

Opening Statement by the Marine Connection



NOTE:

**IN THE INTERESTS OF ECONOMY, DELEGATES ARE KINDLY REMINDED TO
BRING THEIR OWN COPIES OF THESE DOCUMENTS TO THE MEETING**



The Marine Connection is once again pleased to be an observer at the meeting of the ASCOBANS Advisory Committee. Thanks are given to the Chairman, Secretariat, the Government of France and city of Brest for the organisation and hosting of this important meeting.

Marine Connection is a UK based charity committed to working internationally for the care and protection of dolphins, whales and the marine environment. Through continuous education, campaigning and research, the charity effectively contributes towards a world that understands and respects all cetaceans and their natural habitat. Threats to marine mammals have never been greater and therefore by raising public awareness to these threats and pressing for more effective legislation, the Marine Connection are actively securing a safer future for these mammals.

The Marine Connection aim to work at an ecosystem level, developing our understanding of not only the dolphin and whale species, but of the world in which they live. In order to adequately protect these species there is a conservation need to understand their ecology, behaviour and distribution. Any action taken should be based on a scientific understanding of the marine environment as a whole.

The charity already works on a number of issues which are of interest to ASCOBANS:

Cetacean Bycatch

- The Marine Connection has been one of the many organisations working to highlight and prevent the high numbers of bycaught animals in the bass pair trawl fishery operating in ICES statistical division VIIIe. The charity is continuing to collect evidence and information within this area to adequately protect the dolphins concerned.
- The UK Government has prohibited use of pair trawls up to 12 nautical miles offshore to all UK registered vessels, within south west territorial waters. The Marine Connection would advise that this prohibition should be implemented at a European level, to prevent further takes from the cetacean population.
- It is without doubt that other fisheries also suffer from bycatch, however there is a lack of scientific research into fisheries to allow for adequate assessment of the situation. In order to minimise cetacean bycatch, research is required into the cetacean-fisheries interaction, in conjunction with observer schemes, to better understand how individuals become entangled and therefore mitigate the problem accordingly.

Underwater Noise

- High intensity, low frequency sounds can have devastating effects on marine life, especially dolphins and whales. These sounds can disrupt mating, feeding, and singing behaviours and may cause long term harm to the recovery of endangered and threatened species. In 2003, the Marine Connection was involved in investigating three whale deaths, thought to be associated with sonar, in the Azores.
- Given the lack of information available about the UK's new military sonar system, (2087) its potential impact on marine life, and the absence of transparency surrounding this issue, the Marine Connection has been pushing for a public hearing with regards to this sonar. Trials are once again scheduled to take place off the NW

Approaches in July. The charity has received tremendous support from other NGOs and MPs with regards to its *Statement of Concern* which focuses on this particular sonar. There are plans to present it to the MOD (Ministry of Defence).

- Last year the charity was invited to be part of a UK working group, relating to Underwater Noise Pollution. A report will be published later this year.
- The Marine Connection would like to see Member States monitoring and investigating mass strandings and deaths of marine mammals in EU waters which are associated with the use of intense anthropogenic noise. Article 194 of UNCLOS stipulates that “*States shall take all measures that are necessary to prevent, reduce and control pollution of the marine environment from any source*”

The Marine Connection aims to utilise the best scientific approaches to address its cetacean conservation work throughout the world. Co-operation between organisations is an effective means to ensuring adequate protection. The Marine Connection welcomes co-operation with ASCOBANS on future conservation issues of a mutual interest.

Further information on the Marine Connection and its current research work can be found on the website.

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