

Agenda Item 7: Cooperation with IWC, OSPAR, HELCOM and other international Organisations

Report on the 9th Meeting of the Environment Committee to HELCOM, Isle of Vilm, Germany, 28.09 - 02.10.1998

Submitted by the Secretariat

Comment: This document was distributed in October 1998. The Committee might wish to discuss its implications for ASCOBANS' future co-operation with HELCOM.

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

Report on the 9th Meeting of the Environment Committee to HELCOM Isle of Vilm, Germany, 28.09. - 02.10.1998

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General information

The ninth annual meeting of the Environment Committee of HELCOM (EC 9/98) was held at the International Academy for Nature Conservation on the Isle of Vilm, Germany, from 28.09. to 02.10.1998. The Secretary to ASCOBANS attended the meeting according to the recommendations given by the 5th Advisory Committee meeting.

A variety of issues, including monitoring and assessment procedures, nature conservation in the Baltic region and the implementation of the ministerial decisions at HELCOM 19/98, were addressed during the plenary sessions. A total of 69 documents was presented and discussed under the chairmanship of Mr. Niels-Peter Rühl, Federal Maritime and Hydrographic Agency.

Drafting groups were formed to focus on three major topics: One group discussed the implementation of the ministerial decisions at HELCOM 19/98 (chairman: Mr. Joachim Voss, Schleswig-Holstein State Agency for Nature and Environment). The second group, convened by Mr. Juha-Markku Leppänen from the Finnish Institute of Marine Research, elaborated a concept for the Fourth Periodic Assessment of the Baltic Marine Environment. The third team formulated a press release about the current state of the Baltic Sea ecosystem (chairman: Mr. Wolfgang Matthäus, Baltic Sea Research Institute).

With respect to the objectives of ASCOBANS, five issues were especially relevant and/or interesting:

1) Proposal for offshore Baltic Sea Protected Areas (BSPAs)

HELCOM EC-NATURE, the sub-committee dealing with nature conservation issues, is involved in the implementation of Baltic Sea Protected Areas. So far its work has focussed on coastal and inshore sites. During EC 9/98 a Proposal for offshore Baltic Sea Protected Areas was presented. The proposal was prepared by Ornis-Consult as an expert-report to HELCOM EC-NATURE and contains a list of 24 additional offshore areas proposed as BSPAs.

Among the areas, two are important breeding sites of harbour porpoise *Phocoena phocoena*. In Jammerland Bay, Great Belt (proposed offshore BSPA No. 21), more than four porpoises per km² were recorded and the presence of calves indicated the importance of the area as a breeding site. The reefs northeast of Læsø (proposed offshore BSPA No. 24) harbour the largest concentration of breeding harbour porpoises in the HELCOM region. Abundance during summer is supposed to exceed 1000 animals.

2) Hazardous substances and marine pollution

Based on the ministerial decisions at HELCOM 19/98, the Environment Committee (EC) will assess the current knowledge about the distribution and effects of hazardous substances in the Baltic marine environment. EC will consider the work done in other fora "concerning the development of relevant tools for assessing risks of hazardous substances in the marine environment". To further this assessment, EC MON will send a questionnaire to the Contracting Parties, which will include the following questions:

1. Could you, based on your monitoring or research data, define a priority list of hazardous substances, which you consider to be most harmful to the Baltic marine environment?
2. Which effects are known and are referred to which substances?
3. Which monitoring and/or research programmes on the concentration or effects of hazardous substances on the Baltic marine environment, not contributed to COMBINE (the monitoring of HELCOM for the Baltic Sea), are running or planned in your country?
4. Which national working groups or institutions are involved in this field? Please nominate contact points.
5. For which hazardous substances is a phasing out (e.g. by input reduction) most probably to be reached?

6. Do you have information concerning negative effects of hazardous substances from other fora or marine environments than HELCOM or the Baltic Sea?

Point for action

The 5th Advisory Committee meeting asked the Secretariat to provide recommendations for a future co-operation between ASCOBANS and HELCOM. The Secretariat therefore suggests, that the **Advisory Committee members of Denmark, Germany, Poland and Sweden**, which are Contracting Parties to ASCOBANS and HELCOM, should contact their national HELCOM delegates to ensure that our concerns and expertise about the impact of marine pollutants on cetaceans are included in their countries' reply to the questionnaire. The deadline for the national answers to the questionnaire is **1 February 1999**.

3) Co-operation between HELCOM and ICES

HELCOM requested ICES to expand its periodic assessment of Baltic seal populations on harbour porpoise and "to evaluate every third year the population of seals and harbour porpoise in the Baltic Sea Area, including the size of the populations, distribution, migration, reproductive capacity, effects of contaminants and health status, and additional mortality owing to interactions with commercial fisheries (by-catch, intentional killing)". Results of the first assessment were presented in the Report of the ICES Advisory Committee on the Marine Environment 1997.

It is planned to continue the request for scientific advice in 1999 allowing ICES to prepare the next evaluation in the year 2000. However, HELCOM may have to reduce its requests to ICES due to financial constraints.

Secretariat's comment:

In that case, the **Advisory Committee to ASCOBANS** should consider, whether ASCOBANS is able to provide HELCOM with data on the Baltic harbour porpoise population.

4) Fourth Periodic Assessment of the Baltic Marine Environment, 1994 - 1998

During EC 9/98 a concept for the Fourth Periodic Assessment of the Baltic Marine Environment covering the period of 1994 - 1998 was elaborated. Under the heading "Biodiversity and Nature Conservation" a paragraph will be included dealing with marine mammals. The chapter will be approximately two pages long and address "long term and recent population trends of seals and harbour porpoise". The proposed authors D. Boedeker and H. von Nordheim (Germany) in co-operation with Lars Thorell (Sweden) will also focus on "health conditions, threats and conflicts".

5) Global Environment Facility (GEF) proposal for a Baltic Sea Regional Project

A GEF proposal for a Baltic Sea Regional Project was submitted for information to the meeting. Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and the Russian Federation will conduct the project with co-operation by Denmark, Finland, Germany, Norway, Sweden and the United States. Total project costs are estimated at US\$ 18-22 million including a GEF contribution of US\$ 8-10 million. HELCOM in partnership with the International Baltic Sea Fishery Commission and ICES will act as executing agencies. Under the leadership of ICES one component of the project will focus on the "Interrelationships of Living Marine Resources to the Baltic Sea Environment and Ecosystem". Key measures shall be identified and adopted "concerning improved knowledge of environment and fish relationships, including genetic stocks and **marine mammals**, the selection and use of fishing gear and their impacts on marine habitats and fisheries".

Secretariat's comment:

The proposed project might offer an opportunity to investigate and implement measures to reduce by-catch of harbour porpoises in the Baltic. During the project definition phase, scheduled for November 1998 – October 1999, **Poland, Denmark, Germany, and Sweden** should therefore work towards an incorporation of ASCOBANS objectives into the final project proposal.