

Agenda Item 6.3: Review of new information on bycatch

**Evaluating the bycatch of small cetaceans
in the ASCOBANS area**

Submitted by: Chairman of the Advisory Committee



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

Evaluating the bycatch of small cetaceans in the ASCOBANS area

Presented by Chair of the Advisory Committee

This document draws the attention of Parties to requests for information on marine mammal bycatch from a number of different international bodies and suggests a way forward.

Background

1. Parties to ASCOBANS have agreed that one of the greatest threats to small cetaceans is that from bycatch. Resolutions have been passed on bycatch reduction that included target bycatch levels. Parties to ASCOBANS, through its Advisory Committee, wish to know if these target levels are being met and where to prioritise any bycatch reduction strategies. Consequently, ASCOBANS undertakes a periodic review of bycatch of all small cetacean species in the waters covered by the Agreement.
2. The EU requires reporting of certain bycatch under EC Regulation 812/2004, and under the Habitats Directive (Council Directive 92/43/EEC).
3. OSPAR has adopted a system of Ecological Quality Objectives (EcoQO) for use in the North Sea (*OSPAR agreement 2006-4*) that includes an EcoQO on harbour porpoise bycatch. The EcoQO system includes evaluations:
 - a. in 2008, a first evaluation of the results of the application of the EcoQO system, leading to
 - b. in 2009, an improved evaluation of the results of the EcoQO system, as a contribution to the QSR 2010.
4. HELCOM requests ICES on a regular basis (currently bi-annual) to provide information on the status and trends of marine mammals in the Baltic.
5. The EU also requests advice from ICES on a regular basis on the status of small cetacean populations and bycatch issues.
6. Information of fishing effort is currently an area of development and availability/usefulness is changing. Most information provision on this topic in EU waters is driven by the various fisheries data collection regulations (and associated funding). Ideal information on fishing effort (e.g. km of gill net x soak time by time and area) generally are not yet collected, but discussions as to its inclusion in the data collection regulation continue. It is likely however that the information from the smaller boat fleets will never be as good as that from the larger vessels and that proxies such as fleet size per port will remain the only available data. ICES has processed and used some effort/VMS data.

Convergence, synergy and efficiency

7. There appears to be potential to make these reporting processes more consistent and efficient, thereby saving resources (especially expert time).
8. Given that most relevant scientific expertise attends (or has colleagues attending) the ICES Working Group on Marine Mammals, it is suggested that ASCOBANS and the European Commission consider putting a joint request to ICES to evaluate small cetacean bycatch in the ASCOBANS area and agreeing a frequency for such an evaluation. OSPAR might wish to join this grouping in relation to harbour porpoise bycatch in the North Sea (or wider, if in due course, the EcoQO system expands its area of coverage). Helcom might wish to join, but given the paucity of information on bycatch in the Baltic, they probably do not have much to gain by having a joint approach.
9. A paper was considered by the March 2007 meeting of OSPAR's Biodiversity Committee (BDC 07/2/1-Add.1-E) that suggested this joint approach in relation to harbour porpoise bycatch in the North Sea. The OSPAR Secretariat will be discussing this further with the European Commission, ASCOBANS Secretariat and ICES.
10. Further consideration of the collection of data on fishing effort might be best pursued initially in co-ordination with the European Commission.

Action requested

9. The Advisory Committee is invited to consider the suggestions given above for future joint working on marine mammal bycatch and fishing effort data.