

Agenda Item 18.2

Relations with other Bodies

IGOs – HELCOM, OSPAR, EC, IWC, IMO, CBD,
ACCOBAMS, NAMMCO etc.

Document 34

**Co-operation between ASCOBANS and
HELCOM in Cetacean Conservation**

Action Requested

- take note and comment

Submitted by

HELCOM



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

CO-OPERATION BETWEEN ASCOBANS AND HELCOM IN CETACEAN CONSERVATION

The population of harbour porpoise in the Baltic Sea is currently at levels where the species is heavily endangered. Information on the species is scarce and therefore for example the distribution, health status and population structure of the species in the Baltic Sea is poorly known at present.

The Helsinki Commission (HELCOM), a focal point for the protection of the Baltic Sea marine environment, is concerned about the critical conservation status of the harbour porpoise populations in the Baltic Sea. HELCOM calls for enhanced co-operation to improve the living conditions for this species and to increase the current level of knowledge on the species status.

HELCOM has worked since 1996 to improve the conservation status of the harbour porpoises in the Baltic Sea. That year HELCOM adopted Recommendation 17/2 on the Protection of harbour porpoise in the Baltic Sea Area. In November 2007 the HELCOM Contracting Parties adopted the Baltic Sea Action Plan based on the ecosystem approach representing a shift from sector-by-sector approach to a more integrated management of human activities. The HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan addresses all the major environmental problems affecting the Baltic marine environment in order to restore the good ecological status of the Baltic marine environment by 2021. For marine biodiversity and nature conservation, the Action Plan has the goal of "favourable conservation status of marine biodiversity". It is in line with corresponding goals and objectives of already existing regulations at EU and global levels. In order to monitor and assess progress towards favourable conservation status of biodiversity, HELCOM has adopted Ecological Objectives with a set of initial targets and indicators.

To reach the targets and objectives associated with the HELCOM goal for Baltic Sea biodiversity the HELCOM Contracting Parties agreed in the BSAP to increase knowledge on and protection of Baltic Sea marine habitats, communities and species for example by further developing in co-operation with the 1991 Agreement on the Conservation of Small Cetaceans of the Baltic and North Seas (ASCOBANS) a co-ordinated reporting system and database on Baltic harbour porpoise sightings, by-catches and strandings by 2010.

The HELCOM BSAP urges the competent fisheries authorities to take immediate action in co-operation with HELCOM to achieve an evaluation of the effectiveness of existing technical measures, by 2008, to minimise by-catch of harbour porpoises, and to introduce adequate new technologies and measures. The BSAP includes a target that improved conservation status of all threatened and/or declining species in the HELCOM lists, including harbour porpoise, will be reached by 2015. The specific BSAP target for harbour porpoise is that by 2015 by-catch of harbour porpoise has been significantly reduced with the aim to reach by-catch rates close to zero. Preliminary indicators to be used for assessing progress towards the targets are suggested to be abundance, trends, and distribution of Baltic harbour porpoise; trends in numbers of discards and by-catch of fish, marine mammals and water birds; and number of entangled and drowned marine mammals and water birds.

The proposed co-operation should also be build on the existing EU-regulations and measures, such as the ban of driftnets by 1.1 2008 in the Baltic Sea, the mandatory use of pingers in bottom gillnets from June 2005 as well as the JASTARNIA Plan (2002) addressing many of the concerns listed also in the HELCOM Recommendation 17/2 and in the HELCOM Action Plan.

Proposed co-operation between ASCOBANS and HELCOM:

HELCOM wishes that this Meeting would promote the co-operation between HELCOM and ASCOBANS to enhance the protection of harbour porpoise in the Baltic Sea. HELCOM proposes that the co-operation between HELCOM, ASCOBANS and also ICES could include:

1. examination of the genetic origin, population size and structure of the Baltic harbour porpoise,
2. distribution and migration,
3. reproductive capacity,
4. effects of contaminants and health status, and
5. additional mortality owing to interactions with the commercial fisheries (e.g. by-catch, intentional killing), as well as
6. the development of a co-ordinated reporting system and database on Baltic harbour porpoises.