

Agenda Item 13

Annual National Reports 2007

Document 15

**Annual National Reports
e) Belgium**

Action Requested

- briefly present highlights from report (max. 5 minutes)
- take note of the information submitted
- comment

Submitted by

Parties



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

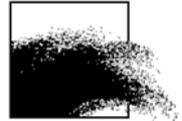
Secretariat's Note

Attached are, as separate documents in order to minimise the need for revisions, the Annual National Reports for 2007, as submitted by the ASCOBANS Parties.

ROYAL BELGIAN INSTITUTE OF NATURAL SCIENCES

MANAGEMENT UNIT OF THE NORTH SEA
MATHEMATICAL MODELS (MUMM)

SECTION 15
MARINE ECOSYSTEM MANAGEMENT



ASCOBANS Annual National Report 2007

MUMM
100 Gulledelle
B-1200 Brussels
Belgium

ASCOBANS Annual National Report 2007

A. General information

BELGIUM	1 JANUARY 2007 – 31 DECEMBER 2007
Name of party	Period covered
Compiled by Jan Haelters (MUMM/RBINS); additional information provided by Thierry Jauniaux, Francis Kerckhof, Sigrid Maebe, Alexandre de Lichtervelde and Koen Van Waerebeek	31 March 2008
Name of report compiler	Date of the report
<p>Since 2006 the national co-ordinating authority is the Federal service Public health, Food chain safety and Environment, Eurostation II, Place Victor Horta 40 box 10, 1060 Brussels, Belgium. Contact person is Paulus Tak (Paulus.Tak@health.fgov.be). The participation to the Advisory Committee meetings remains with RBINS(MUMM).</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Any changes in co-ordinating authority, appointed member of advisory committee</p>	

B. New measures/action towards meeting the resolutions of the 2nd Meeting of Parties

1. Direct interaction of small cetaceans with fisheries

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Investigations of methods to reduce by-catch
<p>The measures taken by the fisheries minister in the Ministerial Decision of 21 December 2006 (Official Journal of 28 December 2006 – see annual report for 2006) were assessed, and it was clear they did not eliminate bycatch in recreational fisheries. Although fewer porpoises seemed to have been bycaught in recreational gill nets, the reason for this reduction cannot be solely attributed to the new legislation. It is clear that less porpoises were present in the southern North Sea during spring 2007 than in previous years (Camphuysen, unpublished). The inconsistencies between the regional (recreational) fishery legislation and the local (municipal) legislation remains unresolved in certain local communities – eg. on the beaches of the community of Ostend, no gillnet fishing is allowed.</p> <p>One of the 3 Belgian professional gillnet fishermen (the largest one, often active outside ICES Area IVc) did not succeed in obtaining pingers. Apparently it was difficult to find them on the market in 2007, and it seemed that the ones available did not meet their goals or had difficulties in their deployment. Therefor an information meeting was organised at Seamarco (Middelburg, The Netherlands) with 2 of the 3 gillnetters, and a researcher of the fisheries research station (ILVO) and MUMM (2 August 2007). In a constructive atmosphere bycatch problems, the use of pingers and EC Regulation 812/2004 were discussed. A demonstration was given of the research undertaken at Seamarco (in which two porpoises are used). Seamarco (founded by Ron Kastelein) is a company performing research on anthropogenic noise related to the hearing of fish and marine mammals.</p> <p>In 2007, a new fishing vessel, capable of setting gillnets, was launched (it started fishing in 2008). A steady increase in the number of gillnetters can be expected, given the ever increasing fuel prices. In 2007 fuel prices increased to 0.50€/l in September, and peaked during the last two months of 2007 with 0.57€/l. The average fuel price in 2007 was equal to the one in 2006: 0.48€/l.</p>

Implementation of methods to reduce by-catch

Observed bycatch in 2007

Species	Estimated number of by-caught animals	Area (ICES area or more detailed)	Notes (type of fishery, effort, seasonal variations, etc.)
Estimates are provisional			
<i>Phocoena phocoena</i>	6 (+)	IVc	Recreational beach fisheries
<i>Phocoena phocoena</i>	6 (+)	IVc	Unknown fisheries

2. Reduction of disturbance to small cetaceans

No more regular high-speed ferry routes between Belgium and the United Kingdom are in operation. A report on shipping in Belgian waters has been submitted to ASCOBANS AC 2008.

