



**Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species
Agreement on the Conservation of Small Cetaceans
of the Baltic, North East Atlantic, Irish and North Seas**
Joint Secretariat provided by the United Nations Environment Programme



UK DOLPHIN STRANDINGS – STATEMENT BY THE JOINT UNEP/CMS/ASCOBANS SECRETARIAT

Bonn, 14 June 2008. The joint CMS/ASCOBANS Secretariat is closely following the recent strandings incident in south-west Britain, in which 26 common dolphins lost their lives and which has attracted considerable international attention. The ASCOBANS Agreement, administered by UNEP, protects dolphins and other small whales in Northern European waters. The Agreement was extended earlier this year and now covers the whole of the Irish Sea and the Eastern Atlantic, where these animals almost certainly originated. The Agreement requires the UK and the other nine Parties to work towards the prevention of significant disturbance to these animals, including disturbance “of an acoustic nature”.

Robert Hepworth, the Executive Secretary of the UNEP Convention on Migratory Species and its Agreement covering northern European dolphins (ASCOBANS) said today:

“We commend the UK strandings networks for their quick response. We would also thank those whose swift action helped to rescue a number of animals. The United Kingdom is fully in line with CMS and the Agreement in investigating the incident through the Zoological Society of London (ZSL). We appreciate that it will take some time to obtain and assess these results conclusively. The Secretariat also looks forward to receiving considered views in the light of the results and any other evidence from expert bodies and the international cetacean scientists who form part of the CMS Scientific Council and the ASCOBANS Advisory Committee.”

The Secretariat added: “It is premature to reach firm conclusions on the causes of the incident and undisputed proof of a link to any one cause may never be established. We can however take account of the probable causes of similar, previous incidents in other parts of the world. The Secretariat has noted that according to initial ZSL findings the dolphins appear to have been well fed, with no obvious signs of disease or poisoning. We share ZSL’s hope that the results of the post-mortems will shed light on the reasons behind this mass stranding and that they will be useful in trying to reduce the risk of further incidents.”

“Although this particular species of dolphin has historically been found in many waters around the globe, it appears no longer to be quite as abundant as its name suggests. In fact whales and dolphins as a whole face a combination of threats from hunting, by-catch, climate change, pollution, ship strikes and acoustic disturbances. The total risks they face are growing. That is why many species are protected under CMS and its regional agreements, including ASCOBANS”

Resolutions adopted by the member states to CMS and ASCOBANS call for efforts to protect all migratory marine mammals. This requires intensive research for conservation, an efficient strandings network and full autopsies on stranded animals. The risk of mass strandings can only be reduced in future if the reasons for each unusual event are understood and if all marine users are willing to share in the efforts to protect these threatened creatures.