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ACCOBAMS input in relation to the draft list of species and habitats

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The ACCOBAMS Secretariat has been following the work of the Informal Online Working Group on Biodiversity and Non-Indigenous Species since the last Meeting of the Integrated Monitoring Correspondence Group (Athens, Greece, 30 March – 1 April 2015). In consultation with the Chair of the ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee, the Secretariat contributed to provide information related to cetaceans in order to develop the minimum list of species and habitats for the Initial Phase of the Integrated Monitoring and Assessment Programme (Initial Phase of IMAP).

Given the short time allowed for finalizing the analysis of priority of habitats and species in July 2015, in particular for screening each species with regard to the Texiel-Faial criteria, the ACCOBAMS Secretariat, in consultation with the UNEP/MAP Coordinating Unit, proposed to provide additional information on cetacean species to the 5th Meeting of the Ecosystem Approach Coordination Group, as a specific information document.

Based on exchanges with Members of the ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee and cetaceans experts, here are some considerations that the ACCOBAMS Secretariat would like to raise to the attention of the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention:

1/ The state of knowledge regarding distribution, abundance and conservation status of cetaceans species is too different among species and too patchy within the Mediterranean basin to allow an accurate analysis for prioritizing cetaceans species on the basis of ecological criteria;

2/ The limited number of cetaceans species, their basin-wide geographical distribution, and their conservation status at the regional level speak in favor of an identical level of priority for all cetaceans species;

3/ Conservation and management priorities of cetacean species can vary over time and space, in particular for these migratory and highly mobile organisms. It would then be more relevant to keep the list opened and to not restrain the monitoring to specific species that would not be consistent in some specific contexts or with time;

4/ Giving a priority to certain species is not in coherence with the implementation of the “ACCOBAMS Survey Initiative”, which is one of the most important priorities for achieving the ACCOBAMS conservation objectives identified by countries that are both Contracting Parties to the ACCOBAMS and to the Barcelona Convention;

5/ The ecosystem approach represents an integrated way of addressing the complex interactions among organisms and their environment (as stated in CBD Decision V/6).

Based on these considerations, the most relevant approach to be taken for cetaceans in the Initial Phase of IMAP appears to be the adoption of a “functional group” approach for cetaceans species instead of prioritizing some species to the detriment of others.

In this context, the ACCOBAMS Secretariat would like to suggest to the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention to consider at the same level of priority the eight cetaceans species identified for implementing the Initial Phase of the IMAP.

By presenting this document at the 5th Meeting of the Ecosystem Approach Coordination Group, the ACCOBAMS Secretariat reassures its willingness to collaborate with the UNEP/MAP system to contribute to and to support the implementation of the Ecosystem Approach in the Mediterranean, considering in particular the significant contribution that the “ACCOBAMS Survey Initiative” will provide in the coming years.