Information on levels of disturbance
(e.g. seismic surveys, new high-speed ferry routes, studies about acoustic impacts on cetaceans, etc.)

The construction and exploitation of two offshore windfarms has been licenced (situation January 2008). The construction of one of the windfarms (on the Thorntonbank – 300MW), for which gravity foundations will be used, will commence in spring 2008. The construction of another windfarm (on the Bligh Bank – 330MW), for which mono-piles will be used, will start in December 2008.

During the construction phases of the two projects, measures will have to be taken for avoiding disturbance of, or harming marine mammals (ramp up procedures for pile driving operations, deployment of acoustic deterrents, ...). Although MUMM, carrying out the Environmental Impact Assessment, advised that in order to avoid disturbance of porpoises pile driving should not take place between January and April, this was not accepted in the licence. For both projects the impact on cetaceans will be monitored. More information concerning the offshore windfarm projects in Belgium is available at MUMM's website (<http://www.mumm.ac.be>).

Implementation of guidelines, new legislation, etc. to reduce disturbance

3. Protected areas for small cetaceans

No areas were proposed specifically for protecting cetaceans.

Publications and communications

Decler, K., Anselin, A., Bauwens, D., Ronse, A., Van Landuyt, W., Stieperaere, H., Coeck, J., Buysse, D., Van Thuyne, G., Belpaire, C., Stienen, E., Courtens, W., Haelters, J., Kerckhof, F., Thomaes, A., & De Knijf, G., 2007. Dieren en planten: Bijlage 2 en 4 habitatrichtlijn, in: Decler, K. (Ed.), 2007. Europees beschermde natuur in Vlaanderen en het Belgisch deel van de Noordzee: habitattypen: dier- en plantensoorten. Mededelingen van het Instituut voor Natuur- en Bosonderzoek, 2007.01: 361-419.

Measures taken to identify, implement and manage protected areas

4. Further research on small cetaceans

In 2007 in total 86 porpoises washed ashore, were bycaught or were found dead at sea. Among the washed ashore carcasses, many were in an advanced state of decomposition. Most of the carcasses were available for research, and were investigated according to the state of decomposition. The following figures are preliminary, given that some carcasses still need to be investigated.

- 4 washed ashore alive; 3 of these died on the beach (and are included in natural mortality), and 1 was returned to sea alive;
- 1 was found dead in the river Scheldt (unknown cause of death);
- At least 12 stranded animals were found to have been caught in fishing gear; of these, 6 of the bycatches were attributed to recreational fisheries (all in March and April); 6 bycaught animals could not be attributed to recreational or professional fisheries;
- 1 of the animals bycaught in recreational beach gillnet fisheries was removed from the net alive, but injured, and was returned to sea; pictures were taken from this event, but the bycatch was not reported by the fishermen (although required by the legislation);
- At least 17 animals died of natural causes (including 3 live stranded animals that died on the beach);
- The cause of death of 56 animals could not be identified (yet) due to an advanced state of decomposition, the unavailability of the carcass, or the fact that the autopsy has not taken place yet (situation 5 March 2008).

In 2007 one white-beaked dolphin washed ashore (decomposed).

Implementation of schemes to use and gain information from stranded cetaceans

Sightings

Harbour porpoises:

Numerous sightings of harbour porpoises were reported in 2007, although numbers were lower than in 2006 (an observation also made in The Netherlands).

White-beaked dolphins:

Only few sightings of white-beaked dolphins were reported (2 sightings of respectively 5 and 2 animals, and 1 sighting of 8 animals in France, near the border with Belgium).

Pilot whales:

A sighting of a group of 3 pilot whales was reported.

Common dolphins:

Two sightings were reported: a solitary (and sociable) animal, and a group of 10.

Bottlenose dolphins:

Numerous observations were reported. In January 2007 2 animals were observed very close inshore. At the end of July 2 animals were observed near the coastline, and from the beginning of August until October (with a break in September) a sociable bottlenose dolphin was present off Ostend. This animal was injured by a ships' propeller around 11 August, but the injuries proved not to be fatal; the wounds were apparently healed by the end of August. During the whole month of November a bottlenose dolphin (the same one?) resided near an offshore mussel farm off Nieuwpoort. It was last observed at the end of November. At the end of November a solitary bottlenose dolphin was observed in the river Scheldt (the same animal?), and 3 bottlenose dolphins were reported from northern French waters, near the border with Belgium.



