

OSPAR Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic
Meeting of the Intersessional Correspondence Group on the Coordination of Biodiversity
Assessment and Monitoring

Videoconference: 14 – 16 December 2020

Multiyear work plan for the marine mammal expert group 2018-2022

Presented by Germany as lead for the marine mammal EG

Issue: The reinstated marine mammal expert group developed a proposal for a multiyear work plan as presented in this document during the kick-off meeting. The proposals are to be considered by ICG-COBAM as input to the drafting of ICG-COBAM ToR to be presented for approval to BDC 2021.

Action requested

1. ICG-COBAM is invited to
 - a. **note** the information as relevant;
 - b. **consider** and **discuss** the proposed workplan;
 - c. **agree** to forward it as background information to the ICG-COBAM 2020/2021 ToR to BDC 2021.

Background

2. Under its [North-East Atlantic Environment Strategy](#) (NEAE Strategy) OSPAR is taking forward work related to the implementation of the Ecosystem Approach (NEAE Strategy Part I) and the suite of five thematic strategies (NEAE Strategy Part II), including a Biodiversity and Ecosystem strategy. Under each theme, work is undertaken in relation to the monitoring and assessment of the status of the marine environment, the results of which are used to follow up implementation of the strategies and the resulting benefits to the marine environment.
3. OSPAR also takes a key role as a platform for EU member states to coordinate their approaches in implementing the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD) in the Northeast Atlantic. For the Biodiversity aspects of the Directive (i.e. with a focus on descriptors D1, D2, D4, D6), OSPAR ICG-COBAM is overseeing the development of regional assessment and monitoring of biodiversity in the OSPAR Region.
4. The development of assessment and monitoring methods (indicators) is advanced by intersessional Expert Groups (EG), focusing on the following seven ecosystem components (current ICG-COBAM leads specified):
 - a. Marine birds: Ian Mitchell (JNCC, United-Kingdom)
 - b. **Mammals: Anita Gilles (Institute for Terrestrial and Aquatic Wildlife Research (ITAW)/TiHo, Germany)**
 - c. Fish and cephalopods: No lead
 - d. Non-indigenous species: Paul Stebbing (CEFAS, United-Kingdom)
 - e. Benthic habitats: Laurent Guérin (MNHN, France) and Cristina Vina-Herbon (JNCC, United-Kingdom)

- f. Pelagic habitats: Abigail McQuatters-Gollop (University of Plymouth, United-Kingdom)
- g. Food webs: Ulrike Schücker (LKN S-H, Germany)

Scope of ICG-COBAM's work

5. ICG-COBAM is responsible for the coordination of OSPAR's biodiversity assessment and monitoring work under the guidance of the Biodiversity Committee. It responds to the requirements of the OSPAR Regional Plan to achieve adequacy and coherence of MSFD Implementation 2014-2018 (COG(2) 2014, Annex 4). It has a particular focus on [JAMP](#) Product B-10 and coordination in relation to the requirements of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD) for biodiversity aspects (D1, 2, 4 and 6). ICG-COBAM also takes account of progress on the implementation of Descriptor 3 on commercial fish and shellfish in its work.

Scope of MMEG's work

6. The priority tasks of MMEG are:

- to develop indicator, assessment and monitoring guidance for marine mammals so that they can be adopted and applied by OSPAR. Indicators should be fully operational through, inter alia, agreed monitoring and assessment methods, and agreed arrangements for coordinated monitoring, data flow and data management.
- to prepare OSPAR common biodiversity indicator assessment as part of OSPAR's Quality Status Report (QSR) 2023, which meet the needs of all Contracting Parties and those EU Member States for their implementation of the MSFD.
- to advise BDC and other OSPAR bodies on gaps in the coverage of marine mammal indicators, including with respect to the implementation of the MSFD, and how to complete a representative set of marine mammal indicators according to OSPAR JAMP for 2014-2021 product B-10.

7. MMEG also contributes and takes account of progress on other related European agreements relevant to OSPAR Contracting Parties (e.g. HELCOM, Barcelona Convention, ICES (WGMME and WGBYC), ASCOBANS, ACCOBAMS, TSEG, NAMMCO, IWC). There is high overlap of nominated experts in MMEG and other Expert Groups for marine mammals.

Organisation of MMEG work

8. MMEG will work through correspondence, video and telephone conferences and, when needed, face-to-face meetings, with a view to deliver the work programme presented for the group and additional actions that might be required by ICG-COBAM.

9. Contracting Parties are requested to support an active engagement with the EG, including sufficient dedicated time and resources for intersessional works and to attend workshops, to ensure a scientifically robust, transparent and representative process and facilitate appropriation for management issues. Preferably this should be supported by national experts that can provide a national perspective and assist in the delivery of work.

10. Indicator leads, eventually as co-leads, will be distributed and clear milestones and deadlines will be communicated by the chair. MMEG will name contributors on documents.

11. Intersessional work will be facilitated using the MMEG Basecamp tool. All nominated experts and observers should have access.

Delivery of results

12. An annual report, in the form of documents or presentations at COBAM meetings, providing updates of the work completed during the year against the agreed ToRs and work plan.

