

Agenda Item 8.1: Annual National Reports 2005 and 2006

ASCOBANS Annual National Report for 2006

Submitted by: Belgium

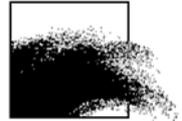


NOTE:
**IN THE INTERESTS OF ECONOMY, DELEGATES ARE KINDLY REMINDED TO BRING
THEIR OWN COPIES OF THESE DOCUMENTS TO THE MEETING**

ROYAL BELGIAN INSTITUTE OF NATURAL SCIENCES

MANAGEMENT UNIT OF THE NORTH SEA
MATHEMATICAL MODELS (MUMM)

SECTION 15
MARINE ECOSYSTEM MANAGEMENT



ASCOBANS Annual National Report 2006

MUMM
100 Gulledelle
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ASCOBANS Annual National Report 2006

A. General information

| | |
|--|--|
| BELGIUM | 1 JANUARY 2006 – 31 DECEMBER 2006 |
| Name of party | Period covered |
| Compiled by Jan Haelters (MUMM/RBINS); additional information provided by Thierry Jauniaux, Francis Kerckhof, Alexandre de Lichtervelde and Koen Van Waerebeek | 31 March 2007 |
| Name of report compiler | Date of the report |
| <p>Since 2006 the national co-ordinating authority is the Federal service Public health, Food chain safety and Environment, Eurostation II, Place Victor Horta 40 box 10, 1060 Brussels, Belgium. Contact person is Paulus Tak (Paulus.Tak@health.fgov.be). The participation to the Advisory Committee meetings remains with RBINS(MUMM).</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Any changes in co-ordinating authority, appointed member of advisory committee</p> | |

B. New measures/action towards meeting the resolutions of the 2nd Meeting of Parties

1. Direct interaction of small cetaceans with fisheries

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| Investigations of methods to reduce by-catch |
| <p>In 2006 an extensive round of meetings was held in which scientists, relevant administrations and minister's cabinets dealing with the environment and with fisheries participated. The subject of the meetings was the high and yearly increasing number of incidental catches of harbour porpoises in recreational beach gillnet fisheries. Also recreational beach fishermen were consulted. Recreational use of gillnets was already banned at sea (below the low water mark) in 2001. Although the environment administrations pleaded strongly for a ban on the recreational use of gill nets on the beach, especially between March and May, this could not be agreed upon by the recreational fishermen and the fisheries minister. The measures taken by the fisheries minister in the Ministerial Decision of 21 December 2006 (Official Journal of 28 December 2006) were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a ban on the use of trammel nets or 'trémil', one of the types of gill net used by recreational fishermen; • the height of the gillnets has been defined; they can be 80cm high, except for March to May when they can only be 60cm high; • a limitation on the total length of gillnets per fisherman to 50m between March and May, and 100m in the other months; a limitation to 50m (12 months/year) had already been installed in certain coastal communities for years, and the use of any gillnet had been banned by the coastal community of Ostend, although difficulties in the interpretation of the local legislation exist. <p>It is not clear yet how inconsistencies between the Flemish and the local community regulations will be dealt with. The effects of the measures on the number of bycaught porpoises will be evaluated in spring 2007.</p> <p>In order to prevent or reduce bycatches of seals and birds, professional gillnet fishing in the immediate vicinity of the outer port of Zeebrugge was banned: a distance limit of 200m was installed (Ministerial Decision of 21 Decem-</p> |

ber 2006; Official Journal of 28 December 2006).

One of the 3 Belgian professional gillnet fishermen (the largest one, often active outside ICES Area IVc) has made enquiries about obtaining pingers. He has experiences big difficulties in obtaining pingers – apparently it was very difficult to find them on the market in 2006; he will try to obtain them in 2007.

One recreational beach fisherman will voluntarily deploy a pinger on his net from 2007 onwards.

