

REPORT OF THE 12TH MEETING OF THE ASCOBANS JASTARNIA GROUP

Hel, Poland

12-14 April 2016



**Agreement on the Conservation of Small Cetaceans
of the Baltic, North East Atlantic, Irish and North Seas**

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1. Opening of the Meeting

1.1 Welcoming Remarks

The Chair, Rüdiger Strempel (Coalition Clean Baltic), opened the meeting and gave the floor to Monika Lesz (Poland), who welcomed the participants to Hel on behalf of the host country and recommended to all participants that they visit the House of the Harbour Porpoise, a small museum that had recently opened in Hel and that was connected to Hel Marine Station. Monika Lesz also mentioned that the Head of Hel Marine Station – Prof. Krzysztof Skóra, who had been involved in ASCOBANS work for many years, had passed away in February of this year.

Iwona Pawliczka (Poland) gave a few domestic announcements and informed the participants that Hel Marine Station had recently been named after Prof. Krzysztof Skóra.

The Chairman, Rüdiger Strempel, requested a minute of silence to honour the memory of Prof. Krzysztof Skóra. Afterwards a short introductory round of participants took place.

1.2 Adoption of the Agenda

The Chair presented the draft Agenda and asked for any comments or suggestions for amending it. Katarzyna Kamińska (Poland) requested to move fisheries issues to the beginning of the discussion of Agenda Item 4. The Chair noted the request.

2. Presentation by Invited Expert

Prof. Ralph Tiedemann (University of Potsdam) presented his recent work on harbour porpoise genetics titled “Genome-wide Single Nucleotide Polymorphism (SNP) analysis of harbour porpoise (*Phocoena phocoena*) improves population resolution in North and Baltic Seas”.

Population differentiation of harbour porpoises from the populations in the Baltic Sea and adjacent waters, in comparison to European Atlantic shelf waters (Iceland, Spain) and the Black Sea, was investigated with a population genomics approach. Specifically, population resolution was assessed with 1,801 Single Nucleotide Polymorphisms (SNPs) which were compared to population delimitation using more traditional molecular markers (microsatellites, mitochondrial DNA).

The study revealed a distinct separation of the North Sea/Skagerrak population from the other Baltic Sea populations and identified splits between porpoise populations in the southern Kattegat, the Belt Sea, and the inner Baltic Sea. Improvements in assigning attribution of individual harbour porpoises to certain populations in the Baltic was important for the conservation and management of this endangered cetacean in threatened habitats, particularly in the Baltic Sea proper.

Genome-wide SNPs outperformed microsatellite markers both regarding population delimitation and assigning of individuals to a certain population. The utility of the approach was demonstrated on a relatively small sample set, but unscaled analyses including a more comprehensive sampling from the North and Baltic Seas were underway. Such a comprehensive spatially and seasonally explicit study on porpoises of different age and gender could provide detailed information on the population status and relatedness among

individual porpoises and might hence contribute to the identification of reproduction areas, close kin associations, and seasonal migration.

At the end of the presentation Mr Tiedemann informed the meeting that if Parties had samples to be analysed this was the time to share the samples as funding for the analysis was available at this point.

Monika Lesz (Poland) asked if harbour porpoises from the Baltic Sea and adjacent waters did not mix with each other although there was no geographical obstacle preventing them from doing so. Mr Tiedemann answered that there was no yes/no answer. Mixing was possible although it might not be random or very frequent. This might be due to geographic independence.

Finn Larsen (Denmark) asked if it was possible to distinguish between residents and migrants, and if it was possible to assign an individual to certain population or assess whether it was a migrant from one population to another. Mr Tiedemann answered that results showed some hybrid individuals, so reproduction occasionally occurred. There was no full separation but less exchange of genes than under random scenarios, thus populations were more or less demographically independent.

Signe Sveegaard (Denmark) asked if these results had been compared with Anders Galatius' morphometric studies. The answer was that this had not been done, although this was something worth exploring.

Further Mr Larsen asked if regarding samples from the Bornholm area it would be possible to assess from which population these animals came. Mr Tiedemann answered that he would be able to assign individuals to clusters presented in his presentation and this could be interpreted as Baltic or non-Baltic animals.

Ms Sveegaard asked if DNA samples could come from a portion of the skin of tagged animals to conduct the analysis, as in Denmark a project was running where animals were tagged and their movement recorded, which showed that some of them moved to the Baltic and back to Danish waters and sample collection was possible while tagging individuals. The answer was that this was possible, as long as the sample was fresh or properly stored.

Sara Königson (Sweden) asked how many individuals had been taken into account for the analysis. Mr Tiedemann answered that the sample size was very small. It was not sufficient to tell with statistical certainty how large the fraction of porpoises from the Baltic was. More samples needed to be analysed to increase certainty. Ms Königson asked for how many animals analysis revealed special features in genes. The answer was 3 out of 13 from the region in question.

Ms Sveegaard mentioned that it would be also interesting to do this kind of analysis for porpoises in Greenland and Iceland. Mr Tiedemann said this kind of study was ongoing now.

3. Recovery Plan for Baltic Harbour Porpoises (Jastarnia Plan - JP)

3.1 Bycatch Reduction

Related Action Points (AP) recommended by previous Meetings of the Jastarnia Group:

(JG11/AP07) *Noting that Regulation 812/2004 in its current form does not protect harbour porpoises in the Baltic Sea sufficiently and that according to EC Communication (2011) 578, a revision is not foreseen in the near future and that bycatch mitigation measures will probably in future be addressed in the new Common Fisheries Policy (CFP), Baltic Sea Range States should implement comprehensively the bycatch mitigation measures laid down in Recommendations 1-4 of the Jastarnia Plan.*

Marcin Ruciński (Poland) proposed to revise the text, as to his knowledge the measures would be discussed at the regional level, in this case on the Baltic Sea level by BaltFish. The Chair noted the request.

3.1.1 JP Recommendation 1: Reduce Fishing Effort in Certain Fisheries

Related Action Points (AP) recommended by previous Meetings of the Jastarnia Group:

(JG11/AP01) ASCOBANS should urge relevant authorities to investigate ways of limiting part-time and recreational set-net fisheries.

(JG8/AP05) With respect to recreational fisheries, Parties should work towards banning those types of gear known to pose a threat to harbour porpoises.

(JG11/AP02) Parties should step up action to reduce fishing effort involving gear known to cause high porpoise bycatch rates as required under the Jastarnia Plan, and to provide information documenting the magnitude and location of such effort to ICES. The Secretariat should request the ICES WGBYC to present the information to the Jastarnia Group.

(JG11/AP03) In order to achieve favourable conservation status for Baltic harbour porpoises as required under the Habitats Directive, Parties should make concerted efforts to eliminate bycatch especially in current and future Natura 2000 sites (SACs) where harbour porpoises form part of the selection criteria. In these areas, this could be achieved by replacing set nets and introducing alternative gear that is considered less harmful.

(JG10/AP04) The Chair of the Jastarnia Group and the Secretariat should write to ICES requesting statistics on IUU fisheries in the Baltic Sea, broken down by ICES areas, to be presented to the next Jastarnia Group Meeting.

Katarzyna Kamińska (Poland) mentioned that there were two draft regulations on the EU level under discussion right now that were related to porpoise bycatch. Finn Larsen (Denmark) mentioned that there was an ICES group that dealt with the matter of recreational fisheries, and proposed to deliver the reports, where fishing effort was calculated, to the group.

Regarding JG11/AP02 Heidrun Frisch (Secretariat) pointed out that it was proposed to leave out the indication for ICES and revert to this issue at the next Jastarnia Group meeting. The Secretariat asked if the Parties reported on actions to reduce fishing effort to ICES. Ms Kamińska informed the meeting that Poland had decided to incorporate a monitoring programme into its national programme of fisheries data collection, starting in 2015. In 2016 the programme would be enhanced and would be reported to ICES.

Sara Königson (Sweden) mentioned that maybe there was no need to send a request to ICES for information, as information was available via ICES working group reports or databases such as the one on effort data. Ms Königson informed the meeting that she, Mr Larsen and Wojtek Gorski (Poland) had attended the ICES meeting and maybe could give the information needed without inviting ICES delegates to Jastarnia Group Meetings. Ms Frisch pointed out that the idea behind this AP was to investigate if fishing effort was being reduced, thus the data were needed to make a statement on any improvement. The Chair concluded that the data were available now, although the recommendation was still relevant.

Michael Dähne (Germany) proposed to harmonize the reporting at the Baltic Sea level. Mr Larsen noted that the ICES bycatch working group was working on a standard format. The meeting discussed in what format the data should be delivered to the Jastarnia Group - either as raw data or extracted from the ICES reports, as pre-analysed data. It had been agreed that the data would be extracted from bycatch working group reports, and this would be done by Ms Königson and Mr Larsen. Mr Larsen presented maps showing gillnet fishing effort around Bornholm extracted from the official Danish Fishery Statistics database for the year 2015. Seasonal changes were visible from the data presented. No questions or remarks were made by participants.

The Chair commented that the fishing effort data were needed because bycatch was a primary concern in terms of harbour porpoise conservation in the Baltic Sea and countries were expected to reduce fishing effort in fisheries that were damaging to harbour porpoise, thus it was important for the Jastarnia Group to know the extent of fishing effort that was damaging to harbour porpoises and the development of these fisheries over the years. Iwona Pawliczka (Poland) added, that information was important to recognise the threat that the fishery posed to harbour porpoises, especially at spatial, seasonal and national levels; this should include also small boat gillnet fishery that was known to pose a threat to harbour porpoises. Marcin Ruciński (Poland) mentioned that this had to be done in cooperation with fishermen, while building trust between scientists and this community. The Chair agreed and stated, that the Jastarnia Group would like to have a representative of the fisheries sector in the group.

