

GUIDELINES FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A SYSTEM OF TISSUE BANKS WITHIN THE ACCOBAMS AGREEMENT

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 to be used as a cost-effective diagnostic tool for research and conservation. The aim of Tissue Banks are: a) to promote selective collection of tissue samples; b) prepare and store such samples long-term using suitable preservation conditions; and c) distribute them to the scientific community for research and conservation purposes.

Although collections held in Tissue Banks may be used in a wide range of applications, they are considered particularly useful for studies of population health, infectious diseases, pollution monitoring and effects, population genetics, and a number of population biology aspects such as reproduction, trophic level, and diet through fatty acid analysis. Collected materials may be also promote knowledge, *inter alia*, on mortality causes, functional anatomy, physiology (including respiratory and diving physiology), toxicology and pathology. To reach these ends, collections of Tissue Banks should be geographically and temporally comprehensive in order to allow comparisons and examination of trends.

Following thorough examination of primary issues on cetacean conservation, and on methods of tissue collection and preservation, the ACCOBAMS Meeting of the Parties has approved the purpose of establishing a network of cetacean Tissue Banks in the Mediterranean and Black Seas and adjacent waters, and to this end it has directed the Scientific Committee to establish appropriate guidelines.

Guidelines:

1) Coordination: The Committee recognizes the need for the establishment of an Agreement-wide coordinating mechanism, which would facilitate the links between the stranding and by-catch collection programmes on one side, and the Tissue Banks on the other side. To assist in the functioning of such mechanism, and taking advantage of the current existence of two tissue banks in the ACCOBAMS area, it identified two Tissue Bank Coordinators, who would interact on an operational basis with national stranding /by-catch focal points:

- The **Barcelona BMA Tissue Bank**, based at the University of Barcelona, focusing on studies on genetics, ecotoxicology and population biology (Coordinator: Alex Aguilar).
- The **Marine Mammal Tissue Bank of the University of Padua**, focusing on histology and pathology studies (Coordinator: Bruno Cozzi).

Contact details for these institutions are given in Appendix 1.

Both coordinators should interact and ensure mutual exchanges between their respective banks and with the national and regional stranding and by-catch programmes operating under the umbrella of ACCOBAMS.

2) Availability of information and samples: To fulfil the goals listed above, the Tissue Banks will prepare and maintain open-access on-line databases with the objective of spreading information about the bank holdings and the protocols for collection and preservation of samples. Samples will be made available free of charge to the researchers or institutions that have previously provided the bank an amount of material that is equivalent to their request, and at the lowest possible cost to external, non-contributing researchers or organisations. Costs involved in handling, packing and shipping will always be covered by the final user.

3) Support: ACCOBAMS member countries are encouraged to support the Tissue Bank system by: a) Institutionally funding Tissue Banks to cover their running costs; b) ensuring that national stranding and by-catch programmes contribute samples to the Tissue Banks; c) facilitating appropriate permits (*e.g.* CITES) for the agile trans-national exchange of samples.

Moreover, the Scientific Committee further recognizes the necessity of international funding (*e.g.* through ACCOBAMS or RAC/SPA) to cover the expenses derived from the shipment of samples donated to the Tissue Banks.

4) Future Action: The Coordinators, in collaboration with the ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee and the ACCOBAMS and RAC/SPA Secretariats, should discuss the creation of future Tissue banks in the Agreement region to strengthen the current Tissue Banks system, and fulfil other conservation-related objectives not currently covered by the existing banks. In particular, this would include a Tissue Bank designed for bacteriological and viral monitoring and research.

Appendix 1

CONTACT DETAILS

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