Picture of the bottlenose dolphin injured by a ships' propeller. Off Ostend, 11 August 2007 (image by Century 21 Cocoon).

Research projects

WAKO

Uitbreiding: Evaluatie van de milieu-impact van WARrelnet- en boomKORvisserij op het Belgisch Continentaal Plat (WAKO-I): 2006–October 2007

This project aims at evaluating the environmental impact of beamtrawling against bottom set gill net fisheries in Belgian marine waters. It is possible it will be followed up by a more extensive project. Contact persons: Jochen Depestele: Jochen.Depestele@ilvo.vlaanderen.be and Jan Haelters: j.haelters@mumm.ac.be).

MARIN

The Federal department of Science Policy is funding a veterinary surgeon at the MUMM department of the Royal Belgian Institute of Natural Sciences (2006 – 2008). This veterinary surgeon is dealing with the autopsies of marine mammals washing ashore in Belgium, the co-ordination with neighbouring countries, and the inventory of a tissue bank of marine mammals.

Systematic collection and preservation of marine mammal tissues started in 1990 and was extended since 1995 with samples from other regions in the southern North Sea through international co-operation with France and the Netherlands. This collection now constitutes the Belgian Marine Mammal Tissue Bank (BMMTB) placed under the joint management of RBINS and the University of Liège, with the purpose to provide high quality samples of marine mammals (small and large cetaceans as well as pinnipeds) to scientists in a non-profit scientific collaboration. Samples may be used for studies in pathology, microbiology, toxicology, life history, etc. So far, 9703 tissue samples have been cataloged. The tissue bank should be considered as a tool to facilitate tissues exchange. Gathering samples of marine mammals from various European areas will help to have a geographical overview of variations and, given that some samples were already collected in 1990, temporal trends could also be investigated. Contact person: Thierry Jauniaux: t.jauniaux@mumm.ac.be.

Harbour porpoises in the southern North Sea

The project “Harbour porpoises in the southern North Sea: trends, threats and research & management proposals” is a small project funded by IFAW. It is executed by MUMM together with Royal NIOZ (The Netherlands). The report will deal with the decline and increase of porpoises in the 20th and 21st century, focus on the related conservation problems, and propose realistic management measures. Contact persons: Jan Haelters (j.haelters@mumm.ac.be) and Kees Camphuysen (camphuys@nioz.nl).

Investigations of impacts of offshore windfarms on cetaceans

Some studies on the impact of the construction and operation of offshore windfarms will be started in 2008. Contact person: Jan Haelters: j.haelters@mumm.ac.be.

Publications, communications

Depestele, J., Courtens, W., Degraer, S., Derous, S., Haelters, J., Hostens, K., Moulaert, I., Polet, H., Rabaut, M., Stienen, E. & Vincx, M. (in prep.). WaKo: Evaluatie van de milieu-impact van WARrelneten boomKORvisserij op het Belgisch Continentaal Plat: Eindrapport. ILVO-Visserij: Oostende, België.

Fontaine, M.C., Baird, S.J.E., Piry, S., Ray, N., Tolley, K.A., Duke, S., Birkun, A.J., Ferreira, M., Jauniaux, T., Llavona, À., Öztürk, B., Öztürk, A.A., Ridoux, V., Rogan, E., Sequeira, M., Siebert, U., Vikingsson, G.A., Bouquegneau, J.-M. & Michaux, J.R., 2007. Rise of oceanographic barriers in continuous populations of a cetacean: the genetic structure of harbour porpoises in Old World waters. *BMC Biology* 5, 30.

Abstract

Background

Understanding the role of seascape in shaping genetic and demographic population structure is highly challenging for marine pelagic species such as cetaceans for which there is generally little evidence of what could effectively restrict their dispersal. In the present work, we applied a combination of recent individual-based landscape genetic approaches to investigate the population genetic structure of a highly mobile extensive range cetacean, the harbour porpoise in the eastern North Atlantic, with regards to oceanographic characteristics that could constrain its dispersal.

Results

Analyses of 10 microsatellite loci for 752 individuals revealed that most of the sampled range in the eastern North Atlantic behaves as a 'continuous' population that widely extends over thousands of kilometres with significant isolation by distance (IBD). However, strong barriers to gene flow were detected in the south-eastern part of the range. These barriers coincided with profound changes in environmental characteristics and isolated, on a relatively small scale, porpoises from Iberian waters and on a larger scale porpoises from the Black Sea.

