

Opening statement: Bycatch of the Harbour Porpoise

Submitted by: Danish NGOs



ASCOBANS

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

Bycatch of the Harbour Porpoise

ASCOBANS Advisory Committee Meeting March 2000
Opening Statement from the Danish NGO's

At the meeting in the ASCOBANS Advisory Committee in Aberdeen in April 1999, the Danish NGOs accounted for the complaint filed to the European Commission regarding Danish bycatch.

So far the fact is that since the action plan was finalised in November 1998, not a single porpoise has avoided bycatch as a result of the action plan, other than the small number of animals that would likely have been affected by the pinger-trial.

As we consequently have pointed to modification of fishing gear as the likely preferable long-term solution, we are pleased to note that a small-scale experiment with echo-enhanced fishing gear is planned for this spring. The Danish environmental organisations very much welcome this experiment, as non-invasive modification of fishing gear might present an acceptable long-term solution for fisheries as well as porpoises, although we will of course await the outcome of the trial before passing our final judgement of this option.

We understand that the European Commission has now asked the Danish Government to account for the compliance with the Habitat Directive's Art. 11 and 12.4 and that the Commission presently is considering the Danish answer.

We have also been led to understand that the Commission now intends to discuss bycatch in relation to the Habitat Directive, within the EU habitats forum. As the harbour porpoise is listed as a species in need of strict protection under the Habitat Directive, and it is the responsibility of Member States to maintain or restore the species to a favourable conservation status, we hope that EU Member States and the European Commission will recognise this responsibility, by actively planning and integrating their policies in action plans with substance, and in environmental and fisheries legislation.

Nevertheless, the Danish action plan stands alone and without any consequence in regard to a reduction in bycatch.

On behalf of the Danish NGOs in the Green Contact Council,
Bo Håkansson