Parties discussed the importance of local as opposed to large-scale fishing effort data. Wojciech Górski (Poland) presented a few slides showing gillnet fishery activities in Polish waters, stressing the relevance of the collection of the fishing effort data on a local and seasonal level, in order to create maps identifying threats, which included not only bycatch, but also, for example, underwater noise.

Regarding JG11/AP03, Mr Larsen mentioned that Denmark in collaboration with Sweden was working on the development of alternative fishing gear, such as cod pots.

Mr Dähne added that there were currently two projects running in Germany concentrating on alternative fishing gear and porpoise alerts. In 2016 the final report on the alternative fishing gear project would be published. Results of the trials done with porpoise alerts seemed to be promising in terms of bycatch reduction.

Sara Königson (Sweden) mentioned that there was another test ongoing in Sweden concerning testing pontoon traps for cod – again results seemed to be promising. In another Swedish project pots were given to more than 20 fishermen for testing in the Baltic. The Chair concluded that there were a great many activities in this field.

In terms of JG10/AP04 the Secretariat had written to ICES, and ICES had responded that there was not a great deal of data in their database on this subject either. Their response was contained in [JG12/Inf.4.1.1](#).

Action Points

- 1) ASCOBANS should urge relevant authorities to investigate ways of limiting part-time and recreational set-net fisheries. – Priority: High to medium, depending on area
- 2) With respect to recreational fisheries, Parties should work towards banning those types of gear known to pose a threat to harbour porpoises. – Priority: High
- 3) Parties should step up action to reduce fishing effort involving gear known to cause high porpoise bycatch rates as required under the Jastarnia Plan, and to provide information documenting the magnitude and location of such effort to ICES. – Priority: High
- 4) Finn Larsen and Sara Königson will present to the Jastarnia Group information on development of gillnet fishing effort in the Baltic Sea. – Priority: High
- 5) In order to achieve a favourable conservation status for Baltic harbour porpoises as required under the Habitats Directive, Parties should make concerted efforts to eliminate bycatch especially in current and future Natura 2000 sites (SACs) where harbour porpoises form part of the selection criteria. In these areas, this could be achieved by replacing set nets and introducing alternative gear that is considered less harmful. – Priority: High

3.1.2 JP Recommendation 2: Involve stakeholders in the work of reducing bycatch of harbour porpoises

Related Action Points (AP) recommended by previous Meetings of the Jastarnia Group:

(JG11/AP04) *A small drafting group should develop briefing notes on ASCOBANS positions regarding bycatch, insofar as possible based on any drafts that the North Sea Coordinator may prepare for fora in that area. These should be used by anyone representing ASCOBANS at Baltic RACs and other meetings of relevant EU and Baltic Sea bodies in order to maintain a consistent and appropriate approach.*

(JG11/AP05) *The Secretariat should produce a synopsis of bycatch-related regulations of relevance to individual fishermen, especially with regard to legal sanctions for bycatch and incentives for those delivering carcasses with a view to using the carcasses obtained for porpoise conservation research, irrespective of whether such incentives are laid down in national legislation. Funding should be made available for a consultant to carry out this task on behalf of the Secretariat, based on Terms of Reference agreed by JG10 (see Annex 5).*

(JG7/AP04) *Parties should establish national processes to develop guidelines and methods for reducing and monitoring bycatch in the relevant fisheries, as called for in Jastarnia Plan Recommendation 2, and to report on progress in achieving this.*

(JG6/AP11) *A targeted approach to involving stakeholders such as fishermen should be adopted. With respect to fishermen, this should involve working primarily with those who have been receptive in the past.*

(JG5/AP02) *Parties should involve stakeholders, including fishermen, and urge them to accept responsibility for eliminating the potential risk of bycatch in gillnets and to take the necessary actions to obtain this goal. One way of making this into a positive market force is to develop a green policy for the fisheries, promoting a “porpoise free fish” label. In such a process it is recommended to seek advice from similar label initiatives on the market and to integrate this green policy into the public relations and awareness campaigns discussed below.*

(JG4/AP07) *Parties should develop a collaborative approach to engaging fishers in reporting bycatch. Parties should involve stakeholders, including fishermen, in the work of reducing bycatch and in collaboration with them develop necessary mitigation measures.*

Regarding JG11/AP04 the drafting group had never materialised, and the Chair would revisit this point himself.

Heidrun Frisch (Secretariat) updated the meeting on the status of JG11/AP05, informing the meeting that thanks to a voluntary contribution from Germany the Secretariat had been able to advertise the contract. The report to be produced would cover the entire ASCOBANS region and was expected to be ready for the 8th Meeting of the Parties in August 2016.

Katarzyna Kamińska (Poland) asked the Secretariat to send the report to the Jastarnia Group members for comments as soon as it was ready. Ms Frisch confirmed that this would be done if time allowed. Parties agreed to remove this AP noting that the report needed to be looked at as soon as it was available.

In terms of JG7/AP04 Ms Kamińska informed the meeting that under Polish legislation fishermen were obliged to report on bycatch of marine mammals (established in 2014). Monika Łaskawska-Wolszczak (WWF Poland) added that the Conservation Programme for Harbour Porpoises in Poland had been adopted, including guidelines on bycatch reduction. Action points needed to be implemented at once. Monika Lesz (Poland) added that the latest version of the Programme had been accepted in December 2015 and gave a brief description of its content, as the document was available only in Polish.

Sara Königson (Sweden) informed the meeting that Sweden would update its national management plan for conservation of harbour porpoise.

Olli Loisa (Finland) added that Finland had had its own national management plan for harbour porpoises for a month now, together with a law on reporting bycatch by fishermen.

Michael Dähne (Germany) said that Germany also had a management plan under development, where recommendations on bycatch would be included.

Referring to JG6/AP11, Julia Carlström (AquaBiota Water Research / Swedish Museum of Natural History) said that a discussion was ongoing in the national collaboration group in Sweden, which included NGOs, scientists and fishermen. The Chair stressed that there was no fishermen's representative on the Jastarnia Group and encouraged Parties to contact fishermen's groups to forward the message to interested prospective candidates to fill this place.

Ms Königson mentioned that a fishermen's representative should receive funding to attend the meetings. The Chair answered that this had never been the case, nor would this be possible in the future.

Marcin Ruciński (Poland) added that it would be very valuable to have a fishermen's representative in the Group, and also recommended the deletion of the part of AP mentioning receptive fishermen. The group agreed to this change together with an amendment mentioning both individual fishermen and fishermen's organizations instead of only 'fishermen'.

Ms Łaskawska-Wolszczak mentioned that if funding was granted a platform for discussion for stakeholders in Poland would be created.

Concluding the discussion on JG5/AP02, Mr Ruciński stated that this kind of certificate development would involve a great deal of work and was a complex process.

Regarding JG4/AP07, Signe Sveegaard (Denmark) noticed an overlap between this AP and one of the previous AP. The Chair agreed. Parties agreed to delete this AP.

Action Points

- 6) A small drafting group should develop briefing notes on ASCOBANS positions regarding bycatch, insofar as possible in consultation with the North Sea Group. These should be used by anyone representing ASCOBANS at Baltic ACs and other meetings of relevant EU and Baltic Sea bodies in order to maintain a consistent and appropriate approach. – Priority: Medium
- 7) Parties should establish national processes to develop guidelines and methods for reducing and monitoring bycatch in the relevant fisheries, as called for in Jastarnia Plan Recommendation 2, and to report on progress in achieving this. – Priority: High
- 8) A targeted approach to involving stakeholders such as fishermen and fisheries organizations should be adopted. Jastarnia Group Members and the Secretariat should make efforts to encourage fisheries organizations to participate in the Jastarnia Group Meetings. – Priority: High
- 9) Parties should involve stakeholders, including fishermen and fisheries organizations, and urge them to accept responsibility for eliminating the potential risk of bycatch in gillnets and to take the necessary actions to obtain this goal. One way of making this into a positive market force is to develop a green policy for the fisheries, promoting a "porpoise free fish" label. In such a process it is recommended to seek advice from similar label initiatives on the market and to integrate this green policy into the public relations and awareness campaigns discussed below. – Priority: High
- 10) Parties are encouraged to make funding available for a consultant to advise on a) whether a "porpoise free fish" label would best be managed nationally, regionally, ASCOBANS-wide or in another manner, and b) how best to devise an operating

system for such a label assuring the appropriate reception by markets, transparency and clarity of the labelling process. – Priority: Medium

3.1.3 JP Recommendation 3: Replace fishing methods known to be associated with high porpoise bycatch (i.e. set nets) and introduce alternative gear considered less harmful

Related Action Points (AP) recommended by previous Meetings of the Jastarnia Group:

(JG11/AP06) Parties should undertake or continue efforts to test and implement pots, traps and other porpoise-friendly gear. Parties are encouraged to report on related initiatives or research even where the intention is not primarily the conservation of marine mammals.

(JG7/AP08) The Jastarnia Group recommends that the Secretariat approach the Marine Stewardship Council and other similar certification organizations to urge them to prioritize bycatch of cetaceans in the evaluation criteria applied for certifying fisheries and to promote porpoise-friendly fishing gear and other mitigation measures as described in the Jastarnia Plan.

(JG6/AP03) Parties should promote research on the development of new porpoise-safe fishing gear. Included in the responsibility of the stakeholders for mitigating bycatch is the active participation in this research and development. The implementation of resulting new fishing gear can be considerably facilitated by including the new gear in a green label, e.g. as outlined above, since it will increase acceptance of a higher value of the catch, which in turn would serve as an incitement for the fishermen to adopt the new gear.

Concerning JG11/AP06, Sara Königson (Sweden) asked that the group to which this recommendation was addressed should be specified. The Chair agreed to this request.

