



A Call for Urgent Attention to Common Dolphin Conservation in the Mediterranean Sea for ACCOBAMS MOP6

It is well known within the ACCOBAMS process that short-beaked common dolphin (*Delphinus delphis*) have suffered dramatic decline in the Mediterranean Sea over the last 40 years, in particular in the central part of the Mediterranean basin.

In the past, this species was widely distributed throughout the Mediterranean and, until the 1960s, was considered the most abundant cetacean species in the region. During the past decades, however, the species has declined throughout the region with notable strongholds remaining only in the Alboran Sea and around the Maltese Islands. In 2003 the Mediterranean short-beaked common dolphin was listed as Endangered on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Animals, based on criterion A2, which refers to a 50% decline in abundance over the last three generations.

The reasons for this alarming decline have been well documented, especially in the waters east of Lefkada in western Greece, a former short-beaked common dolphin area identified as high conservation importance within the ACCOBAMS '*Conservation Plan for Mediterranean Common Dolphins*'. In 2002 ACCOBAMS Parties recognized that immediate implementation of pilot conservation and management measures should be realised to sustain and restore the habitat in this area.

During the subsequent years the ACCOBAMS Parties have made additional commitments to foster necessary protection of short-beaked common dolphins in the Mediterranean Sea.

- The 1st Meeting of the Parties to ACCOBAMS recognized the urgent need for the implementation of conservation measures for short-common dolphins. (2002)
- A comprehensive 90-page '*Conservation Plan for Mediterranean Common Dolphins*' was "strongly welcomed" by the 2nd Meeting of the Parties of ACCOBAMS (Resolution 2.20). (2004)
- The Scientific Committee of ACCOBAMS recommended immediate financial and institutional support to small-scale projects for common dolphin conservation. (2005)
- The Scientific Committee of ACCOBAMS expressed deep concerns about the poor level of conservation measures to foster common dolphin recovery and reiterated the urgent need for the implementation of the '*Conservation Plan for Mediterranean Common Dolphins*'. (Recommendation SC4.1). The Scientific Committee also expressed the need to establish an '*Emergency Action Plan*' for western of Greece (i.e. east of Lefkada and around Kalamos) to prevent the irreversible decline of the population. (2006)
- The 3rd Meeting of the Parties to ACCOBAMS proclaimed it was "deeply concerned that despite the strong scientific evidence, strategic planning and multiple expressions of concern and recommendations, *inter alia* by the ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee and relevant ACCOBAMS Partners, insufficient action has been taken to ensure recovery of the common dolphin in the region". The Parties committed that the '*Conservation Plan for Mediterranean Common Dolphins*' should be implemented and for common dolphin conservation activities to be introduced into National Action Plans. (2007)
- A number of non-governmental organizations joined forces, and launched an '*Urgent Call*' for immediate conservation action, in particular urgent fisheries management actions, to halt further decline of short-beaked common dolphins in western Greece. The document was submitted to the Greek Government and various other stakeholders, and was welcomed by the 4th Meeting of the Parties to ACCOBAMS (Resolution 4.13). (2008)

- The 6th Meeting of the ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee reiterated the need for the implementation of the 'Conservation Plan for Mediterranean Common Dolphins' in the Mediterranean Sea (Recommendation 6.3). The Scientific Committee also highlighted the high risk of local disappearance of short-beaked common dolphins in western Greece unless management measures to reduce overfishing were undertaken. As a consequence beach seining was banned in Greece in May 2010 in accordance with EC regulation 1967/2006 and National Decree No 60/24-1-2007. (2010)
- The 4th Meeting of the Parties to ACCOBAMS urged Range States to implement the 'Conservation Plan for Mediterranean Common Dolphins', to sanction illegal fishing, and "to give all the necessary importance to implementing existing laws for the sustainable management of fisheries resources as well as the existing regulations on by-catch, including, in the case of European Union Member States, Council Regulation 1967/2006 concerning management measures for the sustainable exploitation of fishery resources in the Mediterranean Sea" (Resolution 4.13). (2010)

Despite the repeated and increasingly urgent calls over the past decade, today we face the virtual extinction of common dolphins in western Greece because of poor implementation of the ACCOBAMS 'Conservation Plan for Mediterranean Common Dolphins'. To prevent short-beaked common dolphins from vanishing elsewhere in the Mediterranean Sea serious commitment is needed from the ACCOBAMS Party Range States.

