



**AGREEMENT ON THE CONSERVATION
OF SMALL CETACEANS OF THE
BALTIC, NORTH EAST ATLANTIC,
IRISH AND NORTH SEAS**

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Bonn, Germany, 1–3 September 2026
Agenda Item 6.3

**PRIORITY RECOMMENDATIONS
FROM THE 14TH MEETING OF THE ASCOBANS NORTH SEA GROUP**

(Prepared by the Secretariat)

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FROM THE 14TH MEETING OF THE ASCOBANS NORTH SEA GROUP**

(Adopted by the ASCOBANS Advisory Committee)

NSG14 /Rec #	Recommendation	Long-/short-term + Deadline if possible	Priority (High / Medium / Low)
Evaluation on fisheries with respect to extent of porpoise bycatch			
1.	Parties and Non-Party Range States to focus monitoring and mitigation effort on suspected 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 from RLA analysis. There still remains great uncertainty around all bycatch estimates in the region due to a stratified random sampling approach not yet having been fully implemented, where appropriate. (NSG10/Rec1*)	Ongoing, review annually	High
2.	Parties are encouraged to share training resources with each other to automate bycatch detection in electronic monitoring. (NSG13/Rec2)	Ongoing, review annually	High
3.	Parties are encouraged to further develop and implement fishing effort monitoring such as inshore VMS for small vessel fisheries (less than 12 metres), following the example of the UK. (NSG13/Rec3)	Ongoing, review annually	High
4.	Parties are encouraged to incorporate metrics such as soak time, net length, mesh size in fishing effort reporting, irrespective of vessel size. (NSG13/Rec4*)	Ongoing, review annually	High
5.	Given that the OSPAR threshold for bycatch has already been exceeded, Parties and Non-Party Range States are urged to take mitigation action (e.g. fisheries restrictions, ADDs) to reduce bycatch levels. (NSG13/Rec5*)	Ongoing, review annually	High
Finalise a management procedure approach for determining target limits of anthropogenic removals including bycatch in the region			
6.	Attention is needed to revise the current ASCOBANS conservation objectives to i) take account of the long-term objective to drive anthropogenic removals (i.e., including all pressures) towards zero (NSG10/Rec2*); ii) appraise their effectiveness, and iii) to operationalize the objective with a timeframe and agreed-upon risks of failing as in all management procedure approaches. (NSG11/Rec5)	NSG15	High
7.	Parties, Non-Party Range States, and relevant national bodies to engage and take into regard stakeholder interests, in addition to the fishing industry, to reach common solutions to fulfil conservation aims. (NSG10/Rec3*)	Long-term, review annually	High
Development of alternative mitigation measures to reduce bycatch			

