

Progress Review: Implementation of North Sea Harbour Porpoise Conservation Plan

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PROGRESS ON IMPLEMENTATION OF NORTH SEA CONSERVATION PLAN - 2023

Actions from the North Sea Conservation Plan for HP		Priority	SE	DK	DE	NL	BE	FR	UK	
1	Implementation of the CP: co-ordinator and Steering Committee	High	Coordinator currently in place							
2	Implementation of existing regulations on bycatch of cetaceans - e.g. EC 2019/1241 & Habitats Directive (HD)	High	Vessels requiring pingers	yes	17	yes	na	na	9	18
			No. of vessels using pingers	10+	17	?	na	na	9	18
			Enforcement policy	2	3	0	na	na	3	3
			Protected Species observer programme	2	2	0	1	1	2	2
			Regulating fisheries in N2K sites	2	2	1	1	1	2	2
3	Establishment of BYC observation programmes on vessel smaller than 12m long, professional and recreational fisheries	High	Professional	1	1	0	1	na	1	1
			Recreational	na	1	na	0	na	0	na
4	Regular evaluation of relevant fisheries, extent of HBP BYC:	High	Overall assessment	1	1	0	1	na	1	1
	Gillnet fisheries =>15m vessels, dedicated, % DaS observed		na	1*	?	na	na	?	?	
	Gillnet fisheries <15m vessels, dedicated, % DaS observed		5-10	?	0	1	na	?	?	
	Cetacean scheme appended to DCF / DCR schemes		yes	yes	yes	yes	no	yes	yes	
	DCF observations in NS, % DAS observed		yes	yes	?	10-15	na	?	?	
5	Bycatch Mitigation Measures	High	Deployment of working ADDs	1	2	1*	1*	na	1?	2
			Development of alternative ADDs	1	1	1	na	na	1	1?
			Modification of Fishing Gear	1	1	1	0	0	1	1
			Fisheries effort reduction/closures	2?	1	2	1	1	1	1
			Removal of Ghost Netting	1	1*	1*	1*	1**	0	1*
6	Review of management procedure approach for determining maximum allowable bycatch limits	High	Progress ICES WGBYC, OSPAR (MSFD), ASCOBANS							
7	Monitoring trends in distribution and abundance of HP in NS	High	Large scale	SCANS IV undertaken in 2022						
			Reg/survey	0	2	3	2	3	2	1
			Reg/modelling	0	2	3	2	3	2	1
8	Review of the stock structure of HP in NS	High	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	
9	Collection of incidental porpoise data through stranding networks	Medium	Life History	3	2	2	2	2	2	3
			Contaminants	2	2	3	3	2	2	3
10	Investigation of the health, nutritional status and diet of HP in NS	High	Cause of death	3	2	2	3	3	3	3
			Health/Nutritional Status	3	2	2	3	3	3	3
			Diet	2?	3	3	3	3	2	1
11	Investigation of the effects of anthropogenic sounds on HP	High	Monitoring continuous noise	2	3	2	2	2	2	2
			Monitoring impulsive noise	2	2	2	2	2	1	2
			Mitigation of continuous noise	1	1	1	0	0	0	2
			Mitigation of impulsive noise	2	3	3	3	2	1	2
12	Collection and archiving of data on anthropogenic activities and development of a GIS	Medium	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	

Notes

For NL, pingers required to enter some N2K sites
To be checked for NL, pending

Suggest split exclusion of fishing from other mitigation (pingers etc)

Suggest adding information collected from questionnaires

SE changed to na

NL: % DaS observed: Pelagic fisheries: 10-15%, Demersal fisheries <1%

SE changed to 2

* Private sector, ** Some Government Initiative

List of Priority Actions

1. Implementation of the Conservation Plan: Co-ordinator and Steering Committee – HIGH (ongoing)
2. Implementation of existing regulations on bycatch of cetaceans – HIGH (undertaken through EU Technical Regulations)
3. Establishment of Bycatch Observation Programmes on small vessel (<15m) and recreational fisheries – HIGH (I-VMS trialled in England & Wales and now mandatory from Nov 2023)
4. Regular evaluation of all relevant fisheries with respect to extent of porpoise bycatch – HIGH (ICES WGBYC)
5. Review of current pingers, development of alternative pingers and pinger modifications – HIGH (UK, DE, DK, SE)
6. Finalise a management procedure approach for determining maximum allowable anthropogenic removals in the region – HIGH (JBWG, OSPAR)

List of Priority Actions (cont.)