Referring to JG7/AP08 Heidrun Frisch (Secretariat) reported that the ASCOBANS Bycatch Working Group had been requested to advise on the assessment standards. No answer had been received yet. There had been contact between the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) and the chair of the Working Group; the MSC was positive about the idea of involving ASCOBANS experts in their assessments.

Action Points

- 11) Parties should undertake or continue efforts to test and implement pots, traps and other porpoise-friendly gear. Parties are encouraged to report to the Jastarnia Group on related initiatives or research even where the intention is not primarily the conservation of marine mammals. – Priority: High
- 12) The Jastarnia Group recommends that the Secretariat approach the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) and other similar certification organizations to urge them to prioritize bycatch of cetaceans in the evaluation criteria applied for certifying fisheries and to promote porpoise-friendly fishing gear and other mitigation measures as described in the Jastarnia Plan. (*see also Agenda Item 7.2.1*) – Priority: High
- 13) Parties should promote research on the development of new porpoise-safe fishing gear. Included in the responsibility of the stakeholders for mitigating bycatch is the active participation in this research and development. The implementation of resulting new fishing gear can be considerably facilitated by including the new gear in a green label, e.g. as outlined above, since it will increase acceptance of a higher value of the catch, which in turn would serve as an incitement for the fishermen to adopt the new gear. – Priority: High

3.1.4 JP Recommendation 4: Implement a pinger programme on a short-term basis

Related Action Points (AP) recommended by previous Meetings of the Jastarnia Group:

(JG5/AP04) Parties are reminded to implement urgently the pinger use recommended in the Jastarnia Plan, which calls for pingers to be made mandatory in probable high-risk areas and fisheries associated with bycatch of harbour porpoises on a short-term basis (no more than 3 years) irrespective of vessel size. In the meantime, Parties must develop long-term measures to mitigate bycatch, such as alternative fishing gear.

(JG2/AP03) More enforcement of pinger use and the monitoring of its efficiency should be ensured.

Commenting on JG5/AP04, Monika Łaskawska-Wolszczak (WWF Poland) mentioned that WWF Poland and Hel Marine Station were applying for funding for a project in the framework of which pingers were to be given provided to coastal fishermen in National Park areas.

Michael Dähne (Germany) mentioned that pinger implementation might be difficult in Natura 2000 areas, as there was scientific evidence for the deterrent effect of pingers, so promoting these devices should not be the primary goal of Jastarnia Group.

Monika Lesz (Poland) answered that there was no other method to reduce bycatch for now. Thus it was planned to compensate fishermen in Poland for 50 per cent of the cost of pingers. Moreover, some fishermen already used pingers in Polish waters (ICES 24 zone). Monika Lesz (Poland) added, that the issue might not be the size of the zone where pingers would be used but the number of fishing vessels using pingers, since in large numbers they could generate considerable noise. Thus the pinger use issue should be investigated case by case.

Mr Dähne suggested rewriting the AP in a way that pinger use was recommended in high risk areas.

Finn Larsen (Denmark) suggested to recommend pinger use in ICES Area 25 on a short-term basis until other measures were equally efficient.

Iwona Pawliczka (Poland) concluded that pingers could not be placed on all vessels due to the noise pollution this would cause. She agreed with Monika Lesz that the issue of pinger use should be investigated case by case.

Signe Sveegaard (Denmark) shared her doubts that implementation of such an expensive measure in the short term might never happen. Parties agreed to amend this AP after the revision of Jastarnia Plan.

Julia Carlström (AquaBiota Water Research / Swedish Museum of Natural History) commented on the JG2/AP03, stating that from a scientific point of view there was no need to further monitor pinger efficiency and proposed to change the text of the AP in a way that pinger use was about to be monitored, rather than its efficiency.

Action Points

- 14) Parties are reminded to implement urgently the pinger use recommended in the Jastarnia Plan, which calls for pingers to be made mandatory in probable high-risk areas and fisheries associated with bycatch of harbour porpoises on a short-term basis irrespective of vessel size. In the meantime, Parties must develop long-term measures to mitigate bycatch, such as alternative fishing gear.¹ – Priority: High
- 15) Parties should ensure more monitoring and enforcement of pinger use. – Priority: High

¹ This recommendation may be subject to review dependent on the outcome of the revision of the Jastarnia Plan.

3.2 Research and Monitoring

Monika Kosecka (Poland) gave a short presentation on the new project commissioned by the Chief Inspectorate for Environmental Protection in Poland concerning harbour porpoise and seal monitoring in Polish waters ('Pilot Monitoring of Marine Species and Habitats in the Years 2015 – 2018'). The main objective of the project was to investigate distribution, abundance, protection perspectives and threats to marine mammals in Polish waters, together with determining potential breeding and moulting sites for seals. In terms of harbour porpoise monitoring, the methodology was based on that of the SAMBAH project. C-PODs were deployed in two locations with the highest detection rates of porpoises within Polish waters covered by the SAMBAH project and data would be collected for a period of two years. In total ten C-POD devices were deployed, five at each of two study areas, and at least four of them were deployed at the previous SAMBAH locations in order to allow data comparison in the future and gain long-term dataset. Additionally, aerial surveys would be carried out in the summer months of the second year of the monitoring campaign in order to confirm or rule out the presence of porpoise calves in the study areas. Monitoring results together with additional data on threats to marine mammals would be analysed in order to assess GES in terms of the requirements under the MSFD and the conservation status of marine mammals in Poland in terms of the Habitats Directive. This would serve as input to Polish reports to the EU within the framework of the MSFD and the Habitats Directive.

Signe Sveegaard (Denmark) asked why the C-POD set up in the project included one additional C-POD at each site, at a site other than the SAMBAH C-POD position. Ms Kosecka answered that this had been done in order to increase sampling resolution within the study areas.

Iwona Pawliczka (Poland) asked why the Gulf of Gdansk area had not been included in this monitoring scheme. Ms Kosecka explained, that positions were chosen based on SAMBAH results, and the highest detection rates were not recorded in the Gulf of Gdansk but elsewhere. Ms Pawliczka insisted that the Gulf of Gdansk was a known hotspot for porpoises and in her opinion it should be included in a national monitoring campaign. Ms Kosecka added that as the project was a pilot monitoring campaign, it could not be ruled out that in the future another site would be added to the monitoring area.

3.2.1 JP Recommendation 5: Analyze stock affinities of harbour porpoises in the "transition zone" of the south- western Baltic

Related Action Points (AP) recommended by previous Meetings of the Jastarnia Group:

(JG11/AP09) *Baltic Parties are urged to continue to submit, as they become available, all results on genetic, morphological and other biological research dealing with the stock identity of Baltic porpoises, including results from ongoing relevant studies.*

Regarding JG/AP09 Signe Sveegaard (Denmark) mentioned that in the previous year Denmark had published a proposal for a management area for the Belt Sea population of harbour porpoises and it could be sent to the Parties if needed. The Secretariat asked for a copy of this document.

Action Point

- 16) Parties are urged to continue to submit, as they become available, all results on genetic, morphological and other biological research dealing with the stock identity of Baltic porpoises, including results from ongoing relevant studies. – Priority: Medium

3.2.2 JP Recommendation 6: Develop and apply new techniques (e.g. acoustic monitoring) for assessing trends in abundance

Related Action Points (AP) recommended by previous Meetings of the Jastarnia Group:

(JG11/AP10) ASCOBANS and the Parties should explore the possibility of co-funding and/or otherwise supporting dedicated follow-up studies for SAMBAH, among other things with a view to assessing trends.

(JG1/AP03) The monitoring of population developments should be considered an ongoing project that should continue for many years to come.

Referring to JG11/AP10 Katarzyna Kaminska (Poland) asked if the final SAMBAH report was already available to the public. Julia Carlström (AquaBiota Water Research / Swedish Museum of Natural History) said that the final non-technical report was available on the website, although scientific papers were still being written and should be published soon in the scientific journals.

Under SCANS III it was planned to conduct a study comparing all the methods for abundance estimates. The Great Belt would be the study area where abundance estimate methods comprising the use of C-PODs, aerial surveys, visual surveys from the boat and digital video monitoring from the air would be compared.

Action Points

- 17) ASCOBANS and the Parties should explore the possibility of co-funding and/or otherwise supporting dedicated follow-up studies for SAMBAH, among other things with a view to assessing trends. – Priority: High
- 18) The monitoring of population developments should be considered an ongoing project that should continue for many years to come. – Priority: High

3.2.3 JP Recommendation 7: Develop interactive pingers or pingers using frequencies not audible to seals

Related Action Points (AP) recommended by previous Meetings of the Jastarnia Group:

(JG5/AP08) Parties should promote studies on alternative fishing gear, the development of interactive pingers and pingers not audible to seals.

Updating on JG5/AP08, Sara Königson (Sweden) informed the meeting that Sweden was working on pingers not audible to seals, the field study on porpoises would be conducted later in the year. There was a thesis in preparation on this subject that would probably be published the following year.

Finn Larsen (Denmark) proposed to remove word 'interactive' from the recommendation. The AP would be rewritten.

Action Point

- 19) Parties should promote studies on alternative fishing gear, the development of pingers not audible to seals, and alerting devices other than pingers. – Priority: High

3.2.4 JP Recommendation 8: Investigate possible detrimental effects of various types of sound and disturbance (including pinger signals, noise from vessels, wind parks or construction and seabed exploration for oil and gas) on harbour porpoises

Related Action Points (AP) recommended by previous Meetings of the Jastarnia Group:

(JG8/AP11) Germany recently issued recommendations on the reduction of sound emissions associated with construction of offshore wind farms and set an upper limit for pile driving operations. This good example and the results of current studies should be reflected both in the national legislation of Parties and in the relevant indicators for Good Environmental Status to be developed for the Marine Strategy Framework Directive.

(JG8/AP10) Parties are invited to commission research on whether pingers cause habitat exclusion and habituation.