To assist with this new impetus, OceanCare, Oceanomare Delphis Onlus and the Biology Conservation Research Foundation organized an international workshop: '*Conservation and research networking on short beaked common dolphin (Delphinus delphis) in the Mediterranean Sea*'. The workshop was held in Ischia Island (Italy), 13-15 April 2016, and received broad patronage and support from ACCOBAMS, CMS, the IUCN Species Survival Commission, the United Nations Environment Programme Mediterranean Action Plan, and the Regional Activity Centre for Specially Protected Areas, among others.

The workshop facilitated an important dialogue between scientists and conservationists across a number of Mediterranean countries and sought to enhance national, regional and international cooperation for the implementation of conservation measures for short-beaked common dolphins in the Mediterranean Sea. The goal was to ensure their recovery and long-term survival in this region.

The workshop findings on the ecology, behaviour and critical habitats of the species, conclusions and action plans will be published, after an ordinary peer review process, in a Special Issue of '*Aquatic Conservation: Marine and Freshwater Ecosystems*'.

Meanwhile we draw the report's recommendations to the attention of ACCOBAMS Parties.

The factors that are the likely cause of the continuing decline are incidental mortality in fishing gear, contaminants, prey depletion, and climate change.

In addition to immediate implementation of the conservation measures articulated in the ACCOBAMS 'Conservation Plan for Mediterranean Common Dolphins', we recommend:

- inclusion of static gear fisheries in the Mediterranean Sea within the proposal revising the Data Collection Framework that may supersede the 812/2004 Regulation. We also support the recommendations of the executive secretariat of ASCOBANS transmitted on 30 October 2015 to the European Commission relating to the 'Requirements of Legislation to Address Monitoring and Mitigation of Small Cetacean Bycatch' and including recommending overarching legislation for cetaceans in European waters to ensure the effective protection of cetaceans from all threats;
- monitoring persistent organic pollutant concentrations in cetaceans for inclusion as an indicator under descriptor 8 within the European Marine Strategy Framework Directive (Directive 2008/56/EC);

- establishment of no-take areas in common dolphin critical habitat, at least for fishing gears known to deplete common dolphin prey and severely damage the coastal environment;
- implementation of extensive stock assessments for fish and cephalopod species eaten by common dolphins, including non-commercial species and studies of diet;
- investigation of where the ranges of common dolphins are, in fact, driven by water temperature rather than by other factors which currently co-vary with temperature, to assess the impacts of climate change;
- designate protected areas where short-beaked common dolphin critical habitats are known to occur, including: Kalamos (Greece); The Alborán Sea; waters surrounding the island of Ischia (south-eastern Tyrrhenian Sea, Italy); waters surrounding the island of Malta and south-eastern Sicily (Italy); the eastern Ionian Sea and the Gulf of Corinth (Greece); the Sazan Island – Karaburun Peninsula (Adriatic and Ionian Sea, Albania); the Gulf of Saronikos and adjacent waters (Argo-Saronikos and southern Evvoikos Gulf, Greece); waters surrounding the northern Sporades (Greece); the northern Aegean Sea (Greece); and waters surrounding the Dodecanese (Greece); and for implementation of conservation measures in the protected area of the Island of Ischia Procida and Vivara (Italy); and
- commit to surveys to identify common dolphin populations particularly off the coasts of North Africa; as well as measures to mitigate the impacts of anthropogenic marine noise; and the application of the guidelines for commercial whale watching activities.

We urge you to heed the concerns expressed by your own Scientific Committee; to act on your existing commitments made through the various ACCOBAMS meetings including the '*Conservation Plan for Mediterranean Common Dolphins*'; and to adopt these recommendations within an urgent forward work programme that is implemented within the 2017-2019 period and is qualitatively reported and assessed for priority consideration by ACCOBAMS MOP7.

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