MMEG Work Plan for the 2018/2019 meeting cycle

13. During the 2018/2019 period ICG-COBAM's activities will be guided by the needs of the NEAE Strategy, the QSR 2023 and OSPAR regional coordination in relation to the European Commission Decision on criteria and methodological standards for good environmental status and the next MSFD Article 11 reporting on monitoring programmes in 2020:

Indicator assessments

- a. to review completed work on development and assessment of biodiversity indicators related to marine mammals;
- b. to review IA2017 and identify problems in data calls and missing data (lessons learned from the IA2017 assessment). MMEG will consider whether i) the species included in M4-B are the most relevant ones and ii) outline the re-establishment of a single M4 indicator;
- c. to continue developing assessment values (e.g. thresholds, boundaries, ranges or trends as appropriate), against which the indicators could be assessed;

Indicator development

- d. to finalise CEMP guideline for indicator M4, with the aim that by 2019 all indicators assessed in the IA2017 have CEMP guidelines published on the OSPAR website;
- e. to consider if marine mammals could be integrated into common indicators D8 “contaminants” (e.g. PCB in blubber) (OSPAR HASEC) and D11 “underwater noise” (ICG-Noise);
- f. to develop a candidate indicator on “Trends and Status of PCBs in marine mammals” under HASEC but keep BDC informed;
- g. to consider the development of further candidate indicators, like health assessments for seals and cetaceans and demographic parameters for cetaceans;

Coordinated monitoring and data management

- h. to further work on developing the reporting format and data streams for seals and cetaceans;

Cross-cutting issues

- i. to collaborate with other ICGs, under the coordination of the OSPAR Secretariat, towards an integrated assessment between indicators for marine mammals and biodiversity components (e.g. D8 contaminants, PCB levels in marine mammals; D11 underwater noise); discuss relevant data products;
- j. to support OSPAR by reviewing draft ToRs for the joint OSPAR/HELCOM bycatch workshop 2019 and address specific set of actions on incidental bycatch (i.e. collate assessment methods of threshold setting, risks with specific gears, data related to bycatch numbers and fishing effort); in this respect integrate and link to ASCOBANS/ACCOBAMS bycatch working group, see below (k.);
- k. to review 2018 national reports on MSFD (MMEG members will provide English summaries of indicators relevant to marine mammals) and cross-reference OSPAR indicators to those of national MSFD indicators. This will facilitate further common indicator development.

14. Communication with other international processes

- l. to communicate with ASCOBANS, especially about the joint Bycatch working group between ASCOBANS and ACCOBAMS, and identify synergies;
- m. to work with HELCOM on sharing knowledge about indicators and realising opportunities for cooperation or joint works;
- n. to communicate with ICES working groups, where relevant via the respective secretariats and chairs, to maximise synergies and avoid duplication but also to assess relevant data (e.g. bycatch data from ICES WGBYC needed for M6).

Work programme for 2019-2022:

15. *Assessment work for QSR 2023*
 - prepare and conduct assessment for QSR 2023 (assessment should be conducted no later than 2021);
 - M3: evaluate the use of other datasets, such as visual surveys and telemetry studies, and outline approach to process multi-sources of data;
16. *Threshold setting*
 - consider the suitability of various options for setting thresholds for relevant marine mammal species/ management units/ indicators.
17. *Further candidate indicators*

- consider the development of further candidate indicators, linked to the primary criteria of MSFD and/or the OSPAR NEAE Strategy;
 - investigate pressure-related indicators (contaminants, noise, food web, climate change).
18. *Monitoring*
- develop advice for a coordinated programme of monitoring (SCANS-type large-scale surveys and intermediate monitoring);
 - develop standardised monitoring guidelines and procedures to ensure consistency;
 - ensure expertise and experience is shared between and within Regional Seas Conventions.
19. *Data calls and management*
- decide on the frequency and content of data calls and rolling assessments;
 - finalise data format needed for QSR 2023 in 2020;
 - note that data calls must be issued latest in 2020 to be included in QSR 2023;
 - develop data management and storage, including metadata (ensure data access).
20. *Work plan/timing 2021*
- 11, 12. or 13. Jan 2021 - OMMEG meeting, discuss feedback from COBAM, prepare for BDC 2021
 - March 2021 (tbd) - OMMEG meeting, overview of data call output, next steps
 - May 2021 (tbd) - OMMEG meeting, discuss assessments
 - July/August 2021 (tbd) - OMMEG meeting
 - Sep 2021 (tbd) - OMMEG meeting, evaluate assessments
 - Oct 2021 – Super COBAM, work on assessments and start thematic assessment links
 - M3/M5: data call ends 28 Feb 2021 – preparation of data March – assessment April-Sep – present to OMMEG and ask for feedback – COBAM – BDC 2022
 - M4: data call ends 28 Feb 2021 -> preparation of data March-April 2021 – assessment May-Sep 2021– present to OMMEG and ask for feedback – COBAM – BDC 2022
 - M6: WGBYC 2021 (Sep 2021)->ICES ADG (poss. Dec 2021)->OSPAR receives advice; OMMEG (Jan/Feb 2022)->COBAM (extra spring meeting 2022)->BDC (Mar/Apr) 2022
 - Further develop candidate indicator “Trends and Status of PCBs in marine mammals”; this indicator is developed under HASEC, but BDC will be informed on progress so that BDC could also provide advice as appropriate.