(JG5/AP09) Parties and the ASCOBANS Advisory Committee Noise Working Group are asked to give special consideration to the particular requirements in the Baltic Sea when mitigating the impact of anthropogenic noise on porpoises, such as the destruction through explosion of old ammunition or during the construction of sea bed pipelines as well as pile-driving for wind turbines. Furthermore, additional ship noise is of concern during offshore construction as well as the use of depth sounders (e.g. fish finders) with frequencies of less than 150kHz in particular by an increasing number of leisure boats.

(JG5/AP10) Parties are asked to undertake baseline studies of underwater noise in their respective waters as a reference point for future impact assessments.

(JG5/AP11) The Jastarnia Group requests that the working group on noise should also consider guidelines on the safe disposal of abandoned ammunition to minimise the detrimental effects on harbour porpoises, for example through the use of bubble curtains.

(JG4/AP08) Parties should investigate possible detrimental effects of various types of sound and disturbance on harbour porpoises (including pinger signals, noise from vessels, wind parks or construction). Parties should initiate and support studies on the effect of anthropogenic noise on the harbour porpoise.

(JG1/AP02) More research should be conducted on the behaviour of harbour porpoises near pingers.

(JG1/AP12) A study on noise emitted by vessels should be undertaken; North Sea countries should be asked to contribute to this as the findings were relevant to both recovery plans.

With reference to JG8/AP11, Signe Sveegaard (Denmark) informed the meeting that Denmark had proposed its national criteria for temporary and permanent hearing threshold shifts (TTS and PTS) for harbour porpoises.

Referring to JG8/AP10 Ms Sveegaard said that in a small research project Denmark was now investigating if pingers caused habitat exclusion. A small bay had been monitored for four years, a pinger line crossing it was placed for a few months. Sara Königson (Sweden) informed the group about an ongoing project in Sweden, where pinger use in commercial fisheries was being studied in relation to abundance of porpoises in the area. Results were expected for next year.

Concerning JG5/AP09, Monika Kosecka (Poland) suggested adding seismic surveys to the list of anthropogenic activities generating noise in the Baltic Sea. Signe Sveegaard (Denmark) mentioned that the part of the AP listing 'particular requirements for the Baltic Sea' was not clear in this context; Michael Dähne (Germany) agreed. Julia Carlström (AquaBiota Water Research / Swedish Museum of Natural History) pointed out that not only leisure boats should be mentioned in the AP. It was agreed that the AP would be rewritten accordingly.

Regarding JG5/AP10, Monika Kosecka (Poland) said that Poland had been monitoring underwater ambient noise since 2015 as a part of the national monitoring programme. Ms Carlström mentioned the BIAS project, which monitored ambient noise in the entire Baltic Sea, the end of project conference would take place in June in Sweden. Mr Dähne added that there were several projects in Germany going on right now, some measuring underwater noise due to offshore windfarms. Ms Carlström said that even after the end of the BIAS field work, Sweden, as well as some other Baltic countries, were still monitoring ambient noise in their waters. Mr Dähne asked if ambient noise was not monitored for the purpose of impact assessments anyway. Ms Kosecka commented that this was the case for Poland and Denmark, Mr Dähne added that the situation was the same for Germany.

The group discussed if any study related to JG2/AP12 was being carried out. Ms Carlström mentioned that it was partly covered by the BIAS project, as AIS vessel noise was being monitored. The Chair proposed to conduct literature research on studies concerning this issue. Parties agreed to delete this AP.

Action Points

- 20) Germany issued recommendations on the reduction of sound emissions associated with construction of offshore wind farms and set an upper limit for pile driving operations. This good example and the results of current studies should be reflected both in the national legislation of Parties and in the relevant indicators for Good Environmental Status to be developed for the Marine Strategy Framework Directive. – Priority: High
- 21) Parties are invited to commission research on whether pingers or other alerting or harassment devices cause undue habitat exclusion and habituation. – Priority: Medium
- 22) Parties and the Joint CMS/ACCOBAMS/ASCOBANS Noise Working Group are asked to give special consideration to the particular requirements such as the sound propagation conditions in the Baltic and the conservation status of the Baltic Sea harbour porpoise with regard to mitigating the impact of anthropogenic noise on porpoises, such as the destruction through explosion of old ammunition or during the construction of sea bed pipelines, seismic surveys, as well as pile-driving for wind turbines. – Priority: High
- 23) Parties are asked to undertake baseline studies of underwater noise in their respective waters as a reference point for future impact assessments. – Priority: Medium
- 24) Parties should investigate possible detrimental effects of various types of sound and disturbance on harbour porpoises (including pinger signals, noise from vessels, seismic surveys, wind parks or construction). Parties should initiate and support studies on the effect of anthropogenic noise on the harbour porpoise both on the individual and on a population level. – Priority: Medium
- 25) More research should be conducted on the behaviour of harbour porpoises near pingers. – Priority: Medium

3.2.5 JP Recommendation 9: Monitor bycatch in fisheries known to be harmful to harbour porpoises to be able to estimate bycatch levels

Related Action Points (AP) recommended by previous Meetings of the Jastarnia Group:

(JG9/AP13) *Given the positive experiences in the Danish fishery, Parties should implement video surveillance widely in order to document bycatch of porpoises and identify and implement effective mitigation measures, and at the same time reduce discards of fish.*

Currently video surveillance is the most accurate measure for bycatch estimates and total documentation of the fishery, applicable also to small vessels, and meets the requirements of Article 12 of the Habitats Directive.

(JG4/AP02) *Bearing in mind the Parties' commitments under the Habitats Directive and EC Regulation 812/2004, Parties are required to establish a system to monitor bycatch on all vessels regardless of size.*

Regarding JG9/AP13, Marcin Ruciński (Poland) informed the meeting that in the Baltic Sea all species regulated by the TAC and quota system will be subject to the landing obligation in accordance with the reformed Common Fisheries Policy, and therefore will be covered by a monitoring system aiming at eliminating discards with the exception of plaice (art. 15 of Common Fisheries Policy). Plaice will be covered by the landing obligation starting from 2017.

Heidrun Frisch (Secretariat) pointed out that a workshop had been held on this matter in October 2015. She suggested to delete this point and instead recommend that Parties look at the recommendations from the workshop (available at <http://www.ascobans.org/en/meeting/WS-REM-2015>) and decide what actions could be implemented on the national level. The group agreed to proceed in this way.

Julia Carlström (AquaBiota Water Research / Swedish Museum of Natural History) proposed to amend JG4/AP02 so as to include information on monitoring schemes within the species distribution range.

Action Points

- 26) Parties should consider the recommendations of the October 2015 ASCOBANS Workshop on REM and implement this technique for bycatch monitoring as appropriate in the national context. – Priority: High
- 27) Bearing in mind the Parties' commitments under the Habitats Directive and EC Regulation 812/2004, Parties are required to establish a system to monitor bycatch on all vessels regardless of size. – Priority: High

3.2.6 JP Recommendation 10: Further develop sustainable alternative fishing gear with no bycatch of harbour porpoises

Related Action Points (AP) recommended by previous Meetings of the Jastarnia Group:

(JG4/AP09) *Parties should promote studies on alternative fishing gear and interactive pingers.*

There were no comments to JG4/AP09.

Action Point

- 28) Parties should promote studies on alternative fishing gear. – Priority: High

3.2.7 JP Recommendation 11: Compile data on fishing effort

Related Action Points (AP) recommended by previous Meetings of the Jastarnia Group:

(JG11/AP13) *The Secretariat should ask Parties to provide information as to the definitions of the term 'fisheries', rules and regulations applicable to the various types of fisheries in their national legislation, as well as related statistics. This information should be provided in time for the next JG meeting.*

Concerning JG11/AP13, document [JG12/Inf.4.2.7](#) contained the responses from the Parties. The Chair asked if the group was satisfied with the responses obtained. Sara Königson (Sweden) noted that Parties had used very different formats in their responses. The different levels of data integration and different ways of presenting the data made it difficult to compare the responses and get an accurate picture of the overall situation. Thus, ASCOBANS should be more specific when requesting information from different countries.

Signe Sveegaard (Denmark) commented that it would require a major effort to compile data from different countries, due to the different format in which they delivered the data and proposed creating a draft format for the countries to report in. The Secretariat agreed with this proposal. The Chair proposed omitting the statistical part included in the required data from the countries, as this was the most problematic section in the reports received.

Iwona Pawliczka (Poland) added that, as she recalled, the idea behind this AP was to take into account recreational fisheries in reporting. Finn Larsen (Denmark) stated that the idea was to obtain information on the effort distribution of fisheries to get information on the risk of bycatch of porpoises in the area. Judging by Germany response it seems that in terms of part time fisheries there is no data on effort. It looks like the official statistics on these data did not exist. The same was true for the recreational fisheries.

The Chair stated that what was needed and the idea behind this AP was that every country should define what fisheries were taking place in a specific country and asked if Parties believed this issue was still valid. It was decided that the standardized reporting format to be used by countries would be created. After receiving those answers, Parties would decide what to do next.

Action Point

- 29) Based on a standardized reporting format, the Secretariat should ask Parties to provide information as to the definitions of the term 'fisheries', and rules and regulations applicable to the various types of fisheries in their national legislation. This information should be provided in time for the next JG meeting. – Priority: Low

3.2.8 JP Recommendation 12: Examine habitat preference for harbour porpoises

Related Action Points (AP) recommended by previous Meetings of the Jastarnia Group:

(JG11/AP08) *The Advisory Committee should encourage Parties to explore the possibility of a joint monitoring effort and to promote the collection of data at the sub-regional and local levels based on the methods adopted by SAMBAH. Progress should be reviewed in 2016.*

Regarding JG11/AP08, Julia Carlström (AquaBiota Water Research / Swedish Museum of Natural History) said that noise monitoring was going on in Sweden (as a continuation of the BIAS project at BIAS stations), where C-PODs were attached to noise monitoring devices. Moreover, there was ongoing work on a proposal to create Natura 2000 areas for harbour porpoises in Swedish waters.

