



## **New Responses to Threats to Marine Mammals: Conservation Measures to Reduce Noise Pollution, the Impact of Ship Strikes on Whales and Establishment of New Marine Protected Areas**

Dubrovnik, Croatia, 25 October 2007 – The reduction of by-catch in drift nets, the impact of fisheries, habitat conservation and new Marine Protected Areas are some of the topics that were high on the agenda of the Third Meeting of the Contracting Parties to the Agreement on the Conservation of Cetaceans of the Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea and contiguous Atlantic Area (ACCOBAMS), which Croatia hosted in Dubrovnik between 22 and 25 October 2007.

More than 80 participants, among them the representatives of the 21 Contracting Parties, NGOs, scientific institutions and many observers discussed and endorsed new strategies to reduce the threats to cetaceans living in the ACCOBAMS area.

Ms Ana Štrbenac of Croatia's National Institute for Nature Protection, who chaired the Meeting, said: “Marine protected areas are indispensable tools in our continuous efforts to protect the habitats of whales and dolphins. As a preventive measure, Croatia has designated Cres-Losinj as a special marine reserve. Croatian authorities and local communities will collaborate in the management of marine protected areas.”

Marine mammals are particularly vulnerable to human-induced threats. As such, they are good biological indicators of their ecosystems. Designing a marine protected area will not only help to protect a cetacean species but also to protect other species sharing the same ecosystem. As a result of their migrations, cetacean populations have a vast range. Therefore, scientists from countries in the Agreement area proposed 18 marine protected areas, which extend beyond territorial waters. The Alborán Sea, the Straits of Gibraltar and the waters around Sicily were specifically recommended for this purpose.

The Meeting agreed to a new conservation plan for cetaceans in the strategically important Black Sea region. In addition, delegates adopted a resolution on the highly endangered Mediterranean common dolphin, which might disappear by 2010 in certain parts of the Agreement Area.



Concerning the use of drift nets the Parties agreed to include the prohibition of their use and their presence on board of fishing boats in the text of the Agreement, with the objective of harmonization with other international instruments.

Various guidelines were adopted, to be used as instruments by governments in achieving their objective to reduce the loss of biodiversity by 2010, including the rescue of animals in distress, a centralized collection of tissue samples from stranded animals and the release of cetaceans into the wild.

The delicate issue of noise was attracted special attention. The Parties committed themselves to creating a working group consisting of government representatives and scientists to agree on how to address this important threat to cetaceans.

An expert from the United States gave a presentation on 'dolphin-assisted therapy'. The conclusion of her studies clearly showed that this technique fails to meet the expectations of the public, as it is based on a wrong perception. Instead, it presents a real risk for the conservation of these marine mammals.

With regard to commercial whale-watching activities, the Meeting decided to establish a 'label' for operators to ensure that this activity has a scientific objective, including strict rules how to approach these species and training of operators who are in contact with the public.

The Executive Secretary, Mrs Grillo-Van Klaveren, expressed satisfaction with the outcomes of the Meeting: "The conservation of biodiversity concerns everybody. We can make progress only by strengthening collaboration among governments and by implementing the results of scientific studies through conservation measures in the field.

The Phoenicians said that the Mediterranean is like an eye whose eyelids meet. I would like to use this metaphor for our Agreement, which for the first time brings together two regions: the Mediterranean and the Black Sea with the noble aim of protecting whales and dolphins, and which illustrates the spirit of exchange and collaboration."

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