

Agenda Item 12

Any other Business

Information Document 12

CCB concerns about Mine Detonations in Fehmarnbelt

Action Requested

Take note

Submitted by

Coalition Clean Baltic



Note:

Delegates are kindly reminded to bring their own document copies to the meeting, if needed.

Background

The German Navy reported on their web page www.marine.de the recent detonation of 42 British WWII ground mines by the Standing NATO Mine Countermeasures Group 1 (SNMCMG1) in the waters Northwest of Fehmarn. Following an agreement between the German Lübeck Waterways and Shipping Authority and the German Navy, the NATO SNMCMG 1 detonated 42 British base mines from the Second World War northwest of Fehmarn at the end of August 2019. The operation was continued in early September in the frame of the exercise “Northern Coasts 2019”.

In such detonations, explosive charges of around 500 kg TNT are blasted remotely using an additional demining charge with a TNT equivalent of up to 100 or 200 kg which is placed next to the mine using a remotely operated underwater vehicle.

Some of the mines were blasted in or close to the marine protected area “Fehmarnbelt” in the German EEZ which is designated for harbour porpoises with the conservation objective to protect the calving and nursing ground of this species. Calving takes place in the Western Baltic Sea between June and August (Börjesson & Read 2003; Lockyer & Kinze 2003; Hasselmeier et al. 2004; ASCOBANS 2016). It was brought to our attention that nature conservation authorities were not involved in the decisions.

Depending on the size of the charge, small cetaceans are subject to significant impact such as blast trauma and hearing impairment up to several kilometers away (Koschinski 2011; von Benda-Beckmann et al. 2015). The blasting also introduces toxic and carcinogenic substances such as mercury and trinitrotoluene into the water which enters and accumulates in the food chain (e. g., Strehse et al. 2017; Appel et al. 2018).

Coalition Clean Baltic would like to draw the attention of ASCOBANS Parties to this matter and ask the Advisory Committee to discuss how this matter can be further addressed and progress be made with related recommendations and requests from ASCOBANS Resolution 8.8: Addressing the Threats from Underwater Munitions (MOP8, 2016).

CCB asks the Secretariat to inform about progress made on this matter since the adoption of Resolution 8.8 especially with regard to its points 9, 10 and 11. CCB requests the Secretariat to put the item on the agenda for the next AC meeting with regards to point 12 and update new available information on impacts of underwater munitions and their removal on cetaceans and to make recommendations to Parties as appropriate.

CCB further asks Parties which are also NATO member countries to encourage NATO to share information on detonations with national and regional conservation bodies and to develop international guidelines for removal of munitions involving all relevant stakeholders and organizations which take nature conservation into account. Such guidelines should be based on a precautionary approach, take into account wider environmental effects and consider methods of removal other than detonations and alternative technologies such as the use of underwater robotics. Integral part of such guidelines should be mitigation techniques based on scientific evidence which are to be employed when no alternatives to detonation are feasible, including techniques to reduce the shock wave, dedicated observation techniques and the additional use of acoustic deterrents. Such actions would be consistent with ASCOBANS Resolution 8.8.

Action requested

The Meeting is invited to:

- consider presented information;
- discuss how the issue can be addressed to NATO

References

- Appel, D., Strehse, J. S., Martin, H.-J. & Maser, E. (2018). Bioaccumulation of 2,4,6-trinitrotoluene (TNT) and its metabolites leaking from corroded munition in transplanted blue mussels (*M. edulis*). *Marine Pollution Bulletin* 135 1072–1078.
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- Börjesson, P. & Read, A. J. (2003): Variation in timing of conception between populations of the harbor porpoise. *Journal of Mammalogy* 84(3): 948–955.
- Hasselmeier, I., Abt, K. F., Adelung, D. & Siebert, U. (2004): Stranding patterns of harbour porpoises (*Phocoena phocoena*) in the German North and Baltic Seas, when does the birth period occur? *Journal of Cetacean Research and Management* 6 (3): 259–263.
- Koschinski, S. (2011). Underwater Noise Pollution from Munitions Clearance and Disposal, Possible Effects on Marine Vertebrates, and Its Mitigation. *Marine Technology Society Journal* 45(6): 80-88.
- Lockyer, C. & Kinze, C. C. (2003): Status, ecology and life history of harbor porpoises (*Phocoena phocoena*) in Danish waters. *NAMMCO Scientific Publications* 5: 143–176.
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