NSG14 /Rec #	Recommendation	Long-/short-term + Deadline if possible	Priority (High / Medium / Low)
8.	Parties to support further investigations of approaches to mitigate harbour porpoise bycatch taking into account potential adverse impacts on other taxa such as birds and seals. (NSG10/Rec4)	Ongoing, review annually	High
9.	Parties to support the testing of bycatch mitigation actions at a fleet level and implement those that have proved to be effective and practical. (NSG10/Rec5)	Ongoing, review annually	High
10.	Parties to support more research on the behaviour of harbour porpoises in the wild around fishing gear, especially static nets, including their sensory capabilities and auditory health, for a better understanding of factors leading to bycatch. (NSG10/Rec6*)	Ongoing, review annually	High
Monitoring trends in distribution and abundance			
11.	In addition to SCANS surveys, Parties are encouraged to collaborate on conducting surveys and analyses of regional trends by season (at least two) and year in porpoise distribution and abundance at a North Sea-wide scale, and examine potential explanations for any observed changes. (NSG10/Rec7*)	Long-term, review annually	High
12.	The North Sea Group to note any information on trends in abundance and distribution from the most recent assessments by OSPAR, Habitats Directive etc., and consider the implications of the findings. (NSG10/Rec.8*)	Ongoing, review annually	Medium
Population structure			
13.	Parties and Non-Party Range States are encouraged to provide the necessary samples for ongoing population genomics analyses.	Ongoing, review annually	High
14.	Laboratories and groups involved in population genomics analyses are encouraged to coordinate efforts to share the data for joint analyses.	Ongoing, review annually	High
Investigation of the health, nutritional status and diet			
15.	Parties are encouraged to do collaborative research on the extent and seasonality of grey seal and bottlenose dolphin predation on harbour porpoises. (NSG10/Rec9*)	Ongoing, review annually	Medium (in some regions)
16.	Parties to facilitate rapid collaboration with stranding networks in the event of an unusual mortality event to identify potential causes of death. These should also include new potential sources such as bacterial infections, e.g. <i>Erysipelothrix rhusiopathiae</i> , and other pathogens such as avian influenza. (NSG10/Rec10*)	Ongoing, review annually	High
17.	Parties are strongly encouraged to further support North Sea-wide monitoring of life history parameters and nutritional status (diet, body condition) 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. (NSG10/Rec11*)	Ongoing, review annually	High
18.	Parties are encouraged to collect and analyse a sufficient number of stranded and/or bycaught harbour porpoises for assessing trends and status of persistent chemicals and other pollutants, with particular attention to emerging chemicals in the Greater North Sea. (NSG11/Rec15)	Ongoing, review annually	High
19.	Parties and Non-Party Range States to encourage research investigating the impacts of chemical contaminants from	Ongoing	Medium

NSG14 /Rec #	Recommendation	Long-/short-term + Deadline if possible	Priority (High / Medium / Low)
	discarded munition material and unexploded ordnance on harbour porpoises and their prey. (NSG12/Rec18)		
Investigation of the effects of anthropogenic sounds on harbour porpoises			
20.	Parties to make every effort to monitor and mitigate the effects on porpoises of activities involving explosions (including ordinance clearance in preparation for offshore wind developments). (NSG10/Rec13*)	Ongoing, review annually	High
21.	Collaborative studies are encouraged to quantify the impact of impulsive, continuous, and other noise sources on individual harbour porpoises, considering their different sound characteristics. (NSG10/Rec14*)	Ongoing, review annually	High
22.	Parties and Non-Party Range States to encourage research to establish the population level impacts of noise levels and exposure duration. (NSG10/Rec15)	Ongoing, review annually	Medium
23.	Parties and Non-Party Range States to encourage international harmonisation of noise exposure criteria for regulatory purposes. (NSG10/Rec16*)	Ongoing, review annually	High
24.	In the light of projected wide-scale developments of offshore renewable energy, Parties and Non-Party Range States are urged to better understand and mitigate, where appropriate, short-term, long-term, and cumulative impacts upon porpoises during all phases at the sites and at broader basin-wide scales. (NSG12/Rec25*)	Ongoing, review annually	High
25.	Parties and Non-Party Range States are encouraged to take mitigating action to minimise impacts to porpoises from continuous, impulsive and other sources of noise. (NSG12/Rec6*)	Ongoing, review annually	High
Climate change			
26.	Parties and Non-Party Range States are encouraged to investigate the short-term implications of climate change on harbour porpoise distribution, movements, and foraging behaviour.	Ongoing, review annually	Medium
Other			
27.	Parties and Non-Party Range States are urged to consider the cumulative effects upon porpoises of human activities including offshore industrial development so that they are incorporated into spatial planning. (NSG13/Rec24)	Ongoing, review annually	High
28.	Parties and Non-Party Range States are encouraged to apply the MSP Guidelines. The work should collate MSPs within the region, and review consistencies in approaches for their development and whether they have incorporated plans and decisions made by neighbouring Parties, taking account of porpoise movements, MPAs and IMMAs. (NSG13/Rec25*)	Ongoing, review annually	High
29.	Parties and Non-Party Range States are encouraged to work with international fora to establish a joint industry programme to pool and make publicly available relevant data collated during EIAs and continuous monitoring of sites. (NSG13/Rec26)	Ongoing, review annually	High

* Wording added/edited