

Agenda Item 2.1

Review on New Information on Threats and Other
Issues Relevant to Small Cetaceans

Noise

Information Document 2.1e

**Meeting of the OSPAR Intersessional
Correspondence Group on Underwater Noise -
ICG-Noise(2) 2021 Summary Record**

Action Requested

Take note

Submitted by

OSPAR

OSPAR Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic
Meeting of the Intersessional Correspondence Group on Underwater Noise

By Webex: 30 June 2021

ICG-Noise(2) 2021 Summary Record

Agenda Item 1: Adoption of agenda

- 1.1 ICG-Noise(2) 2021 was chaired by the Co-convenors Nathan Merchant (United Kingdom) and Niels Kinneking (Netherlands). Co-convenor Niels Kinneking welcomed everyone to the meeting. The meeting was attended by representatives from Denmark, France, Germany, Ireland, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, and United Kingdom, together with observers from ACOPS, ICES, IOGP and IAGC and invited experts from Witteveen&Bos.
- 1.2 The draft agenda (ICG-Noise(2) 21/01/01) was adopted. It was noted, however, that agenda item 3 would not be discussed since a draft assessment on pressure from impulsive noise was still to be prepared.
- 1.3 The list of participants is at ICG-Noise(2) 21/00/01.

Agenda Item 2: Cross-cutting and strategic issues

- 2.1 ICG-Noise noted updates and feedback from OSPAR meetings as set out in document 21/02/01 (EIHA, CoG, HoD). In relation to the work on an implementation plan for ambient noise monitoring in the North Sea, Co-convenor Niels Kinneking reported that the JOMOPANS project had been awarded a year's extension which would enable it to support the transition phase towards the establishment of a joint monitoring programme.
- 2.2 ICG-Noise considered an update on preparations for the QSR thematic assessment of underwater noise (21/02/02). The Secretariat reported that a small consultancy contract had been put in place to provide EIHA with technical assistance on the EIHA human activities and noise thematic assessments.
- 2.3 ICG-Noise agreed to the revised timetable for production of the thematic assessment as at Annex A, incorporating a reference to the EIHA meeting on 4 November 2021 where all outstanding indicator assessments should be approved. Co-convenor Niels Kinneking noted the need to circulate draft indicator assessments via basecamp in advance of EIHA.

Agency item 3: Draft indicator assessment on pressure from impulsive noise -

- 3.1 This item was not discussed. Co-convenor Nathan Merchant advised that the draft assessment would be prepared over the next couple of months and would closely follow the approach taken in the previous 2019 assessment.

Agenda Item 4: Draft indicator assessment on risk of impact from impulsive noise

4.1 Co-convenor Nathan Merchant presented the draft indicator assessment on risk of impact from impulsive noise for OSPAR Region II (21/04/01 and presentation P0002). Key developments in the draft assessment were the switch in harbour porpoise dataset (to Gilles et al, 2016) and extension of time series to 2015-2019. The spatial coverage of the assessment was constrained by the harbour porpoise data and therefore covered most but not all of the North Sea. There was a need to carry out a checking of the 2019 data, notably in relation to piling and generic data sources. The assessment included information on the effects/benefits from noise abatement techniques for piling activities and on risk of exposure in marine protected areas compared to the assessment area as a whole (where the assessment currently indicated higher risk in MPAs).

4.2 The following discussion points were noted:

- a) assessment thresholds should take account of periods and areas of higher sensitivity, e.g. for calving/nursing; it would be helpful for the assessment to show both the results on time and area exposed, e.g. to show where there is chronic loss of habitat, as well as the index itself;
- b) evidence on population movement and nursing/calving areas in the North Sea was limited; it was assumed that there was one harbour porpoise population in the North Sea and that areas of higher density were also important for calving/nursing;
- c) the approach taken in the RAMSAR Convention to defining acceptable levels of population exposure could be considered, so that for example a conservation aim could be not to lose more than 1% of the habitat area for harbour porpoise; or use similar methods as for calculating acceptable levels of by-catch;
- d) the selection of thresholds was under consideration in TG-Noise, but no guidance had so far been produced by them;
- e) the inclusion of MPA data was valuable and could be useful for the “key message” section in the assessment; risk of exposure in MPAs should be lower than across the whole region;
- f) it would be helpful to have more explanation/discussion in the assessment of the distinctions between risk of impact and population effects;
- g) the use of ICES sub-rectangles for estimating areas of effect (plus buffer area) was a pragmatic way of providing a consistent methodology; but the ideal would be to have precise data across the board that would allow for a more accurate regional scale assessment;
- h) a lot of 2019 impulsive noise had been received from Norway but none of the reported seismic data applied to the relevant part of the North Sea covered by the assessment; however, Norway would double-check the data and confirm;
- i) ICG-Noise would need to agree the final text of the “key message”, which could be modified to include reference to sensitive time periods and MPAs; it could also be pointed out that the decline between 2015-2017 was heavily influenced by the exceptionally large seismic survey conducted in 2015;

