MEETING DOCUMENT

**Task Group Management (TG-M 20-1)**

17 - 18 April 2020

Bremen, Germany

**Agenda Item: 6. Harbour porpoises**

**Subject: Letter ASCOBANS**

**Document No.:** TG-M 20-1/6

**Date:** 3 March 20

**Submitted by: CWSS**

In October 2017, the Trilateral Wadden Sea Cooperation (TWSC) received a letter from an Agreement on the Conservation of Small Cetaceans of the Baltic, North East Atlantic, Irish and North Seas (ASCOBANS) Advisory Committee, proposing to consider the formal inclusion of harbour porpoises (*Phocoena phocoena*) in the mandate of the TWSC (see WSB 21/5.2/1).

The item was taken up in the Ministerial Council Declaration of the 13th Trilateral Governmental Conference on the Protection of the Wadden Sea (Leeuwarden Declaration) paragraph 16: *Agree to duly take account of the fact that harbour porpoises are present in the Wadden Sea, thus addressing the conservation of the species*;

Following recommendations from a symposium “Bright Future? Harbour porpoises in the Wadden Sea” and a subsequent expert workshop both held in April 2019, the trilateral Expert Group Seals (EG-Seals) agreed that harbour porpoises are an integral part of the Wadden Sea ecosystem and should be tackled by their group.

Consequently, the Wadden Sea Board, in their 30th meeting held on 21 November 2019 in Wilhelmshaven, Germany. endorsed the TG-M recommendation to including harbour porpoises into the responsibilities of the EG-Seals and the Board instructed TG-M to inform ASCOBANS about this decision

Following this instruction, TG-M requested CWSS to submit a draft letter in response to ASCOBANS.

This document contains a draft letter.

**Proposal:** The group is invited to finalise the letter to ASCOBANS on basis of the submitted draft.

# Letter to ASCOBANS

Re: Coverage of harbour porpoises (*Phocoena phocoena*) under the Trilateral Cooperation on the Protection of the Wadden Sea

Wilhelmshaven, March 2020

Dear Representatives of the ASCOBANS Advisory Committee,

In October 2017, the Trilateral Wadden Sea Cooperation (TWSC) received a letter proposing an encouragement of the Parties to consider the formal inclusion of harbour porpoises (*Phocoena phocoena*) in the mandate of the Cooperation, also with the wish for enhanced cooperation between ASCOBANS and the Trilateral Cooperation, specifically regarding the implementation of the ASCOBANS Conservation Plan for harbour porpoises in the North Sea.

This initiative and the wish for enhanced cooperation was generally welcomed by the involved trilateral bodies.

In response to your request, the topic had been intensely discussed and assessed also in relation to existing activities regarding marine mammals and harbour and grey seals in particular. The symposium “Bright Future? Harbour porpoises in the Wadden Sea” and a subsequent expert workshop were held in April 2019 with the aim to develop expert recommendations on the future handling of the topic in the trilateral framework. Following recommendations from this workshop, the trilateral Expert Group Seals (EG-Seals) agreed that harbour porpoises are an integral part of the Wadden Sea ecosystem. EG-Seals further underlined that the Wadden Sea Area is an important habitat for harbour porpoises.

Based on these findings and recommendations, the Wadden Sea Board endorsed during its 30th meeting in November 2019 to include harbour porpoises to the responsibilities of EG- Seals. The expert group is now requested to further develop practical and strategic activities to facilitate and establish the topic within the trilateral framework.

The TWSC is welcoming this next step towards an intense cooperation with ASCOBANS and is hoping for a positive reception of the consequences of the corresponding letter from 2017 and the continuation of the encouraging cooperation in the future.

Yours sincerely,

Prof. Dr. Karin Lochte, on behalf of the Trilateral Wadden Sea Cooperation