Monika Kosecka (Poland) cited the Chief Inspectorate for Environmental Protection's project which she had presented before as an example of a porpoise monitoring programme in Polish waters in accordance with SAMBAH project methodology and conducted on chosen SAMBAH project positions within the Polish Baltic.

Michael Dähne (Germany) informed the meeting that long-term acoustic monitoring of porpoises was going on in Germany.

Olli Loisa (Finland) said that offshore areas would be monitored with the use of passive acoustic devices.

Iwona Pawliczka (Poland) asked Radosław Koza (Poland) to give a short presentation on a locally-based approach to the porpoise monitoring programme implemented in Puck Bay and the Gulf of Gdansk. This was done in order to stress the importance of small-scale monitoring in comparison to the SAMBAH project. Monitoring was conducted by means of passive acoustic monitoring. The Puck Bay and Gulf of Gdansk region was chosen because bycatch of porpoises was well documented in this region. Moreover, these areas had very intensive fishing activity.

Results from three projects (including SAMBAH) were presented together in the form of normalized detection rates in order to enable comparability of the data coming from different projects, although data were collected in different time frames, which could also show differences in detection rates between years. Mr Koza stated that the results obtained for Puck Bay and the Gulf of Gdansk were comparable the highest detection rate station in SAMBAH deployed in the Polish part of the Baltic.

Signe Sveegaard (Denmark) asked why the results were not presented per year or per month as this would make data comparison straightforward. Mr Koza answered that the data would be analysed closely at the later stage.

Ms Kosecka asked why days with positive detection were not compared instead of minutes, as the effort between projects was different; more precisely, in one of the projects C-PODs were placed very close to each other and this could cause multiple counts of one animal. Mr Koza answered that detection minutes were used as a measure of the time animals spent in the area, which could point out the areas of special interest to animals.

Ms Sveegaard added that by using different means of data analysis different results would be obtained. Mr Koza said that at this point the analysis was focused on minutes of detection. Even if this were only one animal, a threat was posed to the individual staying in the area with a high level of fishing activity. Ms Sveegaard mentioned that the way of presenting the data could also lead to misinterpretation.

Mr Koza presented a density estimate map from the SAMBAH project and concluded, that the high detection rates recorded during small-scale monitoring schemes were not visible when looking only at SAMBAH project results, which highlighted the need for small- to medium-scale monitoring programmes.

Ms Sveegaard asked about the C-POD position arrangement within Puck Bay. The answer was that due to low detection rates when there were several C-PODs in the area it was decided to create a dense grid of C-PODs to record every individual passing through the bay, which increased the number of detections obtained. Ms Sveegaard added that this set-up was interesting in terms of examining of auto-correlation to check if one or more animals were recorded at several devices. Mr Koza said this had not been done so far.

Mr Dähne mentioned that Gallus et al. had published a paper in Marine Ecology Progress Series in 2012 where the distances between C-PODs were compared with porpoises' swimming speed in order to assess if the recordings on different devices came from one animal or from more individuals in a given area.

Action Point

- 30) Parties should continue to explore the possibility of a joint monitoring effort and to promote the collection of data at the sub-regional and local levels based on the methods adopted by SAMBAH. Progress should be reviewed in 2017. – Priority: High

3.2.9 JP Recommendation 13: Investigate the prevalence of derelict (“ghost”) gear and the feasibility of its removal

Related Action Points (AP) recommended by previous Meetings of the Jastarnia Group:

(JG11/AP14) Parties should continue to collect data on the extent of ghost nets in their waters, including net types and locations. Regular assessments should then be made of the total quantities of nets lost or discarded, taking account of the distribution of different types of fisheries.

(JG11/AP15) Taking into consideration the future requirements under the MSFD, Parties should continue to implement measures to prevent the loss of fishing gear, and mitigation measures for ghost nets, such as regular clean-ups, provision of disposal containers at ports, deposit systems, mandatory reporting of lost gear, marking of nets etc. Wherever possible fishing communities and other relevant stakeholders should be actively involved. A review of progress should be conducted by JG12.

(JG5/AP14) Parties should recognise the magnitude of the problem regarding derelict fishing gear and encourage fisheries organisations to remove it. There may be major benefits for the stakeholders in terms of public relations.

Regarding JG11/AP14, Monika Łaskawska-Wolszczak (WWF Poland) said that WWF Poland estimated that they were 800 tons of ghost nets in the Polish part of the Baltic Sea and was running a project for their collection. Furthermore, she said that an international project (Marelitt Baltic) for the collection of ghost nets in the Baltic Sea had started (a joint effort of Estonia, Germany, Poland and Sweden). The project is co-funded by the INTERREG Baltic Sea Region Programme 2014-2020.

Sara Königson (Sweden) informed the meeting that ghost nets were collected in Sweden.

It was decided that text of JG11/AP15 would be changed to a ‘periodic review of progress’.

It was decided to delete AP JG5/AP14.

Action Points

- 31) Parties should continue to collect data on the extent of ghost nets in their waters, including net types and locations. Regular assessments should then be made of the total quantities of nets lost or discarded, taking account of the distribution of different types of fisheries. – Priority: Medium
- 32) Taking into consideration the future requirements under the MSFD, Parties should continue to implement measures to prevent the loss of fishing gear, and mitigation measures for ghost nets, such as regular clean-ups, provision of disposal containers at ports, deposit systems, mandatory reporting of lost gear, marking of nets etc. Wherever possible fishing communities and other relevant stakeholders should be actively involved. Periodic reviews of progress should be conducted by the JG. – Priority: High

3.3 Marine Protected Areas

3.3.1 JP Recommendation 14: Expand the network of protected areas in the Baltic Sea and improve its connectivity to ensure the development of appropriate harbour porpoise management plans for these areas

Related Action Points (AP) recommended by previous Meetings of the Jastarnia Group:

(JG10/AP16) Parties, Range States and NGOs seeking to develop management plans for SACs and MPAs designated for harbour porpoises are encouraged to make use of the

expertise available within the Jastarnia Group, and to consult or cooperate with other Parties that are in the process of developing or have developed management plans.

(JG9/AP03) *Parties are strongly encouraged to use the data provided by SAMBAH once these become available, in particular in connection with the establishment of management plans for harbour porpoises, as well as with regard to mitigation measures.*

(JG4/AP06) *A working group should be established to evaluate how the selection guidelines for MPAs set out during the joint ECS/ACCOBAMS/ASCOBANS workshop (selection criteria for marine protected areas for cetaceans) in San Sebastian also can be adapted for use in the Baltic Sea.*

(JG3/AP07) *Guidance should be provided on how to identify sites suitable for harbour porpoise conservation.*

Concerning JG9/AP03, Katarzyna Kaminska (Poland) suggested deleting 'once these become available' as this had already happened. The proposal was accepted.

Parties decided to delete JG4/AP06 and JG3/AP07 as they were out of date.

Action Points

- 33) Parties, Range States and NGOs seeking to develop management plans for SACs and MPAs designated for harbour porpoises are encouraged to make use of the expertise available within the Jastarnia Group, and to consult or cooperate with other Parties that are in the process of developing or have developed management plans. – Priority: Low
- 34) Parties are strongly encouraged to use the data provided by SAMBAH, in particular in connection with the establishment of management plans for SACs and MPAs for harbour porpoises, as well as with regard to mitigation measures. – Priority: High

3.4 Public Awareness

3.4.1 JP Recommendation 15: Develop a comprehensive public awareness campaign

Related Action Points (AP) recommended by previous Meetings of the Jastarnia Group:

(JG11/AP16) *Each country is encouraged to designate one website for reporting of sightings and strandings by the public. The URLs should be made available for use on the ASCOBANS website. There should be an exchange of information between these databases as appropriate. GIS referenced data should be submitted to HELCOM regularly.*

(JG10/AP17) *Parties should establish sightings and strandings programmes, preferably in a coordinated fashion for all Baltic Sea States. They should consider initiating sightings days or weeks, comparable to the National Whale and Dolphin Watch in the UK. They should also consider developing a sightings and strandings app for smartphones.*

(JG8/AP17) *All Parties and Range States should establish sighting campaigns and related databases similar to those established by GSM in Germany, the Finnish Ministry of the Environment and the Swedish Museum of Natural History. The websites should be interlinked. The data should be submitted to HELCOM regularly.*

(JG8/AP16) *Information on the impacts of anthropogenic pressures (bycatch, noise, pollution, disturbance etc.) on cetaceans, specifically geared to relevant professional groups, should be made available on the ASCOBANS website. The information should be compiled and updated by the Secretariat with continuous input from the relevant Working Groups.*

(JG4/AP11) *Funding should be provided for translation of information material for the general public and fishers into all Baltic languages.*

(JG11/AP17) National focal points for public awareness should be established.

Regarding JG11/AP16, Michael Dähne (Germany) informed the meeting that there was a public website in Germany and an app for mobile phones for reporting opportunistic sightings although this information was not available to ASCOBANS yet.

Julia Carlström (AquaBiota Water Research / Swedish Museum of Natural History) reported that there were two databases collecting porpoise sightings, and they were available from HELCOM on request.

Olli Looisa (Finland) said that there was a website on porpoise sightings in Finland.

Signe Sveegaard (Denmark) said that stranding data were collected in Denmark.

Concerning JG10/AP17 Ms Sveegaard informed the meeting that Denmark had established a strandings network but did not have an app.

Sara Königson (Sweden) added that a strandings network was going to be included in the Action Plan for Sweden.

JG8/AP17 would be deleted.

