

*Accord sur la Conservation des Cétacés de la Mer Noire, de
la Méditerranée et de la zone Atlantique adjacente*



*Agreement on the Conservation of Cetaceans of the Black
Sea, Mediterranean Sea and contiguous Atlantic Area*

PROPOSAL FOR A BLOCK RED LIST ASSESSMENT OF CETACEANS IN THE ACCOBAMS AREA

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**Proposal
for a block Red List Assessment of
Cetaceans in the ACCOBAMS Area**

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This is a proposal to organize a meeting of cetacean experts from the Mediterranean and Black Seas to assess the status of the cetacean populations in the region and to propose appropriate classifications of subspecies or subpopulations in the IUCN Red List. It is envisioned as a cooperative effort between IUCN and ACCOBAMS.

What is the IUCN Red List System?

"The IUCN Red List System is a hierarchical classification system developed to assess and highlight species of animals and plants under higher extinction risk. First conceived in 1963 and originally used by the IUCN's Species Survival Commission (SSC), the IUCN Red List System has set a global standard for species listing and conservation assessment efforts. For more than 30 years SSC has been evaluating the conservation status of species and subspecies on a global scale – highlighting those threatened with extinction and promoting their conservation.

"The system was developed to focus attention on conservation measures designed to protect species at risk. Over time, IUCN has recognized that a more objective and scientific system for determining threat status, as well as a more accurate system for use at the national and regional level were needed. The IUCN Red List Categories were reviewed in the early 1990s through extensive consultation and testing involving more than 800 SSC members, and the wider scientific community. This resulted in a more precise and quantitative approach that was adopted by IUCN in 1994 (IUCN 1994).

"Since their adoption in 1994, the Categories have become widely recognized internationally, and they are now used in a range of publications and listings produced by IUCN, as well as by numerous governmental and non-governmental organizations. Such broad and extensive use revealed the need for a number of improvements, and SSC was mandated by the 1996 World Conservation Congress to conduct a review of the system, principally to ensure the criteria were applicable to a wide range of organisms, especially long-lived species, and species under intensive management. It was also considered desirable to ensure the highest standards of documentation, information management, and scientific credibility were embodied in the resulting document.

"The Species Survival Commission completed an extensive review of the categories and criteria used to list species on the IUCN Red List in 2000. The review, involving broad consultation with users and organizations from around the world, has produced a clearer, more open, and easy-to-use system. With particular attention paid to marine species, harvested species, and population fluctuations, the review has refined the effectiveness of the Red List Categories and Criteria as indicators of extinction risk. Extensive consultation and testing in the development of the system strongly suggest that it is now robust across most organisms.

"The revised Categories were adopted by IUCN Council in February 2000 and have now been published (IUCN 2001). SSC intend to leave this system unchanged for a period long enough to allow genuine changes in conservation status to be monitored. IUCN believes that stability in the categorization system is essential if the IUCN Red List is to be used as a reliable indicator of trends in biological diversity".¹

The CMS Scientific Council proposed that CMS regard the IUCN listings as guidance for decisions on which species should be placed in Appendix I, and as providing some guidance for listings in Appendix II.

Has the Red List Assessment process involved cetaceans?

The IUCN Species Survival Commission relies on its Cetacean Specialist Group to perform Red List assessments of cetaceans, at the species, subspecies and "subpopulation" levels. All species were assessed and assigned a Red List status in 1996, as were a number of subspecies and "subpopulations," including the Black Sea harbour porpoise subpopulation. Since 1996, a number of species and "subpopulations" have been assessed against the 2000 Categories and Criteria, and these assessments (unlike those of 1996) are supported by detailed documentation that includes the rationale for listing.

Red List Assessment of cetaceans in the ACCOBAMS area

As far as the geographic area covered by ACCOBAMS is concerned, so far only the Mediterranean "subpopulation" of short-beaked common dolphins has been assessed. An assessment of the Mediterranean "subpopulation" of sperm whales, as well as of harbour porpoises in the Black Sea, is close to completion.

When conducted species by species, or subpopulation by subpopulation, the assessment process is prolonged and time-consuming, especially when most or all of the work is done by correspondence. Typically, a CSG member or group of members volunteers to draft the assessment of a species or subpopulation, and the draft is then forwarded by the Chairman to the entire Specialist Group for comment and approval. A long debate may ensue, which makes the correspondence method much less effective and desirable than direct, face-to-face discussions.

In recent years other taxon-oriented Specialist Groups have experimented with a different approach and achieved excellent results. The largest possible number of experts on particular taxa from a particular region have gathered in one place for a few days to develop the assessments for all the species belonging to the appropriate species group present in that geographical region. This approach has proven particularly successful in the Mediterranean through the support of the IUCN Centre for Mediterranean Cooperation of Malaga ("IUCN MED"). Mediterranean sharks and rays were thus assessed in 2003, and amphibians, reptiles and freshwater fishes from the Mediterranean region were assessed in 2004.

Can a cooperative effort be envisaged between IUCN and ACCOBAMS to assess the status of cetaceans in the ACCOBAMS area through the Red List mechanism?

The Second Meeting of the Contracting Parties to ACCOBAMS adopted a resolution, Resolution 2.22 ("Relation with IUCN"), in which the current process of evaluating threats to cetaceans by the Scientific Committee is noted as being linked to the IUCN Red List assessment of cetacean populations, and which stresses that the harmonization of such effort within a proper joint institutional arrangement would greatly enhance reciprocal efficiency.

Moreover, IUCN MED has clearly expressed its willingness to cooperate in this sense with ACCOBAMS and to help organizing in the near future a meeting of experts having the goal of assessing the status of the region's cetaceans for Red List purposes. Although the mandate of IUCN MED is limited to the

¹ Quoted from: Baker B., Hewitt T., Bromley R., Galbraith C., Gilmour A. 2002. Report on the implications of the IUCN listing criteria for CMS. 8 p. The report can be downloaded from:
http://www.cms.int/bodies/COP/cop7/proceedings/pdf/en/part_1/annex_VIII_ScC11_report_en.pdf

Mediterranean, a cooperative effort with the ACCOBAMS Secretariat and Scientific Committee, which would also consider Black Sea cetaceans, may be envisaged.

The proposal

It is hereby concluded that an IUCN regional red listing process for cetaceans would be a helpful tool, complementary to work already underway under the ACCOBAMS framework. It is recommended that the IUCN be invited to consider convening a meeting of experts before the fourth Meeting of the Scientific Committee of ACCOBAMS, with the goal of reviewing the status of, and drafting Red List assessment for, all cetaceans living in the Mediterranean and Black Seas, in a cooperative effort to be undertaken between ACCOBAMS and IUCN.

It is further suggested that a Working Group be created, to assist in the organization of such a meeting. Organisational aspects will include, among others, a careful preparation of the meeting agenda and funding arrangements, with exhaustive information on the procedures, distribution of reading material and other necessary information, and, insofar as possible, the tasking of the preparation of preliminary draft assessment on as many species as possible to selected experts. It is viewed as desirable to keep the CSG as a whole (i.e. including members not directly involved in this regional assessment process) informed about the ongoing process. The authors of this proposal are available to be part of the WG.

The ACCOBAMS Secretariat is invited to communicate this proposal to IUCN in the framework of Resolution 2.22.