Implementation of methods to reduce by-catch

Observed bycatch in 2006

| Species | Estimated number of by-caught animals | Area (ICES area or more detailed) | Notes (type of fishery, effort, seasonal variations, etc.) |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--|
| Estimates are provisional | | | |
| <i>Phocoena phocoena</i> | 27-31 (+) | IVc | Both recreational fisheries from the beach as professional fisheries at sea. |
| <i>Lagenorhynchus Albirostris</i> | 1 (+) | IVc | Unknown gear |

2. Reduction of disturbance to small cetaceans

No more regular high-speed ferry routes between Belgium and the United Kingdom are in operation.

Information on levels of disturbance
(e.g. seismic surveys, new high-speed ferry routes, studies about acoustic impacts on cetaceans, etc.)

In April 2004 the construction and exploitation of an offshore windfarm was licenced. The windfarm of 60 turbines will be located on the Thorntonbank, approximately 27 km offshore. During the construction phase (probably starting in 2008), measures will have to be taken for avoiding disturbance of, or harming marine mammals (ramp up procedures for pile driving operations, deployment of pingers, ...). On 22 September 2005 a change in the planning schedule, in the size of the turbines (up to 5MW each) and type of foundation (gravitary instead of monopole) was requested. This request was accompanied by an EIA. The change in the planning was authorised in 2006. More information is available at MUMM's website (<http://www.mumm.ac.be>).

Implementation of guidelines, new legislation, etc. to reduce disturbance

3. Protected areas for small cetaceans

No areas were proposed specifically for protecting cetaceans.

Measures taken to identify, implement and manage protected areas

4. Further research on small cetaceans

In 2006 a record number of harbour porpoises (live/dead stranded, bycaught, found at sea dead) was counted in Belgium: 92 (provisional data). Most of the carcasses were available for research, and were investigated according to the state of decomposition.

- 4 washed ashore alive; 2 of these died and 2 were refloated;
- 3 were found dead at sea (unknown cause of death);
- 26-31 washed ashore dead, and were found to have been caught in fishing gear (26 certain, another 5 most probably); of these, a number could be attributed to recreational fisheries, especially in March and April;
- 27 washed ashore dead, and were found to have - most probably - died from natural causes;
- 27 washed ashore dead, and a cause of death could not be determined.

Of the stranded animals that died or were already dead, and for which a cause of death could be identified (in total 60 animals), 43-52% had died due to bycatch in fishing gear. Bycatch is almost confined to the months of March to May, although 2 bycaught animals washed ashore in December. It is clear that absolute numbers of bycaught animals washing ashore is increasing.

In 2006 two dead white-beaked dolphins washed ashore: an adult and a juvenile. The cause of death of the adult was bycatch in (unknown) fishing gear.

On 5 March 2006 a humpback whale washed ashore. It concerned a young female. This was the first record of a humpback whale in Belgium since 1751 (Haelters *et al.*, 2006). The animal had died as a result of the injuries inflicted most probably during the collision with a ship (Jauniaux *et al.*, 2006).

In May 2005 a relatively high number of decayed harbour porpoise carcasses washed ashore in a short period of time. The most probable cause of death of most of these animals had been determined as bycatch. A model developed at MUMM demonstrated that the most probable region where the animals had died was the southern North Sea – eastern Channel. The results of this investigation were presented at the 2006 ICES Annual Science Conference (Haelters *et al.*, 2006).

Implementation of schemes to use and gain information from stranded cetaceans

Sightings

Numerous sightings of harbour porpoises were reported in 2006. INBO and others reported a few sightings of white-beaked dolphins to MUMM.

Number of porpoises present in Belgian waters

Researchers at INBO estimated (roughly) that between 2.000 and 5.000 porpoises were present in Belgian waters in late winter-spring 2005 (Eric Stienen, personal communication). From sightings during two aerial observation flights (modified pollution control flights) performed by MUMM it was (roughly) estimated that the average density of porpoises in Belgian waters in March and April 2004 was between 0.2 to 0.6 per square km, or 650 to 2100 animals (Haelters & Jacques, 2006). Numbers of porpoises in Belgian waters in summer and autumn are much lower.