Regarding JG8/AP16, Heidrun Frisch (Secretariat) reported that basic information had been placed on the webpage, but these pages had been developed without input from the Working Groups. She was concerned that continuous updating of more detailed information, as the AP suggested, would require a great deal of work on both sides (Secretariat and Working Groups) and use up time that might more beneficially be spent on other things.

Julia Carlström (AquaBiota Water Research / Swedish Museum of Natural History) agreed and suggested to include only basic information on the webpage. The Secretariat proposed to Parties that they look at the webpage and inform the Secretariat if the information included was relevant or needed an update. It was decided that the AP would be rewritten accordingly.

JG4/AP11 would be deleted. In terms of JG11/AP17 the Secretariat was to contact Parties to establish focal points.

Sara Königson (Sweden) asked the Secretariat to specify the tasks assigned to public awareness focal points.

Monika Łaskawska-Wolszczak (WWF Poland) informed the meeting about an international public awareness project that was about to start.

Action Points

- 35) Each country is encouraged to designate one website for reporting of sightings and strandings by the public. The Secretariat should place the URLs on the ASCOBANS website. – Priority: High
- 36) There should be an exchange of information between the sighting and stranding databases as appropriate. GIS referenced data should be submitted to HELCOM regularly. – Priority: High
- 37) Parties should establish sightings and strandings programmes, preferably in a coordinated fashion for all Baltic Sea States. They should consider initiating sightings days or weeks, comparable to the National Whale and Dolphin Watch in the UK. They should also consider developing a sightings and strandings app for smartphones. – Priority: High
- 38) Information on the impacts of anthropogenic pressures (bycatch, noise, pollution, disturbance etc.) on cetaceans should be made available on the ASCOBANS website. The Jastarnia Group is invited to provide comments and suggestions for improvement of the existing pages. – Priority: Medium

3.5 ASCOBANS Cooperation with Other Bodies

3.5.1 JP Recommendation 16: Strive for close consultation and cooperation between ASCOBANS and other relevant regional and international bodies

Related Action Points (AP) recommended by previous Meetings of the Jastarnia Group:

(JG3/AP09) These recommendations of the Jastarnia Group should be forwarded to all relevant organisations active in the Baltic.

(JG10/AP22) Parties are urged to ensure that calls for participation in the Jastarnia Group are relayed to the environmental and fisheries organizations in their respective countries.

No changes were made to the APs.

Action Points

- 39) The recommendations of the Jastarnia Group should be forwarded to all relevant organizations active in the Baltic. – Priority: Medium
- 40) Parties are urged to ensure that calls for participation in the Jastarnia Group are relayed to the environmental and fisheries organizations in their respective countries. – Priority: Medium

a) European Commission / ICES

Related Action Points (AP) recommended by previous Meetings of the Jastarnia Group:

(JG10/AP19) Parties are strongly encouraged to fulfil their obligations under the current Regulation 812/2004 and the Habitats Directive.

(JG8/AP07) Given that the Jastarnia Group has the most specific expertise related to harbour porpoise conservation in the area and in light of the specific problems and situation in the Baltic Sea, the Secretariat should address the European Commission to urge it to seek the Group's advice when the technical measures framework (TMF) and data collection framework (DCF) of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) are being drafted. Parties should also convey the same message to appropriate fora.

(JG5/AP12) Parties should use their right to comment during the process for the review of the Common Fisheries Policy of the European Commission to ensure marine mammal bycatch reporting. For example, bycatch reporting should be included in the fishing logbooks as additional columns without requiring any separate forms.

(JG7/AP16) The Jastarnia Group encourages Parties to take advantage of the financial resources available within the framework of the European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region by working towards launching two flagship projects under Priority Area 2 of the Strategy (To preserve natural zones and biodiversity, including fisheries) relating to a) monitoring bycatch in fisheries known to be harmful to harbour porpoises to be able to estimate bycatch levels; and b) developing and promoting the use of alternative fishing gear in collaboration with the fisheries sector.

(JG7/AP18) Baltic Sea Parties should ensure that ASCOBANS is duly involved in updating and further developing the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region.

The group agreed to rewrite JG8/AP07, as most of the AP had been implemented.

JG5/AP12 would be deleted as the goal had been achieved.

Regarding JG7/AP16 no action had been taken so far.

JG7/AP18 was no longer valid and was deleted.

Action Point

- 41) Parties are strongly encouraged to fulfil their obligations under the current Regulation 812/2004 and the Habitats Directive. – Priority: High
- 42) Parties should convey positions agreed within ASCOBANS, such as those available at http://www.ascobans.org/sites/default/files/basic_page_documents/ASCOBANS_Recommendations_EUBycatchLegislation_Final.pdf to the appropriate fora at the European level. – Priority: High

b) HELCOM

Related Action Points (AP) recommended by previous Meetings of the Jastarnia Group:

(JG10/AP21) *Parties are urged to provide all relevant data to the HELCOM harbour porpoise database.*

(JG8/AP18) *Parties should designate focal points dealing with the Baltic Harbour Porpoise Database operated by HELCOM. The Secretariat should remind Parties to provide the details of these focal points to the Secretariats of ASCOBANS and HELCOM.*

(JG8/AP21) *The Secretariat should collaborate with HELCOM SEAL to obtain data on harbour porpoise strandings in the Russian territories of the Baltic Sea.*

(JG5/AP17) *The Jastarnia Group acknowledges the progress regarding the future cooperation between the Jastarnia Group and HELCOM. The Jastarnia Group promotes further cooperation with the HELCOM ad hoc Seal Group and will strive to cooperate with the HELCOM fish forum. Further, HELCOM should continue to be invited to take part in the Jastarnia Group meetings.*

Regarding JG8/AP18, Heidrun Frisch (Secretariat) informed the meeting that this had been done and nominees had been communicated to HELCOM. The AP was rewritten accordingly.

The Secretariat noted that there had been no progress concerning JG8/AP21.

Katarzyna Kaminska (Poland) informed that within the HELCOM a report form had been created for countries that were not members of ASCOBANS and if the Russian Federation was willing to report, this could be shared with ASCOBANS. The form could be found in [JG12/Inf.4.5.1](#).

It was decided that JG5/AP17 would be deleted.

Action Points

- 43) Parties are urged to provide all relevant data to the HELCOM harbour porpoise database. – Priority: Medium
- 44) Parties should designate contact persons dealing with the Baltic Harbour Porpoise Database operated by HELCOM. The Secretariat should remind Parties that have not yet done so (Lithuania, Poland and Sweden) to provide the details of these contact persons to the Secretariats of ASCOBANS and HELCOM. – Priority: High
- 45) The Secretariat should collaborate with HELCOM SEAL to obtain data on harbour porpoise strandings in the Russian territories of the Baltic Sea. – Priority: Medium

- 46) The Jastarnia Group acknowledges the progress regarding the cooperation between the Jastarnia Group and relevant meetings of HELCOM. The Jastarnia Group promotes further cooperation with HELCOM SEAL and will strive to cooperate with the HELCOM Fish Group. Further, HELCOM should continue to be invited to take part in the Jastarnia Group meetings. – Priority: High

c) Fisheries Organizations

Related Action Points (AP) recommended by previous Meetings of the Jastarnia Group:

(JG7/AP17) Parties should provide the financial resources required to enable ASCOBANS representatives to attend BALTFISH and RAC meetings and events. Once this funding is ensured, the Secretariat should write to BALTFISH and the Baltic RAC suggesting enhanced cooperation and the inclusion of ASCOBANS issues in the agenda of BALTFISH and RAC meetings

(JG6/AP12) Bycatch mitigation activities of the Jastarnia Group should be coordinated with the related work of other regional bodies and organizations in order to avoid duplication of effort.

(JG6/AP22) The Jastarnia Group should step up cooperation with the Baltic RAC.

(JG1/AP08) Fisheries organizations should be contacted to stress the importance of recovering bycaught animals.

Regarding JG7/AP17, Heidrun Frisch (Secretariat) noted that the requested donations had so far not been made available to fund representation at BALTFISH and RAC meetings and events. Signe Sveegaard (Denmark) noted that ASCOBANS representatives should be attending those when asked or invited as an expert. There might, however, also be other ways to strengthen cooperation.

Katarzyna Kaminska (Poland) together with Ms Sveegaard proposed to change the text of JG6/AP12 in order to stress the mitigation measures in this AP. Parties decided to delete this AP.

Ms Sveegaard noted that concerning JG1/AP08 it should be mentioned who should make contact and how. The Secretariat asked for clarification as to what was meant by fisheries organizations. Monika Lesz (Poland) proposed that this should be done at national level.

Action Points

- 47) The Jastarnia Group should step up cooperation with the Baltic Advisory Committee. – Priority: High
- 48) The Secretariat and Parties should continually contact fisheries organizations to make them aware of the importance of recovering bycaught animals. – Priority: High

4. Revision of the Jastarnia Plan

Related Action Points (AP) recommended by previous Meetings of the Jastarnia Group:

(JG11/AP21) *In view of the SAMBAH results and the requirement for regular reviews and updates of both the Jastarnia Plan and the Gap Area Plan, an urgent revision of both plans is needed with the aim of presenting drafts for adoption by MOP8 in 2016. Parties are urged to provide the necessary funding.*

Julia Carlström (AquaBiota Water Research / Swedish Museum of Natural History) presented a short introduction on the revised Jastarnia Plan. The new template prepared by the Secretariat and agreed by Parties had been used to develop the document.

The Chair opened the floor for a discussion regarding the area covered by the Jastarnia Plan. Michael Dähne (Germany) stated that SAMBAH results should be taken into account in the revised Jastarnia Plan, and two issues should be considered in his opinion: SAMBAH winter and summer distribution might give new indications for the Plan.

Signe Sveegaard (Denmark) added that animal distribution maps created within SAMBAH also included the Belt Sea harbour porpoises and this was important because including them in the Baltic Proper might lead to misinterpretation. Further, Ms Sveegaard suggested moving the delimitation border further east to take into account only animals of the Baltic Proper.

