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Establishment of a System of Tissue Banks: Progress Report

Report on activities conducted on Action 18 arising from SC1:

ESTABLISHMENT OF A SYSTEM OF TISSUE BANKS

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Background: The first meeting of the parties identified the necessity of creating central repositories of cetacean tissues, also known as *tissue banks*, to provide researchers and managers with comprehensive collections of samples that may be used as a cost-effective diagnostic tool for toxicological, pathological and genetic studies. At that time, two tissue banks of this type were in the process of creation: one at the University of Barcelona, Spain (designed for toxicology and genetics) and another at the University of Padova, Italy (designed mostly for pathological and health-related studies). It was felt that coordination between these and any further initiatives was a priority, and that the geographical scope of the bank system should be enlarged to cover the entire Agreement area, Black Sea included.

At the first meeting of the Scientific Committee, documents describing the profile and activities of these banks were presented (SC1 documents 20 and 21) and it was recommended that a workshop to develop agreed sampling and conservation protocols, as well as to ensure effective networking between suppliers of samplers and potential users in the various ACCOBAMS countries, be organised.

Action taken: After SC1, the objectives of the workshop were further developed as to:

- Identify objectives, priorities of research and tissues to be stored
- Establish workable procedures for collection and storage of tissues
- Design protocols for exchange (see above) of samples
- Ensure co-ordination and exchange of samples among potential sub-banks

Establish a co-ordination unit

Attendance to the workshop was estimated at about 15 persons that should include a variety of disciplines and contain a good representation of the ACCOBAMS geographic area. Duration was determined as 2 working days.

Synergies were established with the UNEP-MAP Regional Activity Centre for Specially Protected Areas (RAC/SPA) to combine the tissue banking workshop with a short training course on sampling procedures for stranded cetaceans. Funds and resources could thus be

optimised since some of the specialists attending the banking workshop could also serve as trainers at the course. Also, it was considered the convenience to hold the meeting either in the southern or in the eastern Mediterranean Sea in order to improve local skills and interest on cetacean research and conservation in these regions.

The Marine Biology Research Centre at Tajura, Libya, has been approached to act as hosting institution and, although final approval is pending, preliminary conversations are positive. The date of the meeting has been provisionally established in January 2004.
