

Agenda Item 3

Species Action Plan

Conservation Plan for the Harbour
Porpoise Population in the Western Baltic,
the Belt Sea and the Kattegat

Document 3.3.a

**Letter regarding Mitigation of Marine
Mammal Bycatch in Schleswig-
Holstein and beyond**

Action Requested

- Take note

Submitted by

Jastarnia Group



**NOTE:
DELEGATES ARE KINDLY REMINDED
TO BRING THEIR OWN COPIES OF DOCUMENTS TO THE MEETING**

Secretariat's Note

The Rules of Procedure adopted at the ASCOBANS 8th Meeting of Parties remain in force until and unless an amendment is called for and adopted.



Svenja Schulze
Minister
Federal Ministry for the Environment,
Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety
Robert-Schuman-Platz 3
53175 Bonn

Julia Klöckner
Minister
Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture
Rochusstraße 1
53123 Bonn

Mitigation of marine mammal bycatch: PAL monitoring and application beyond Schleswig-Holstein

Bonn, 20 April 2018

Dear Minister Schulze, dear Minister Klöckner,

Bycatch is one of the greatest dangers that marine mammals face today, and has proven to be challenging and demanding to regulate given the interference with fisheries policies. I am writing to you regarding the application of Porpoise Alerting Devices (PALs) by local fishermen along the Baltic Sea coast of Schleswig-Holstein, to mitigate the bycatch of the only resident marine mammal, the Harbour Porpoise (*Phocoena phocoena*). As Chair of the Jastarnia Group, a UN ASCOBANS working group tasked with supporting the conservation of the Harbour Porpoise across the Baltic Sea, I would like to reach out to you and Dr. Habeck, Dr. Backhaus and Mr. Albrecht to compliment you on this initiative and to underline the importance of closely monitoring this effort to evaluate bycatch rate and fishing effort.

Last month the 14th Meeting of the Jastarnia Group (12-14 March 2018, Copenhagen) noted the positive progress made in Schleswig-Holstein through the **voluntary agreement for the conservation of Harbour Porpoises and diving sea ducks** (Freiwillige Vereinbarung zum Schutz von Schweinswalen und tauchenden Meeresenten), which includes the installation of almost 1,700 PALs through local fishermen. The meeting further acknowledged that data from the Thünen Institute show a 70 per cent reduction in bycatch when using PALs on a small scale, but that these results have not yet been peer-reviewed. Given that now for the **first time across the Baltic Sea** PALs are being used **on a large scale**, this Schleswig-Holstein case study provides a unique chance to conduct a long-term scientific study on the effectiveness of PALs to mitigate bycatch, and on the possible habituation of Harbour Porpoises to the type of biological signals used in PALs.

A monitoring programme with sufficient funding is imperative and of critical importance to detect whether the measures that are proposed actually work. I would therefore urge you to put a monitoring programme in place that will provide answers to the following questions:

1. How much is bycatch being reduced when fishermen use PALs? (noting that it is necessary to document fisheries effort and estimates of porpoise bycatch in nets with and without PALs, i.e. acting as a control)
2. Do Harbour Porpoises become habituated to the PALs' sound over time (i.e. they no longer react), or do PALs continue to be efficient in the long term?

Such a monitoring programme is of critical importance to rigorously test if PAL application is effective in reducing Harbour Porpoise bycatch. There is considerable interest from other Baltic States and stakeholders to use PALs and thus the Schleswig-Holstein case is being observed with much attention. With a scientifically robust "proof" at hand that the application of PALs is effective and safe for the environment, other stakeholders across the Baltic are likely to buy in. Not unlike the experience made with limiting underwater noise around offshore wind farms (see Schallschutzkonzept), Germany could once again play a much-needed leadership role.

The forthcoming 24th Meeting of the ASCOBANS Advisory Committee (25-27 September 2019, Vilnius) will focus on bycatch and would provide an excellent opportunity to spread the positive lessons learnt from Schleswig-Holstein across the ASCOBANS region. I could envisage a special session at the Advisory Committee on tools such as the voluntary agreement in reducing bycatch and would welcome input and leadership from Germany.

In my capacity as Chair I stand ready to contribute my expertise and to engage the other members of the group to make progress on this matter of critical importance in order to ultimately preserve the only whale resident in the Baltic for future generations.

Yours sincerely,



Ida Carlén

Chair of the Jastarnia Group

cc:

Dr. Robert Habeck, Minister for Energy, Agriculture, the Environment, Nature and Digitalization, Schleswig-Holstein

Dr. Till Backhaus, Minister for Agriculture and the Environment, Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania

Jan Philipp Albrecht, future Minister for Energy, Agriculture, the Environment, Nature and Digitalization, Schleswig-Holstein