Mr Dähne disagreed with this opinion as he was more in favour of a precautionary approach, even if this meant that the Plan would take into account some of the Belt Sea animals. Ralph Tiedemann (University of Potsdam) agreed.

Finn Larsen (Denmark) added that the border issue was not so relevant as far as management was concerned, as long as the Parties took into account the fact that there might be a mixing area at this location.

Sara Königson (Sweden) added that changing the delimitation would create a gap between management plans. The Chair suggested that it was less problematic for the management plans to overlap rather than to create a gap between them.

Ms Carlström pointed out that SAMBAH maps presented a modelled distribution from SAMBAH and not a population range of porpoises. Mr Dähne suggested coordinating management plans for both populations in the future. Mr Tiedemann added that more genetic studies could answer some questions in the near future. Parties agreed to leave the delimitation as it was.

Detailed discussion followed on each of the Actions in the draft document, with changes being noted by Ms Carlström for the next revised version. This would be circulated again to the Group members before it was finalized for presentation to the 8th Meeting of the Parties (MOP8, 30 August - 1 September 2016, Helsinki, Finland).

5. Cross-cutting Issues

5.1 Baltic Sea Coordinator

Related Action Points (AP) recommended by previous Meetings of the Jastarnia Group:

(JG11/AP18) *In light of the positive experience with the North Sea Coordinator, the Jastarnia Group recommends that the Advisory Committee ensure that the appointment of a Baltic Sea Coordinator, or a joint coordinator for both regions, possibly attached to the Secretariat, is considered by the next MOP.*

Regarding JG11/AP18, Heidrun Frisch (Secretariat) reported that some funding was available for a few months of work for a North Sea Coordinator, kindly donated by the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. Baltic Sea Parties had not responded positively to the request to fund a Baltic Sea Coordinator. The Advisory Committee had set up an intersessional working group to revise the terms of reference for coordination of all the Harbour Porpoise Action Plans adopted by the Agreement. No progress had been made with this task to date.

Parties agreed that there was a need for a Coordinator/Coordinators.

Action Point

- 49) In light of the positive experience with the North Sea Coordinator, the Jastarnia Group recommends that the Parties ensure that a Baltic Sea Coordinator, or a joint coordinator for both regions, possibly attached to the Secretariat, be appointed. – Priority: High

5.2 CFP Expert

Related Action Points (AP) recommended by previous Meetings of the Jastarnia Group:

(JG11/AP19) *Coordinating Authorities of the countries hosting the Group's meetings are asked to ensure the attendance of an expert on the CFP at the respective meetings of the Group. The Secretariat should recall this recommendation to the Coordinating Authority of the host country in good time before the meeting.*

Regarding JG11/AP19 recommendation will stay in place.

Action Point

- 50) Coordinating Authorities of the countries hosting the Group's meetings are asked to ensure the attendance of an expert on the CFP at the respective meetings of the Group. The Secretariat should recall this recommendation to the Coordinating Authority of the host country in good time before the meeting. – Priority: High

5.3 Projects

Related Action Points (AP) recommended by previous Meetings of the Jastarnia Group:

(JG11/AP11) *Parties should consider supporting any projects relevant for achieving the aims of the Jastarnia Plan.*

(JG11/AP12) *Parties and NGOs are requested to ensure that the results of all relevant projects are made available to ASCOBANS.*

(JG11/AP20) *Parties are encouraged to use SAMBAH results for harbour porpoise conservation in the Baltic Sea.*

(JG11/AP21) In view of the SAMBAH results and the requirement for regular reviews and updates of both the Jastarnia Plan and the Gap Area Plan, an urgent revision of both plans is needed with the aim of presenting drafts for adoption by MOP8 in 2016. Parties are urged to provide the necessary funding.

Regarding JG11/AP12, Signe Sveegaard (Denmark) asked why NGOs were mentioned in this action. The Chair explained that the results of NGOs' work should be available to ASCOBANS; the Secretariat confirmed this, as it was relevant for ASCOBANS to know in advance what actions and projects were running.

Regarding JG11/AP21 Sara Königson (Sweden) proposed a revision of the AP due to expected new results of SCANS-III. The AP would be rewritten in terms of the gap area plan's needs.

Action Points

- 51) Parties should consider supporting any projects relevant for achieving the aims of the Jastarnia Plan. – Priority: High
- 52) Parties and NGOs are requested to ensure that the results of all relevant projects are made available to ASCOBANS. – Priority: High
- 53) Parties are encouraged to use SAMBAH results for harbour porpoise conservation in the Baltic Sea. – Priority: High
- 54) In view of the SAMBAH results and the requirement for regular reviews and updates of both the Jastarnia Plan and the WBBK Plan, a timely revision of the WBBK Plan is required. Parties are urged to provide the necessary funding. – Priority: High

6. Conservation Plan for the Harbour Porpoise Population in the Western Baltic, the Belt Sea and the Kattegat (WBBKP)

6.1 Involvement of All Stakeholders in the Implementation of the Plan and its Evaluation

6.1.1 WBBKP Recommendation 1: Actively seek to involve all stakeholders in the implementation of the Plan and its evaluation

Related Action Points (AP) recommended by previous Meetings of the Jastarnia Group:

(JG10/AP26) National Coordinators should provide an overview of measures currently ongoing in their countries actively to engage fishing communities and other stakeholders in the implementation of the Plan, in order to identify existing gaps and lessons learnt of interest to all Parties. Parties should provide the funding required for measures needed to fill the gaps. Parties should explore the possibility of obtaining EU funding for this purpose.

(JG10/AP27) Noting the successful Natura 2000 dialogue forums conducted in Denmark, Parties are encouraged to consider establishing a similar format for the stakeholder working group required under Objective a. of the Plan.

Concerning JG10/AP26 Signee Sveegaard (Denmark) said that an overview was in preparation. Sara Königson (Sweden) pointed out that meetings with stakeholders and fishermen were ongoing due to harbour porpoise management plans in progress. Moreover, this AP created many responsibilities for national coordinators. Ms Sveegaard pointed out that the overview should be short and include dense information. Ms Königson agreed with this idea. It was decided that this AP would be rewritten and a simple questionnaire would be created and sent out to Parties to complete.

With regard to JG10/AP27, Michael Dähne (Germany) informed the meeting that he had no information on this matter, although it was possible that this was being implemented. Ms Königson added that this was taking currently place in Sweden. Moreover she informed the meeting that fishermen in Sweden used pingers in certain areas under the voluntary programme.

Action Points

- 56) The Secretariat, making use of a simple questionnaire, should request Parties to provide an overview of measures currently ongoing in their countries actively to engage fishing communities and other stakeholders in the implementation of the Plan, in order to identify existing gaps and lessons learnt of interest to all Parties. – Priority: Medium
- 57) Noting the successful Natura 2000 dialogue forums conducted in Denmark, Parties are encouraged to consider establishing a similar format for the stakeholder working group required under Objective a. of the Plan. – Priority: High

6.1.2 WBBKP Recommendation 2: Cooperate with and inform other relevant bodies about the Conservation Plan

No comments were made on this point.

6.2 Mitigation of Bycatch

6.2.1 WBBKP Recommendation 3: Protect harbour porpoises in their key habitats by minimizing bycatch as far as possible

Related Action Points (AP) recommended by previous Meetings of the Jastarnia Group:

(JG11/AP22) A request should be made to the Bycatch Working Group to advise whether the revised MSC assessment standards meet ASCOBANS' requirements.

(JG11/AP23) The Secretariat should invite a MSC representative to next Jastarnia Group meeting.

(JG10/AP28) Parties are strongly encouraged to take all necessary steps to develop without delay their joint recommendations to the European Commission regarding the management of harbour porpoise SACs to minimize bycatch rates within these areas.

(JG10/AP29) Parties should continue to provide funding for research on alternative fishing gear and practices as needed.

(JG10/AP30) ASCOBANS should seek to influence existing eco-labelling programmes to take full account of the need to avoid cetacean bycatch in certifying fisheries. In the case of MSC, the Secretariat is requested to liaise directly with the organization in order to determine the appropriate means of influencing their eco-labelling programmes.

Concerning JG11/AP22, Heidrun Frisch (Secretariat) had reported earlier that the request had been made, without a response from the Working Group to date. She proposed to renew the request.

Regarding JG11/AP23 Ms Frisch said that she had discussed this with the Chair in the preparation for this meeting, and they had agreed to postpone the invitation to the MSC to the next meeting, as the current session would need to be dedicated primarily to the revision of the Jastarnia Plan. Finn Larsen (Denmark) pointed out that maybe the information needed from the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) was already available on their webpage. The

Chair clarified that the suggestion to invite an MSC representative had come from the group, which had decided it would be best to have an expert at the meeting to address questions to.

Regarding JG10/AP28, Signe Sveegaard (Denmark) asked what 'joint' referred to. The Chair explained that the joint recommendation idea had been suggested by the Parties. Ms Sveegaard said that the recommendations were currently being written for Denmark and Germany but these had not yet been implemented. Sara Königson (Sweden) said that in Sweden areas were under designation now but management plans for those areas would only be available in six years. Michael Dähne (Germany) said that in Germany management plans had been developed for the North Sea, and work was under way for the Baltic Sea, and a species management plan was under development for harbour porpoises. Further he pointed out that countries should not wait for joint efforts on this AP and should move forward as soon as possible. The Chair concluded that there were no known cases of joint recommendations by two or more countries. Ms Königson pointed out that in her opinion this should be done at a national level due, among other things, to local differences in fisheries. Ms Frisch recalled that the idea behind this AP was for the Parties to reach consensus in terms of recommendations, so they would not deliver different statements when approaching the EU. Parties agreed to leave AP as it was. The Secretariat would ask Parties to provide information about actions taken in this matter.

