



**Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species
Agreement on the Conservation of Small Cetaceans
of the Baltic, North East Atlantic, Irish and North Seas**
Joint Secretariat provided by the United Nations Environment Programme



A Day for the Harbour Porpoise in the Baltic Sea: 16 May 2010

Bonn, 14 May 2010 – Even in the Baltic Sea there lives a relative of whales and dolphins: the harbour porpoise. This species, one of the smallest of the whale family, is usually less than 1.8 metres in length and weighing between 45 and 70 kg. Harbour porpoises are widespread in cool coastal waters, but are seldom noticed as they rarely approach boats.

The situation in the central Baltic Sea is dramatic: the population there, which has clear genetic differences compared with porpoises in the North Sea, is in critical danger of extinction! Only a few hundred animals still live in the Baltic proper!

In the German and Danish western Baltic Sea the situation is not much better – the number of animals is decreasing dramatically and the numbers of dead porpoises washing up on shore, which have often drowned as unwanted by-catch in fishing nets, are increasing greatly.

During the International Year of Biodiversity 2010, which has been declared by the United Nations, it is being emphasized that the main cause of biodiversity loss at the present accelerated rate is human activity. We can prevent this loss only if we take urgent action now to safeguard wildlife. Therefore, now is the time to work towards the effective conservation of the harbour porpoise in the Baltic Sea. There used to be many thousands of them, but now the last few individuals are threatened mainly by by-catch in bottom-set gillnets, underwater noise from the construction of offshore wind farms, gas pipelines and the destruction of World War II ordnance, as well as marine pollution.

In addition to the policy and scientific work done under the Agreement on the Conservation of Small Cetaceans of the Baltic, North East Atlantic, Irish and North Seas (ASCOBANS), raising awareness of the critical situation and the sharp decline of the Baltic harbour porpoise is one of the most important activities to ensure the survival of the population. It can be protected only if people know and care about it. For this reason ASCOBANS has declared the 3rd Sunday on May of each year as the “International Day of the Baltic Harbour Porpoise”. This special day has been celebrated with many different activities by schools, museums, NGOs, institutions and individuals in countries bordering the Baltic Sea since 2003.

The Secretariat of the Agreement is based in Bonn, Germany. On 15 and 16 May its staff will be present at a nearby Sea Life Centre (www.sealife.de) in Königswinter to inform the visitors about the work of the Agreement and the Baltic harbour porpoise. Several thousand visitors are expected. In addition to distributing information material for adults and children, the staff will be available to answer questions. On this occasion a new German language exhibition will also be presented to the public. It allows interested visitors to inform themselves, among other topics, about how they themselves can contribute to the protection of harbour porpoises and dolphins.

The celebration of the harbour porpoise day throughout the Baltic Sea area has already started. In Lithuania, about 1,500 people gathered on the beach on 12 May to form the outline of a harbour porpoise with their bodies. The Lithuanian Sea Museum (www.muziejus.lt) will also show a special exhibition about porpoises and organizes educational activities for adults and children alike.

The event will also be marked in the Särkänniemi Dolphinarium (www.sarkanniemi.fi) in Finland. They will especially concentrate on activities for children, which aim to provide basic information on the harbour porpoise and its protection. A drawing competition allows them to express their concern for the small whale. Two institutions in Sweden participate in the celebration, the Havets Hus (www.havetshus.lysekil.se) and the Kullaberg Nature Reserve (www.kullabergsnatur.se). Further, the Marine Station in Hel (<http://hel.univ.gda.pl>) in Poland is organizing fascinating, educational activities for children. Reports of all activities will be published with photos on the ASCOBANS website (www.ascobans.org).

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Note to Editors:

ASCOBANS, the **Agreement on the Conservation of Small Cetaceans of the Baltic, North East Atlantic, Irish and North Seas**, is a UN treaty concluded to promote close cooperation amongst member governments with a view to achieving and maintaining a favourable conservation status for small cetaceans in the ASCOBANS Area. A Conservation and Management Plan, which forms part of the Agreement, obliges Parties to engage in habitat conservation and management, surveys and research, pollution mitigation and public information. To achieve its aim, ASCOBANS cooperates with all states in the Agreement area, relevant intergovernmental organizations and non-governmental organizations.

The term “**small cetaceans**” refers to small whales, dolphins and porpoises, which occur in nearly all of the world’s seas and in some rivers. The Agreement covers all small cetaceans found in the ASCOBANS Area. Examples are the well-known bottlenose dolphin, the killer whale, deep-diving species such as beaked whales and the Agreement’s flagship species, the harbour porpoise.

More information:

www.ascobans.org

The eight German and further 28 global **Sea Life Aquaria** work together with the international Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society (WDCS) as their official partner against whaling. Among other topics, visitors to all Sea Life Centres receive information about whaling and are encouraged to support the efforts to achieve a lasting and efficient ban on whaling by signing a protest card. The aim of this S.O.S. Campaign of Sea Life and WDCS is to gather 500,000 protest cards, which the WDCS will pass to the representatives of the European governments who participate in the meeting on the International Whaling Commission (IWC). Further, in 2009 Sea Life was able to collect about €10,000 in donations for projects carried out by the WDCS.



More information:

www.sealife.co.uk / www.wdcs.org