4.3. The Co-convenor concluded that the draft assessment was close to being a final version. He would pick up specific points with contributors and look to include additional figures as proposed before circulating a revised text.

Agenda Item 5: Draft indicator assessment on pressure from ambient noise

5.1 Co-convenor Niels Kinneging gave a presentation (P0001) on the development of the draft indicator assessment on pressure from ambient noise in OSPAR Region II. This included material presented to EIHA 2021 and further work done under the JOMOPANS project since then, for example on selection of species for a risk of impact assessment and selection of assessment area.

5.2 The following discussion points were noted:

- a) Germany gave further explanation of the reasoning for their study reservation on the adoption of the Common indicator; on the positive side, they welcomed discussion of the index and potential ambiguity of results, and that MPAs should be considered in a similar way within the ambient noise assessment to the assessment on risk of impact from impulsive noise; the assessment also needed to address the accuracy of the models and the constraints they placed on use of excess levels; the further work should consider the choice of relative versus absolute level: use of the 20 dB excess level risked to “allow” for additional shipping noise over and above high natural levels; an alternative would be to be able to adjust the excess level according to circumstances;
- b) For the moment the model provided a choice between 6 and 20 dB excess over natural levels; 20 dB was not a level that is allowed as such but it was used to assess what is limiting communication by animals; a 6 dB cut-off on the other hand would show most of the North Sea as “black” and would lose resolution; there might be good reasons to change the excess value in future assessments but for present purposes it enabled assessors to produce a pressure map clearly distinguishing between natural and anthropogenic noise;
- c) A decision was needed on the definition of the assessment area or areas; while an assessment would be made at North Sea regional scale, the presentation discussed possible sub-divisions; selection of the assessment area was a matter for the assessors, taking account of ecological but also political and jurisdictional issues;
- d) MPAs could be useful to include within the pressure assessment as an illustration of how pressure data could be matched with other spatial data, though for the actual impact indicator it would be important to look more closely at specific conservation objectives; some ICG-Noise members considered that discussion on MPA data was really a matter for the risk of impact assessment and that the focus in the pressure assessment should be on the human activities;
- e) France advised that data for OSPAR Region IV would be available from the JONAS project, to include within the assessment.

5.3 The Co-convenor confirmed that the assessment would include both the pressure curves and the index as was done with the impulsive noise assessment, and include discussion of the accuracy of the models. He was open also to discussion on absolute versus relative values and would include more

explanation in the text of the assessment. The next steps were to complete the indicator template so that a draft assessment would be ready for circulation by the end of the summer.

Agenda Item 6: Any other business

6.1 Niels Kinneging and Jakob Tougaard (Denmark) provided an update on the ongoing work of EU TG-Noise to provide guidance on the definition of threshold values for Good Environmental Status to EU Member States. This work remains ongoing and a 'flexible' approach is understood to be in development, to accommodate different approaches to assessment. Jakob Tougaard also provided an update on the development of noise assessments in HELCOM, confirming that the methodological approach aligns with that of ICG-Noise.

6.2 The Co-convenors informed ICG-Noise that there would be a joint OSPAR-HELCOM noise meeting on 24 August to exchange information on indicators, assessments, data and thresholds. The Secretariat would post the invitation and agenda on basecamp.

Agenda Item 7: Report of the meeting

7.1 The Secretariat proposed that a draft of the summary record would be issued by the week of 19 July, after it had been cleared with the Co-convenors.

7.2 ICG-Noise agreed that it would meet again in the week of 13 September to have a final meeting to sign-off on the draft indicator assessments, before submitting to the EIHA meeting on 4 November (document deadline 13 October).

7.3 The Co-convenors invited ICG-Noise members to consider if they could host a face-to-face meeting of ICG-Noise in January 2022.