Research projects

WAKO: Uitbreiding: Evaluatie van de milieu-impact van WARrelnet- en boomKORvisserij op het Belgisch Continentaal Plat (WAKO-I): 2006–July 2007

This preliminary project aims at evaluating the environmental impact of beamtrawling against bottom set gill net fisheries in Belgian marine waters. Part of the project is the investigation of the temporal and spatial distribution of har-

bour porpoises in Belgian waters, and assessing the bycatch problem. One T-PoD is being deployed for some months. It is possible that this initial project is followed by a more extensive project from 2008 onwards (contact persons: Jochen Depestele: Jochen.Depestele@ilvo.vlaanderen.be and Jan Haelters: j.haelters@mumm.ac.be).

MARIN

The Federal department of Science Policy is now funding a veterinary surgeon at the MUMM department of the Royal Belgian Institute of Natural Sciences. This veterinary surgeon will be dealing with the autopsies of marine mammals washing ashore in Belgium, the co-ordination with neighbouring countries, and the inventory of a tissue bank of marine mammals. Funding is provided for 2006-2007, with possible future extensions.

Systematic collection and preservation of marine mammal tissues started in 1990 and was extended since 1995 with samples from other regions in the southern North Sea through international co-operation with France and the Netherlands. This collection now constitutes the Belgian Marine Mammal Tissue Bank (BMMTB) placed under the joint management of RBINS and the University of Liège, with the purpose to provide high quality samples of marine mammals (small and large cetaceans as well as pinnipeds) to scientists in a non-profit scientific collaboration. Samples may be used for studies in pathology, microbiology, toxicology, life history, etc. The tissue bank should be considered as a tool to facilitate tissues exchange. Gathering samples of marine mammals from various European areas will help to have a geographical overview of variations and, given that some samples were already collected in 1990, temporal trends could also be investigated. Contact person: Thierry Jauniaux: t.jauniaux@mumm.ac.be.

Publications, communications

- Camphuysen, K & Peet, G., 2006. Walvissen in de zuidelijke Noordzee – Whales and dolphins of the North Sea. Fontaine Uitgevers BV, 's Graveland, Nederland. 160 p.
- Courtens, W., Stienen, E.W.M. & Vanermen, N., 2006. Zeevogels en zeezoogdieren van de Vlakte van de Raan, in: Coosen, J. *et al.* (Ed.), 2006. Studiedag: De Vlakte van de Raan van onder het stof gehaald, Oostende, 13 oktober 2006. VLIZ Special Publication, 35: 59-72.
- Drouget, O., 2006. Écologie trophique du marsouin commun (*Phocoena phocoena*) (L.) en baie sud de la Mer du Nord: Étude préliminaire sur base de la composition en acides gras et en isotopes stables. Master thesis (Oceanography), University of Liège, 2006.
- Fontaine, M.C., Baird, S.J.E., Piry, S., Ray, N., Tolley, K.A., Duke, S., Birkun, A.J., Ferreira, M., Jauniaux, T., Llavona, A., Öztürk1, B., Öztürk, A.A., Ridoux, V., Rogan, E., Sequeira, M., Siebert, U., Vikingsson, G.A., Bouquegneau, J.-M. & Michaux, J.R. (submitted). Rise of oceanographic barriers in continuous populations of a cetacean: the genetic structure of harbour porpoises in Old World waters. BMC Biology.
- Haelters, J. & Jacques, T.G., 2006. De bescherming van walvisachtigen in Belgische wateren: bijkomende informatie gericht aan DG Leefmilieu van de federale Overheidsdienst volksgezondheid, veiligheid van de voedselketen en leefmilieu, m.b.t. de uitvoering door België van de Habitatrichtlijn Art. 11 en 12 voor wat betreft walvisachtigen. KBIN (BMM), Brussel. 15 p.
- Haelters, J., Jauniaux, T. & Kerckhof, F., 2006. Bultrug op Belgisch strand. Zoogdier 17(2): 3-5.
- Haelters, J., Jauniaux, T., Kerckhof, F., Ozer, J. & Scory, S., 2006. Using models to investigate a harbour porpoise bycatch problem in the southern North Sea–eastern Channel in spring 2005. ICES CM 2006/L:03. 8p.
- Haelters, J. & Kerckhof, F., 2006. Strandingen van bruinvissen tussen 1995 en 2006 (31 mei): doodsoorzaken. Nota KBIN (BMM), sectie 15, 9 juni 2006, 5p.
- Jauniaux, T., Brenez, C., Das, K., Haelters, J. & Coignoul, F., 2006. By-caught cetaceans stranded along the Belgian and northern French coastline: are they a good control population? 20th annual conference of the European Cetacean Society, Gdynia, Poland, April 2006 (presentation).
- Jauniaux, T., Brenez, C., Haelters, J., Jacques, T., Ozer, J., Scory, S. & Coignoul, F., 2006. Stranding of a humpback whale (*Megaptera novaeangliae*) on the Belgian coast. International Council for the Exploration of the Sea; Annual Science Conference, Maastricht, The Netherlands, September 2006 (poster).
- Jauniaux, T., Brenez, C., Haelters, J., Kiszka, J. & Lastavel, A., 2006. Evolution des échouages et des causes de mortalité des mammifères marins dans le nord de la France (1995-2005). Séminaire du Réseau National d'Échouages, Lançeres, France, Novembre 2006 (presentation).
- Van Waerebeek, K., Sequeira, M., Williamson, C., Sanin, G.P., Gallego, P. & Carmo, P., 2006. Live-captures of common bottlenose dolphins *Tursiops truncatus* and unassessed bycatch in Cuban waters: evidence of sustainability found wanting. Lajam 5(1): 39-48, June 2006 ISSN 1676-7497

