

Marine Mammal Observers and Seismic Guidelines in the ACCOBAMS area

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August 10, 2015.

Marine Mammal Observers (MMOs) and Passive Acoustic Monitoring (PAM) operators detect marine mammals and provide real time mitigation advice for various human activities, including seismic surveys. MMOs can also collect data that can be used to increase our understanding of population distributions, as well as acoustic impacts. Thus, MMOs should be highly skilled in detecting and identifying marine mammals at sea, including assessing behaviour, and determining distances between animals and noise sources.

The Agreement on the Conservation of Cetaceans of the Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea and contiguous Atlantic area (ACCOBAMS <<http://www.accobams.org/>>) aims to develop MMO and PAM operator training courses and reporting protocols for the ACCOBAMS area. By developing such documents, ACCOBAMS aims to become the standard-setting body for MMO conduct in the ACCOBAMS area, much as the Joint Nature Conservation Commission (JNCC <<http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/>>) acts in the Atlantic. ACCOBAMS intends to achieve this in close collaboration with the JNCC.

The Marine Section of the SCB welcomes the decision to set regional MMO standards. However, SCB Marine believes that the current JNCC guidelines, training courses, and reporting protocols suffer several serious drawbacks <<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0025326X09000952>> that should be carefully considered prior to adoption, as both data quality and conservation goals may be compromised.

Accordingly, SCB Marine wrote to ACCOBAMS <ADD LINK TO LETTER> encouraging them to also approach relevant Government agencies from other countries, such as Germany <https://www.bfn.de/fileadmin/MDB/documents/themen/erneuerbareenergien/Tgng_of_fshore2012/2_3_werner.pdf>, Denmark (inc. Greenland <https://www.govmin.gl/images/stories/petroleum/environmental_reports/EIA_Guidelines_to_environmental_impact_assessment_of_seismic_activities_in_Greenland_waters.pdf>), Netherlands and New Zealand <<http://www.doc.govt.nz/our-work/seismic-surveys-code-of-conduct/code-of-conduct-for-minimising-acoustic-disturbance-to-marine-mammals-from-seismic-survey-operations/>> that are also improving their acoustic exposure guidelines, or have recently done so. We hope that ACCOBAMS will not pass on this opportunity to develop consistent, high-standard training, reporting and mitigation protocols, both within and outside the ACCOBAMS area, for the protection of marine mammals and wider achievement of conservation goals.