

North Sea Plan Progress Report

Summary of Progress in Implementation of the Plan

Qualitative Assessment of Progress in the implementation of the ASCOBANS North Sea Conservation Plan (CP) for HP (update Aug 2018)										
Except for Action 2, ref. pinger use: na = non applicable; -1, situation is less good than at the adoption of the plan in 2009, 0 = no progress, 1 = small progress or at experimental level; 2, steady progress; 3, fully implemented.										
Actions from the North Sea Conservation Plan for HP		Priority	SE	DK	DE	NL	BE	FR	UK	
1	Implementation of the CP: co-ordinator and Steering Committee	High	Coordinator currently in place							
2	Implementation of existing regulations on bycatch of cetaceans e.g. EC 812/2004 & Habitat Directive (HD)	High	Vessels requiring pingers	?	14	yes	yes	0	90	6-8
			No. of vessels using pingers	?	?	?	0	na	9	6-8
			Enforcement policy	0	?	1	?	na	na	3
			Dedicated observer prog	0	0	0	0	0	(yes)	3
			Monitoring under HD	0	0	0	0	yes	yes	yes
3	Establishment of BYC observation programmes on vessel smaller than 15m long, professional and recreational fisheries	High	Professional	1	1	0	2	0	2	2
			Recreational	0	1	na	0	0	1?	na
4	Regular evaluation of relevant fisheries, extent of HP BYC: Gillnet fisheries =>15m vessels, dedicated, % DAS observed Gillnet fisheries <15m vessels, dedicated, % DAS observed Cetacean scheme appended to DCF / DCR schemes DCF observations in 2016 in NS, % DAS observed	High		0	0	0	0	0	0	1
				0	0	0	0	0	14%	18%
				0	0.2	0	REM	0	0.7	0.33
				no	yes	yes	yes	no	yes	yes
				0	0.76	0	0	0	na	9.4
5	Review of current pingers, dev. of altern.pingers and gear modif.	High	2	2	2	1	na	1	2	
6	Finalise a management procedure approach for determining maximum allowable bycatch limits	High	General progress ICES WGMME, WGBYC, OSPAR (MSFD)							
			0	0	0	1	0	0	2	
7	Monitoring trends in distribution and abundance of HP in NS	High	Large scale	SCANS III undertaken in 2016						
			Reg/survey	1	2	3	3	3	1	1
			Reg/modelling	0	2	2	2	2	3	3
8	Review of the stock structure of HP in NS	High	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	
9	Collection of incidental HP data through stranding networks	Medium	1	0	3	3	3	2	3	
10	Investigation of the health, nutritional status and diet of HP in NS	Medium	1	2	2	2	1	1	2	
11	Investigation of the effects of anthropogenic sounds on HP	Medium	0	2	2	2	2	1	2	
12	Collection and archiving of data on anthropogenic activities and development of a GIS	Medium	1	2	2	2	1	1	2	



North Sea Conservation Plan



Priority Recommendations - 1

- Work nationally (e.g. through work plans) and regionally (through Regional Coordination Groups) to improve quality and availability of fishing effort data (e.g. by region, gear type, net length, vessel size category, season, and country)
- Investigate options for more robust but cost-effective bycatch monitoring in the ASCOBANS region by commissioning a cost-benefit analysis of available and potential monitoring tools to be used aboard fishing vessels (e.g. observers, mobile REM). The method needs to be suitable for vessels of less than 15 metres length. The results of the study should be discussed at the Part II Bycatch Workshop on “Unacceptable interactions”
- Assess how Parties can individually and collectively draw on fisheries funding from the EU (e.g. EMFF) to jointly implement better bycatch monitoring and mitigation, with assistance from DG Environment)



North Sea Conservation Plan



Priority Recommendations - 2

- Investigate gear specific solutions to mitigate bycatch, including alternative fishing methods to static gillnetting, by commissioning a review of available mitigation that could be applicable to fisheries within the ASCOBANS Agreement Area
- Recommend to Parties to address the challenges for monitoring cetacean bycatch as a consequence of working under the EU-MAP. These include an appropriate sampling design (taking account of areas, metiers, number of vessels to be sampled, amount of sampling days/hauls, etc), and ensuring that trained and dedicated observers are deployed in adequate numbers and adequately engaged in monitoring cetaceans, drawing upon knowledge of high risk areas and fisheries



North Sea Conservation Plan



Priority Recommendations - 3

- Encourage Parties to pass on bycatch monitoring and mitigation recommendations under ASCOBANS, at a national level, to the appropriate persons to facilitate engagement internationally, particularly in discussions with the Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries (STECF) and the European Commission.
- Recommend to Parties that at future meetings of the Advisory Committee and the North Sea Group a fisheries representative from the respective Party is present. The Terms of Reference of the North Sea Group shall be updated accordingly in the intersessional period.