Conclusion

The presence of these barriers to gene flow that coincide with profound changes in oceanographic features, together with the spatial variation in IBD strength, provide for the first time strong evidence that physical processes have a major impact on the demographic and genetic structure of a cetacean. This genetic pattern further suggests habitat-related fragmentation of the porpoise range that is likely to intensify with predicted surface ocean warming.

Haelters, J., Kerckhof, F. & Jacques, T., 2007. Strandvisserij en strandingen van bruinvissen tussen 1995 en juni 2007. Rapport van de Beheerseheid van het Mathematisch Model van de Noordzee (BMM), Koninklijk Belgisch Instituut voor Natuurwetenschappen, Brussel. 9p.

Jauniaux, T., Haelters, J. & Jacques, T.G., 2007. Espèces marines strictement protégées (mammifères): prise en charge de l'acroissement des échouages et mise au point de la banque de tissus. Rapport scientifique IRSNB/UGMM, période 2006 - 2007, 18 p., 4 fig.

Rappé, K., 2007. Strandvisserij in de kijker. De Grote Rede 18: 17-20.

Research on abundance, population structure etc.

5. Research on the effects of pollutants on cetacean health

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Research on the effects of pollutants on cetacean health

6. Public awareness and education

Information on stranded animals and on sightings, is given on the website of MUMM (in Dutch, English and French): http://www.mumm.ac.be/EN/Management/Nature/search_strandings.php. For reporting sightings, the following email account can be used: dolphin@mumm.ac.be.

From 15 till 17 March 2007, the Brussels harbour welcomed the cetacean research sailing ship 'Song of the Whale'. This state of the art sailing ship belongs to the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW). An event was organised by IFAW on 15 March at the Brussels Royal Yacht Club in collaboration with the Ministry of Environment and in presence of the Federal Minister of the Environment; cetacean experts and the press got the opportunity to receive first-hand information on the research performed from the vessel as well as on threats to whales. A visit of the sailing ship allowed the participants which included scientists, the general public and school children to meet the international crew.

In the framework of the international year of the dolphin (CMS), a major event was organised by Natuurpunt, together with some other partners. It was attended by 2 Belgian ministers, the former Belgian minister of the North Sea, a former Dutch minister, the lord mayor of the city of Nieuwpoort, and his royal highness Prince Laurent, son of the Belgian king. The contributions for the Dolphin fund gathered by school children were handed over to the executive secretary of CMS, Dr. Robert Hepworth. A side event was the "North Sea Market", in which key institutes for the North Sea presented their activities. The event was covered by all media.

Publications, communication

In the framework of the year of the dolphin, a book on "101 questions about dolphins" was published by Clavis Publishers; profits were partly transferred to the Dolphin Fund.

Haelters, J. (2007). Walvisachtigen in Belgische wateren: vreemde luizen of toch niet? *De Grote Rede* 20: 2-7

Measures taken in the fields of public awareness and education to implement or promote the Agreement

7. Other relevant news

In the framework of the 59th International Whaling Commission annual meeting held in Anchorage in Alaska from 4 to 30 May 2007, Belgium succeeded to get consensus on its Vaquita proposal. The proposal 'The Vaquita, from critically endangered to facing extinction' was sponsored by 27 countries. The Vaquita is a small cetacean found only in the Gulf of California in Mexico.

Publications, communications

Haelters, J., de Lichtervelde, A. & Van Waerebeek, K., 2007. Belgian progress report on cetacean research, May 2005 to April 2007, with statistical data for the calendar years 2005-2006. National Report to the International Whaling Commission (IWC) 2007. 5p.

Goffin, A., Lescauwae, A.-K., Calewaert, J.-B., Mees, J., Seys, J., Delbare, D., Demaré, W., Hostens, K., Moolaert, I., Parmentier, K., Redant, F., Mergaert, K., Vanhooreweder, B., Maes, F., De Meyer, P., Belpaeme, K., Maelfait, H., Degraer, S., De Maerschalck, V., Derous, S., Gheschiere, T., Vanaverbeke, J., Van Hoey, G., Kuijken, E., Stienen, E., Haelters, J., Kerckhof, F., Overloop, S. & Peeters, B., 2007. MIRA (2006) Milieurapport Vlaanderen, Achtergronddocument 2006, Kust & zee. [MIRA (2006) Environmental report Flanders, Background paper 2006, Coast and sea]. Vlaamse Milieumaatschappij: Erembodegem, Belgium. 180 p.