Van Waerebeek, K. Conservation status of the northwest African population of the harbour porpoise. Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals, 14th Meeting of the CMS Scientific Council, Bonn, Germany, 14-17 March 2007, doc. cms/scc14/doc.7, 10p.

Research on abundance, population structure etc.

5. Research on the effects of pollutants on cetacean health

Publications, communications

Das, K., De Groof, A., Jauniaux, T. & Bouquegneau, J.-M., 2006. Zn, Cu, Cd and Hg binding to metallothioneins in harbour porpoises *Phocoena phocoena* from the southern North Sea. *BMC Ecology* 2006, 6:2

Fontaine, M.C, Galan, M., Bouquegneau, J.-M. & Michaux, J.R., 2006. Efficiency of Fluorescent Multiplex Polymerase Chain Reactions (PCRs) for rapid Genotyping of Harbour Porpoises (*Phocoena phocoena*) with 11 Microsatellite Loci. *Aquatic Mammals* 32(3): 301-304

Schnitzler, J., Siebert, U., Jepson, P., Beineke, A., Jauniaux, T., Bouquegneau, J.-M. & Das, K., 2006. Biological trace element research, F.I.: 1,4440 Humana Press.

Research on the effects of pollutants on cetacean health

6. Public awareness and education

Information on stranded animals and on sightings, is given on the website of MUMM (in Dutch, English and French): http://www.mumm.ac.be/EN/Management/Nature/search_strandings.php. For reporting sightings, the following email account can be used: dolphin@mumm.ac.be.

Natuurpunt, the Belgian partner of Birdlife International, has developed, together with Stichting De Noordzee, the RBINS (Royal Belgian Institute of Natural Sciences), the minister responsible for the North Sea and the Federal service Public health, Food chain safety and Environment, a folder on cetaceans in the North Sea, which was widely distributed (in Dutch and French). The folder contains information on what to do when observing cetaceans and whom to inform of sightings. It explains the goals of ASCOBANS and gives information about the declaration by UNEP/CMS of 2007 as the year of the dolphin.

In 2006 a book was written by Kees Camphuysen and Gerard Peet on the cetaceans of Dutch and Belgian waters. RBINS co-operated by providing Belgian data. The book was presented in Belgium by the minister of the North Sea at a press conference on 17 January 2007. The book has been published in Dutch and English.

Measures taken in the fields of public awareness and education to implement or promote the Agreement

7. Other relevant news

Belgium is chairing the Ship Strikes Working Group of the Conservation Committee of the International Whaling Commission (IWC). A first progress report was presented to the Conservation Committee in 2006 (de Lichtervelde, 2006).

Publications, communications

de Lichtervelde, A. (Ed), 2006. First progress report of the Ship Strikes Working Group. Report presented to the IWC Conservation Committee, May 2006, 26p.