7. Monitoring trends in distribution and abundance of harbour porpoises in the region – HIGH (SCANS-IV in 2022; FR, BE, NL*, DE, DK) - *every 3 years)
8. Review of the stock structure of harbour porpoises in the region – HIGH (no new information since Fontaine *et al.*, 2017; Ben Chehida *et al.*, 2021)
9. Collection of incidental catch data through stranding networks in the region – HIGH (FR, BE, NL, DE, DK, SE, UK)
10. Investigation of the health, nutritional status and diet of harbour porpoises in the region – HIGH (most recent publications are: IJsseldijk *et al.*, 2020, 2022; Lambert, 2021; Ramsijn *et al.*, 2021; Williams *et al.*, 2020, 2021, 2023)
11. Investigation of the effects of anthropogenic sounds on harbour porpoises – HIGH (ICES Impulsive Noise Register, BE, NL, DE, DK, SE, UK)
12. Collection and archiving of data on anthropogenic activities and development of a North Sea-wide GIS based database – MEDIUM (ongoing)

Priority Recommendations

Evaluation on fisheries with respect to extent of porpoise bycatch

- Parties and Non-Party Range States to focus monitoring and mitigation effort on 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 indicated from RLA analysis. There still remains great uncertainty around all bycatch estimates in the region. Greater emphasis needed to monitor fishing effort and bycatch in small vessels as they become of increasing importance in some fishing fleets

Finalise a management procedure approach for determining maximum allowable bycatch limits in the region

- The current ASCOBANS conservation objectives need to be revised to incorporate a timeframe for their achievement, taking account of the goal to drive anthropogenic removals towards zero.
- Parties, Non-Party Range States, and relevant national bodies to engage and take into regard stakeholder interests, in particular the fishing industry, to reach common solutions to fulfil conservation aims.

Priority Recommendations (cont.)

Development of alternative pingers and gear modifications (including other mitigation measures)

- Parties to support further investigations of approaches to mitigate harbour porpoise bycatch taking into account any possible adverse impacts on other taxa such as birds and seals.
- Parties to support the testing of bycatch mitigation actions at a fleet level and implement those that have proved to be effective and practical.
- Parties to support more research on the behaviour of harbour porpoises around fishing gear, especially static nets, including their sensory capabilities and auditory health, for a better understanding of factors leading to bycatch.

Priority Recommendations (cont.)

Monitoring trends in distribution and abundance

- Parties are encouraged to collaborate on analyses of regional trends in porpoise distribution and abundance at a North Sea-wide scale and examine potential explanations for any observed changes.
- 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.

Investigation of the health, nutritional status and diet

- Parties are encouraged to do collaborative research on the extent and potential reasons for grey seal predation on harbour porpoises.
- Parties to facilitate rapid collaboration with stranding networks in the event of an unusual mortality event to identify potential causes of death. These should include new potential sources such as avian flu and bacterial infections, e.g. *Erysipelothrix rhusiopathiae*.
- Parties are encouraged to further support North Sea-wide monitoring of life history parameters 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.

Priority Recommendations (cont.)

Investigation of the effects of anthropogenic sounds on harbour porpoises

- In the light of studies demonstrating acoustic trauma in porpoises due to explosions in the Baltic, where similar activities occur in the North Sea, surviving animals might have impaired hearing which, among other things, could affect their ability to detect nets and find prey. There is a need to examine all causes of death in porpoises and also consider their interaction in affecting bycatch risk.
- Parties to make every effort to mitigate the effects on porpoises of activities involving explosions.
- Collaborative studies are encouraged to better quantify the impact of both impulsive and continuous noise on harbour porpoises.
- Parties and Non-Party Range States to encourage research to establish the population level impacts of noise levels and exposure duration.
- Parties and Non-Party Range States to encourage international harmonisation of noise thresholds for regulatory purposes.