and Agreements

2.2 National Legislation and Management Arrangements

2.2.1 Participating Range State A

National legislation with respect to the species/population

2.2.2 Participating Range State B

National legislation with respect to the species/population

2.2.3 Participating Range State C

National legislation with respect to the species/population

2.2.4 Participating Range State A

Area X Fisheries Management Plan

2.2.5 Participating Range State B

Marine Protected Area X Operational Management Plan

3. Governance

3.1 Coordination of a SAP

Since a SAP may cover a large geographical area and involve several jurisdictions, it is important to establish an appropriate management structure for the SAP that identifies key stakeholders, their roles and responsibilities and the interaction between them during the development, implementation and review stages of the plan.

Insert an outline of the governance framework under which the SAP would be conducted, from the development stage through to the implementation and review stages.

3.2 Timeline for a SAP

Identify the various stages of a SAP with tasks and indicative timings for each stage as well as outlining which parties may be involved with the tasks identified.

4. Scientific Background

4.1 Biology, Status and Environmental Parameters

Insert concise background information on the nominated population(s), including:

- Population structure
- Abundance and population trends

- Distribution, migration and movements
- Basic biology (feeding, reproduction and survivorship)

Identify any knowledge gaps that exist in current data.

4.2 Critical Habitats

If habitats are identified that are deemed as critical for the recovery and/or protection of a target cetacean population, the extent of these habitats and the purposes that they are used for should be outlined here.

4.3 Attributes of the Population to be Monitored

The ultimate success or failure of any SAP depends on improvements in the conservation status of the target population(s) – this can only be assessed by monitoring. Depending on the objectives of the SAP and the nature of the threats a population faces, a variety of candidate ‘attributes’ of the population can be considered for monitoring over time, to determine the success of the overall plan and/or individual actions and to amend the SAP where necessary.

This section should include a description of the attributes of the population that will be monitored (e.g. abundance (relative and/or absolute), reproductive rates, survivorship, health, prey status, range) and an evaluation of the feasibility of detecting trends with current methods given that changes occur (e.g. using power analyses).

5. Threats, Mitigation Measures and Monitoring

5.1 Identification of Threats

This section should provide a summary of the known or suspected threats (both direct and incidental) to the nominated cetacean population/critical habitat. This should be summarised in tabular form (such as that seen below), but should also include a discussion of each explaining the rationale behind the summary. Where appropriate, reference should be made to actions within the SAP.

Table: Summary of actual and potential threats to the population

Actual/Potential Threat	Cause or related activity	Evidence	Possible Impact	Priority for Action	Relevant Actions	Party Responsible
Directly lethal threats						
<i>e.g. Entrapment in set nets</i>	<i>Set net fishing</i>	<i>Strong</i>	<i>Mortality +/- or serious injury</i>	<i>High</i>	<i>RES-01</i>	<i>Participating range states</i>
<i>e.g. Entanglements in Other Types of Fishing Gear</i>						
Sub-lethal threats						
<i>e.g. Noise, pollution, etc</i>						

5.2 Mitigation Measures and Monitoring

This section should include identified mitigation measures to address key threats and how the mitigation measures will be monitored. For example:

5.2.1 Entrapment in Set Nets

Undertake the following mitigation measures (MIT-01, 02, 03) and the following monitoring measures (MON-01, 02) to facilitate the conservation of species A in the area designated XYZ.

Undertake the following public awareness raising measures PACB-01, 02 to promote the conservation of species A in the area designated XYZ.

5.2.2 Entanglements in Other Types of Fishing Gear

6. Actions

These form the key component of any SAP. While there may be overlap, these can generally be incorporated under the following categories:

- Coordination (COORD)
- Public awareness and capacity building (PACB)
- Research essential for providing adequate management advice or filling in knowledge gaps (RES)
- Monitoring (MON)
- Mitigation measures (MIT)

It is important that actions be realistic and effective. They should be well specified (usually 1-2 pages for each action) and generally include the following information, where relevant:

- (1) Description (including concise objective, threats to which relevant and how, rationale, target data or activity, method, implementation timeline)
- (2) Actors (responsible for implementation and relevant stakeholders)
- (3) Evaluation (actors responsible);
- (4) Priority (importance to the plan and feasibility)
- (5) Costs (where appropriate)

6. Summary and Implementation of Actions

Insert a tabular summary of all actions here, referring to the 1-2 page detailed summaries (see above). In addition, include here an implementation strategy or designate responsibility for developing and implementing an implementation strategy along with a Management Framework.

Outline how the actions will meet the short, medium or long term objectives of the plan.

6.1 Stakeholder Engagement, Public Awareness and Education

Insert here a strategy and information on stakeholder engagement, public awareness and any education activities that will be undertaken during the SAP implementation stage (e.g. via websites, meetings etc.).

6.2 Reporting Process

A SAP should be considered a living document and once the implementation stage begins, a process of reporting and review is essential to determine how well the SAP is meeting its overall objectives and implementation timelines and milestones.

Insert process for reporting on SAP progress to ASCOBANS (including a timeframe).

7. Bibliography

Since a SAP should be based upon best scientific knowledge and guided by the principles and practices of adaptive management, it is important for a SAP to identify any published works relevant to effective implementation of the plan.

Insert bibliography here.

8. Appendices

Insert additional background and contextual information in appendices.