North Sea Conservation Plan



Priority Recommendations - 4

- Recommend that North Sea-wide information on life history parameters be collected and analysed from strandings and bycaught animals in order to assess for evidence of temporal changes in those parameters that may have resulted from anthropogenic activities.
- Improve the information relevant to the Conservation Plan provided to ASCOBANS by Parties to facilitate collation and assessment of the North Sea status by the Coordinator
- Ensure greater coordination of activities between countries within the ASCOBANS Agreement Area



North Sea Plan Progress Report – Actions 1 & 2



Action 1: Implementation of the Plan through establishment of a Coordinator and a Steering Committee

Key Conclusions and Recommendations

- *Part-time Coordinator (responsible for all three Conservation Plans) in place from February 2018, for an initial 12 months*

Action 2: Implementation of existing regulations on bycatch of cetaceans

Key Conclusions and Recommendations

- *Most EU Member States submit annual reports for Reg. 812/2004*
- *Often a time delay & content not fulfilling the objectives of reliable bycatch estimates & adequate mitigation*
- *Consistency required across National reports with comparable level of detail*
- *Ready access to reports*
- *Obligations under EU Habitats Directive & Resolutions adopted by ASCOBANS Parties should be fully implemented.*



North Sea Plan Progress Report – Action 3



Action 3: Establishment of bycatch observation programmes on small vessel (<15 m) and recreational fisheries

Key Conclusions and Recommendations

- *Small vessel (<15 m) and recreational net fisheries are known to cause porpoise bycatch in and around North Sea, and yet are inadequately monitored*
- *Despite challenges, remote electronic monitoring proven successful in Denmark and the Netherlands*
- *Attention needed across the region for more effective bycatch monitoring of these fisheries that, although required under Reg. 812/2004, is rarely implemented.*



North Sea Plan Progress Report – Action 4



Action 4: Regular evaluation of all fisheries with respect to extent of harbour porpoise bycatch

Key Conclusions and Recommendations

- *Estimates of bycatch rates suffer from low sampling rate*
- *Measures of fishing effort (e.g. days at sea) inadequate and for different sizes of vessels, measures (VMS, logbooks, etc) not easily equated with one another*
- *Currently far from obtaining target of spatio-temporal measures of net length and soak time for static gear*
- *Sampling procedure required that adequately reflects actual number of porpoises bycaught per unit effort across all vessels causing bycatch.*



North Sea Plan Progress Report – Action 5



Action 5: Review of current pingers, development of alternative pingers and gear modifications

Key Conclusions and Recommendations

- *Pingers mandatory in certain gillnet fisheries in the North Sea for EU Member States but not all countries using them and level of enforcement very variable between countries*
- *More research needed to find mitigation measures that are both practical and effective*
- *Development of alternative gears may be the most desirable long-term solution to porpoise bycatch.*



North Sea Plan Progress Report – Action 6



Action 6: Review & finalise a management procedure approach for determining maximum allowable bycatch limits in the region

Key Conclusions and Recommendations

- *Debate as to what society should set as conservation objectives; RLA approach developed within the UK sets some numerical parameters to establish an environmental limit and potential trigger for action for harbour porpoises experiencing bycatch in the North Sea*
- *A number of assumptions have to be made, including accuracy of annual bycatch estimate, overall population size, population structure, demographic trend & structure, reproductive & mortality rates, carrying capacity, and impact levels of other anthropogenic activities*
- *Current levels of bycatch in the North Sea believed to be insufficient to cause serious depletion of the harbour porpoise population*
- *Continuing discussion needed amongst Member States to attempt to arrive at consistent and well-defined conservation objectives across the region, and the setting of environmental limits and triggers over a practical time scale, with further consideration of the utility of the RLA approach bearing in mind a number of uncertainties.*



North Sea Plan Progress Report – Action 7



Action 7: Monitoring trends in distribution and abundance of harbour porpoises in the region

Key Conclusions and Recommendations

- *The harbour porpoise population within the North Sea (including the eastern half of the English Channel) estimated to be c. 250,000-350,000 animals. No significant change in abundance since the mid 1990s*
- *Regular visual monitoring by aerial survey now undertaken on a seasonal and annual basis in the southern North Sea involving a number of countries. Winter months remain less well covered, and areas in the central and northern North Sea largely unmonitored except by decadal wide-scale surveys and some local windfarm-related visual and/or acoustic monitoring. Northernmost part of the North Sea relatively poorly monitored*
- *It is recommended that these gaps are filled and that every Member State has a regular programme of monitoring across its entire EEZ.*



North Sea Plan Progress Report – Action 8



Action 8: Review of the stock structure of harbour porpoises in the region

Key Conclusions and Recommendations

- *Still some uncertainty over extent to which there is substructuring of harbour porpoise populations in North Sea, with one, two, or three areas suggested as Management Units*
- *Further samples for some of the boundary areas – Danish vs Norwegian Skagerrak, northern Kattegat, southern vs western Norway, Shetland vs Orkney/Scottish mainland, would be useful for analysis using a range of approaches*
- *Possibility of further substructuring should be explored in central North Sea from Danish and north German coasts across to eastern Britain since there are signals of differentiation on an east-west as well as north-south axis. Analyses best conducted on samples where the precise original location is known.*

