

Agenda Item 5.3: Preparations for the workshop aimed at drafting a recovery plan for harbour porpoises in the Baltic Sea

Outline and Terms of Reference for a Workshop Aimed at Drafting a Recovery Plan for Harbour Porpoises in the Baltic Sea

Submitted by: Secretariat/Baltic Discussion Group



ASCOBANS

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Outline and Terms of Reference for a Workshop Aimed at Drafting a Recovery Plan for Harbour Porpoises in the Baltic Sea

A. Background

The status of harbour porpoises in the Baltic Sea is a cause for serious concern. The most recent survey (1995) yielded an estimate of 599 animals for the Baltic Sea proper. In its report to the 8th Meeting of the Advisory Committee to ASCOBANS (Nymindegab, Denmark, April 2001), the ASCOBANS Baltic Discussion Group states: "The available evidence clearly points to a population that is in severe danger."

In its Resolution on Incidental Take of Small Cetaceans, ASCOBANS, MOP2 (Bonn, 1997) invited Parties and Range States to "develop (by 2000) a recovery plan for porpoises in the Baltic Sea, one element of which should be to identify human activities which are potential threats to the recovery of this species in the Baltic".

For a number of reasons it has thus far not been possible to develop this plan. Accordingly, ASCOBANS MOP3 (Bristol, 2000) reiterated its invitation to Parties and Range States to proceed with the elaboration of the plan (MOP3, Res. No. 3). The ASCOBANS Triennium Workplan for 2001-2003 includes the organisation of this workshop.

B. Aims

To elaborate a recovery plan for harbour porpoises in the Baltic Sea¹, based on the outline and terms of reference drafted by the AC8 Baltic Working Group.

The short-term objective is to elaborate a prioritized recovery plan with a view to achieving the long-term objective of restoring and or maintaining a viable population² of harbour porpoises in the Baltic. In addition to these objectives, indicators should be included in order to measure the progress of the plan (changes in population size and various threats identified, in particular level of by-catch).

The recovery plan should encompass the following eight elements:

1 Background

- Past status (historic reviews, and studies of museum collections should be undertaken)
- Possible causes for the decline of harbour porpoises should be examined.

¹ The Baltic Sea is defined as the waters in ICES Division IIIId east of the Darss and Limhamn Ridges; for comparison, the waters south of the line Skagen – Marstrand should also be taken into consideration where appropriate

² ASCOBANS MoP 2 agreed that a suitable short-term sub-objective was to restore and/or maintain stocks/populations to 80% or more of carrying capacity, cf. ASCOBANS MOP 2 Doc. 4

2 Threats

The workshop should identify possible threats and prioritize necessary action to mitigate e.g.:

- Incidental capture/bycatches; possible mitigation methods for specific fisheries should be considered
- Disturbance
- Pollution
- Indirect effects of fisheries through reduction of food supply and competition for prey
- Diseases/epizootics
- Habitat degradation

3 Present population status and trends, population structure and population parameters

- The workshop should consider the results of various pertinent surveys.
- The workshop should review information regarding the status of possible separate populations in the Baltic.
- The workshop should review information on spatial and temporal distribution.

4 Review of research needed in light of the results of the ASCOBANS Baltic Discussion group³

The workshop should identify and specify prioritised research in line with Recommendations 1 and 5 – 12 contained in the report of the ASCOBANS Baltic Discussion Group (AC8/Doc.4 (S)).

5 Development of specific action plans within the overall recovery plan

- 5.1 The workshop should identify means of estimating and mitigating bycatch, including observer programmes wherever feasible.
- 5.2 The workshop should also identify means of estimating and mitigating other known threats (cf. 3 above).
- 5.3 The workshop should recommend immediate steps towards reducing mortality in identified 'hot spots' of porpoise bycatch and population 'hot spots' to be identified.

6 Monitoring and surveillance

- 6.1 The workshop should recommend methods of monitoring aimed at establishing long term trends in the harbour porpoise population(s) in the Baltic.

³ cf. AC 8 Doc. 4, Report of the ASCOBANS Baltic Discussion group

6.2 The workshop should recommend methods of monitoring the development of bycatch and other threats to harbour porpoises in the Baltic.

7 Public awareness (at regional, national and local level)

The workshop should develop schemes to involve the local public (including fishermen and other interested stakeholders) in the implementation of specific parts of the overall recovery plan and in monitoring the results of the plan. These schemes should ensure that data collected within the framework of the action plan is disseminated to the general public.

The output of the workshop will be circulated to Parties and Range States for further discussion and presented to the 9th Meeting of the Advisory committee for approval.

8 Implementation

The workshop should formulate clear time-bound objectives with a view to implementing its recommendations. It should devise processes for monitoring the implementation of its recommendations at the international, regional, national and local levels.

C. Steering Group

A Steering Group, composed of the ASCOBANS Secretariat, representatives of Denmark and Poland and the facilitator will be established. Baltic Parties and Range States should designate national contact points for the preparation of the workshop. A formal peripheral advisory group composed of a representative of the fisheries industry, an NGO representative and scientific advisors should support the Steering Group. The Steering Group will have to meet several times prior to the workshop. It will establish study groups as needed.

The Steering Group will seek an independent professional facilitator for the workshop.

D. Structure, duration and venue of the workshop

A three-day workshop held in January 2002. The venue is yet to be determined. Participation should be by invitation. The attendance of a wide range of experts and stakeholders from all interested Parties and Range States, including representatives of relevant IGOs, industries and NGOs should be ensured. A participation of approx. 100 persons is envisioned. The Steering Group will submit a list of potential participants from the NGO sector and relevant industries to Parties and Range States for their comments.

E. Funding

Funding for the workshop will be provided by DANCEE.