

Agenda Item 3.3

Species Action Plans

Conservation Plan for Harbour Porpoises
in the North Sea (North Sea Plan)

Information Document 3.3

Priority Recommendations from the 11th
Meeting of the North Sea Group

Action Requested

Take note

Submitted by

Secretariat



**PRIORITY RECOMMENDATIONS
 FROM THE 11TH MEETING OF THE ASCOBANS NORTH SEA GROUP**

(Adopted by the Advisory Committee)

NSG11 /Rec #	Recommendation	Long-/short-term + Deadline if possible	Priority (High / Medium / Low)
Evaluation on fisheries with respect to extent of porpoise bycatch			
1.	Parties and Non-Party Range States to focus monitoring and mitigation effort on suspected high-risk fisheries and areas, bearing in mind that the latest bycatch estimates for porpoises in the North Sea indicate the annual numbers bycaught likely exceed thresholds from RLA analysis. There still remains great uncertainty around all bycatch estimates in the region due to a stratified random sampling approach not yet having been implemented. (NSG10/Rec1*)	Ongoing, review annually	High
2.	Parties are encouraged to share training resources with each other to automate bycatch detection in electronic monitoring	End 2023	High
3.	Parties are encouraged to further develop and implement fishing effort monitoring such as inshore VMS for small vessel fisheries (less than 12 metres), following the example of the UK.	Ongoing, review annually	High
4.	Parties are encouraged to incorporate metrics such as soak time, net length, mesh size in fishing effort reporting	Long-term, end 2025	High
Finalise a management procedure approach for determining target limits of anthropogenic removals including bycatch in the region			
5.	Attention is needed to revise the current ASCOBANS conservation objectives to i) take account of the long-term objective to drive anthropogenic removals (i.e., including all pressures) towards zero (NSG10/Rec2*); ii) appraise their effectiveness, and to iii) to operationalize the objective with a timeframe and an agreed-upon risk of failing as in all management procedure approaches.	NSG12	High
6.	Parties, Non-Party Range States, and relevant national bodies to engage and take into regard stakeholder interests, in addition to the fishing industry, to reach common solutions to fulfil conservation aims. (NSG10/Rec3*)	Long-term, review annually	High
Development of alternative mitigation measures to reduce bycatch			
7.	Parties to support further investigations of approaches to mitigate harbour porpoise bycatch taking into account potential adverse impacts on other taxa such as birds and seals. (NSG10/Rec4)	Ongoing, review annually	High
8.	Parties to support the testing of bycatch mitigation actions at a fleet level and implement those that have proved to be effective and practical. (NSG10/Rec5)	Ongoing, review annually	High
9.	Parties to support more research on the behaviour of harbour porpoises in the wild around fishing gear, especially static nets, including their sensory capabilities and auditory health, for a better understanding of factors leading to bycatch. (NSG10/Rec6*)	Ongoing, review annually	High

NSG11 /Rec #	Recommendation	Long-/short-term + Deadline if possible	Priority (High / Medium / Low)
Monitoring trends in distribution and abundance			
10.	Parties are encouraged to collaborate on conducting surveys and analyses of regional trends in porpoise distribution and abundance at a North Sea-wide scale, and examine potential explanations for any observed changes. (NSG10/Rec7)	Long-term, review annually	High
11.	The North Sea Group to note any information on trends in abundance and distribution from the OSPAR QSR2023, and consider the implications of the findings. (NSG10/Rec.8*)	Short-term, NSG12	Medium
Investigation of the health, nutritional status and diet			
12.	Parties are encouraged to do collaborative research on the extent and seasonality of grey seal predation on harbour porpoises. (NSG10/Rec9*)	Ongoing, review annually	Medium (in some regions)
13.	Parties to facilitate rapid collaboration with stranding networks in the event of an unusual mortality event to identify potential causes of death. These should also include new potential sources such as bacterial infections, e.g. <i>Erysipelothrix rhusiopathiae</i> , and other pathogens such as avian influenza. (NSG10/Rec10*)	Ongoing, review annually	High
14.	Parties are strongly encouraged to further support North Sea-wide monitoring of life history parameters and nutritional status through the collection and analysis of stranded and bycaught animals in order to assess evidence of temporal changes in those parameters and explore links to anthropogenic drivers. (NSG10/Rec11*)	Ongoing, review annually	High
15.	Parties are encouraged to collect and analyse a sufficient number of stranded and/or bycaught harbour porpoises for assessing trends and status of persistent chemicals and other pollutants in the Greater North Sea.	Ongoing, review annually	High
Investigation of the effects of anthropogenic sounds on harbour porpoises			
16.	In the light of recent studies demonstrating acoustic trauma in porpoises due to explosions in the Baltic Sea, serious concern is expressed over similar activities occurring in the North Sea. Surviving animals might suffer from impaired hearing which, among other things, affect their ability to detect nets and find prey. The Secretariat is asked to bring these studies to the attention of all North Sea States and relevant bodies carrying out explosions. (NSG10/Rec12)	Short-term, NSG12	High
17.	Parties to make every effort to mitigate the effects on porpoises of activities involving explosions. (NSG10/Rec13)	Ongoing, review annually	High
18.	Collaborative studies are encouraged to quantify the impact of both impulsive and continuous noise on individual harbour porpoises. (NSG10/Rec14*)	Ongoing, review annually	High
19.	Parties and Non-Party Range States to encourage research to establish the population level impacts of noise levels and exposure duration. (NSG10/Rec15)	Ongoing, review annually	Medium
20.	Parties and Non-Party Range States to encourage international harmonisation of noise exposure criteria for regulatory purposes. (NSG10/Rec16*)	Ongoing, review annually	High
21.	The Secretariat to request the Joint Noise Working Group to compile the noise criteria used by individual Parties for regulatory purposes.	Short-term, NSG12	High

* Wording added/edited.