In terms of JG10/AP29 Finn Larsen (Denmark) reported that Denmark was providing funding on alternative gear studies, as was Sweden.

Action Points

- 58) The Secretariat will enquire with Parties regarding steps taken to develop their joint recommendations to the European Commission regarding the management of harbour porpoise SACs to minimize bycatch rates within these areas. – Priority: High
- 59) The Secretariat should relay the Jastarnia Group's request for advice as to whether the revised MSC assessment standards meet ASCOBANS' requirements to the Bycatch Working Group. – Priority: High
- 60) ASCOBANS should seek to influence existing eco-labelling programmes to take full account of the need to avoid cetacean bycatch in certifying fisheries. In the case of MSC, the Secretariat is requested to liaise directly with the organization in order to determine the appropriate means of influencing their eco-labelling programmes. – Priority: Medium
- 61) The Secretariat should invite an MSC representative to the next Jastarnia Group meeting. – Priority: High

6.2.2 WBBKP Recommendation 4: Implement pinger use in fisheries causing bycatch

Related Action Points (AP) recommended by previous Meetings of the Jastarnia Group:

(JG11/AP24) *Parties are strongly encouraged to take all necessary steps to develop as soon as possible agreements to implement immediately the use of pingers in gillnet fishery associated with bycatch irrespective of vessel size or type, as provided for in the Plan, and to enforce the use of pingers.*

Regarding JG11/AP24 Sara Königson (Sweden) asked what kind of agreement this AP refers to. Heidrun Frisch (Secretariat) clarified that this did not refer to a specific document, but agreement on actions to be taken. Ms Königson pointed out that in her opinion there was no need for an international agreement to start using pingers.

Signe Sveegaard (Denmark) explained this AP referred to fishing in the area of another country – thus agreement should be made among the three countries.

Michael Dähne (Germany) reported that Germany was planning to close certain areas for a certain season rather than applying pingers; thus this agreement might be not suitable.

It was agreed that the AP would be rewritten in order to specify “establishing agreement” not “an agreement” (as a legal document). Parties decided that maybe there was a need to make a change to the Plan itself; this would be done as soon as possible.

Action Point

- 62) Parties are strongly encouraged to take all necessary steps to achieve as soon as possible agreement to implement immediately the use of pingers in gillnet fishery associated with bycatch irrespective of vessel size or type, as provided for in the Plan, and to enforce the use of pingers. – Priority: High

6.2.3 WBBKP Recommendation 5: Where possible replace gillnet fisheries known to be associated with high porpoise bycatch with alternative fishing gear known to be less harmful

Upon recommendation by Signe Sveegaard (Denmark), the meeting agreed to adopt an Action Point about providing funding for the development of alternative gear.

Action Point

- 63) Parties should continue to provide funding for research on alternative fishing gear and practices as needed. – Priority: High

6.3 Assessment of the Bycatch Level

6.3.1 WBBKP Recommendation 6: Estimate total annual bycatch

Related Action Points (AP) recommended by previous Meetings of the Jastarnia Group:

(JG10/AP32) Parties are encouraged to undertake or promote research regarding bycatch estimation.

Concerning JG10/AP32, Finn Larsen (Denmark) mentioned that bycatch monitoring projects were being conducted with the aim to estimate total marine mammal and sea-bird bycatch in Danish gillnet fisheries.

Action Point

- 64) Parties are encouraged to undertake or promote research regarding bycatch estimation. – Priority: High

6.4 Monitoring the Status of the Population

6.4.1 WBBKP Recommendation 7: Estimate trends in abundance of harbour porpoises in the Western Baltic, the Belt Sea and the Kattegat

Related Action Points (AP) recommended by previous Meetings of the Jastarnia Group:

(JG11/AP25) Noting activities that have already taken place in 2012, Parties are strongly encouraged to continue to undertake and cooperate on inter-SCANS surveys of the Western Baltic (gap area) harbour porpoise population and evaluate trends in population density and abundance.

(JG11/AP26) Parties are strongly encouraged to lend their support to the projected SCANS III survey and secure the necessary funding.

Regarding JG11/AP25 Signe Sveegaard (Denmark) reported that a new programme within Denmark would be starting soon – a mini-SCANS survey conducted jointly with Germany (aerial survey). Julia Carlström (AquaBiota Water Research / Swedish Museum of Natural History) asked if Denmark was about to approach Sweden in order to join the monitoring programme. Ms Sveegaard confirmed this would be done.

JG11/AP26 was no longer relevant as SCANS-III was already taking place.

Action Points

- 65) Parties are strongly encouraged to continue to undertake and cooperate on inter-SCANS surveys of the Western Baltic (gap area) harbour porpoise population and evaluate trends in population density and abundance. – Priority: High

6.4.2 WBBKP Recommendation 8: Monitor population health status, contaminant load and causes of mortality

Related Action Points (AP) recommended by previous Meetings of the Jastarnia Group:

(JG11/AP27) Parties are strongly encouraged to coordinate and standardize their monitoring efforts and determine the number of stranded or bycaught animals to be collected for necropsies in the Western Baltic, the Belt Sea and the Kattegat. For this purpose, ASCOBANS is requested to establish a coordination group comprised of the scientists involved, whose names should be notified to the Secretariat by 1 May 2015. The first meeting of this group could take place in conjunction with JG12.

(JG10/AP35) The animals collected should be necropsied and examined with regard to health status, contaminant load and causes of mortality. The resultant data should be fed into a common database, such as the future database required under MOP Resolution 7.4.

Regarding JG11/AP27, Heidrun Frisch (Secretariat) reported that national contact points had been nominated, but a meeting had not yet been convened, both for time and financial reasons. She proposed considering the use of methods that were more cost-efficient than physical meetings for this working group, such as teleconferences. The group could then approach the Secretariat in case they felt a face-to-face meeting was necessary. Ms Frisch also pointed out that the leader of the group should be chosen.

Regarding JG10/AP35 Ms Frisch informed the meeting that a contract had been concluded with the Zoological Society of London to develop a fully costed proposal for the creation of this database. The results were expected to become available in good time before the next meeting of the Advisory Committee.

Action Points

- 66) Parties are strongly encouraged to coordinate and standardize their monitoring efforts and determine the number of stranded or bycaught animals to be collected for necropsies in the Western Baltic, the Belt Sea and the Kattegat by means of the coordination group established in 2016. – Priority: High
- 67) The Secretariat will contact the members of the necropsy coordination group to discuss their mode of operation and the facilitation of the group. – Priority: High
- 68) The animals collected should be necropsied and examined with regard to health status, contaminant load and causes of mortality. The resultant data should be fed

into a common database, such as the future database required under MOP Resolution 7.4. – Priority: High

6.5 Ensuring Habitat Quality Favourable to the Conservation of the Harbour Porpoise

6.5.1 WBBKP Recommendation 9: Ensure a non-detrimental use of pingers by examining habitat exclusion and long-term effects of pingers

Signe Sveegaard (Denmark) proposed to create an Action Point for this recommendation with a view to securing research funding.

Sara Königson (Sweden) reported that a low-budget project about pinger use in areas where commercial fisheries took place was going on in Sweden.

Michael Dähne (Germany) added there was a project investigating the use of porpoise alerts in Germany. A more large-scale project was necessary to get a clear view on whether porpoise alerts worked long-term.

Action Point

69) Parties should continue to provide funding for research on non-detrimental use of acoustic devices and possible habitat exclusion through pingers. – Priority: High

6.5.2 WBBKP Recommendation 10: Include monitoring and management of important prey species in national harbour porpoise management plans

Related Action Points (AP) recommended by previous Meetings of the Jastarnia Group:

(JG11/AP28) Parties should promote research on the consequences of impacts on prey communities for harbour porpoises.

Concerning JG11/AP28, Signe Sveegaard (Denmark) informed the meeting that within Denmark a model was being created to see how the distribution of prey patches affected porpoises.

Action Point

70) Parties should promote research on the consequences of impacts on prey communities for harbour porpoises. – Priority: Medium

6.5.3 WBBKP Recommendation 11: Restore or maintain habitat quality

Related Action Points (AP) recommended by previous Meetings of the Jastarnia Group:

(JG11/AP29) The Secretariat should ask Jacob Nabe-Nielsen of Aarhus University, the leader of the project “Disturbance Effects on the Harbour Porpoise Population in the North Sea” (DEPONS), to attend the next meeting of the Jastarnia Group as an invited expert.

(JG10/AP38) Parties should undertake or promote continual monitoring of the effects of projects with a potential impact on harbour porpoise behaviour and distribution, and baseline studies on this issue. Research is also required on the context in which porpoises are using the habitats.

Regarding JG11/AP29 Heidrun Frisch (Secretariat) reported that, in agreement with the Chair given the time limitations at this meeting, the invitation had not been extended. Instead, it was

proposed to invite this expert to the next meeting. This proposal met with approval by the group.

Regarding JG10/AP38, Parties proposed to rewrite the AP in order to stress the relevance of continuous monitoring and research/construction activities and stress the importance of a baseline monitoring in construction/industrial projects.

Action Point

- 71) The Secretariat should ask Jacob Nabe-Nielsen of Aarhus University, the leader of the project “Disturbance Effects on the Harbour Porpoise Population in the North Sea” (DEPONS), to attend the next meeting of the Jastarnia Group as an invited expert. – Priority: High
- 72) Parties should ensure baseline studies and continual monitoring with regard to potential effects of activities with an impact on harbour porpoise behaviour and distribution. Research is also required on the context in which porpoises are using the habitats. – Priority: High

7. Any other Business

No other businesses were discussed.

8. Date and Venue of the 13th Meeting of the Jastarnia Group

Heidrun Frisch (Secretariat) said that to date no Party had made an offer to host the next meeting. However, Rüdiger Stempel (Chair) had kindly suggested that the premises of the Wadden Sea Secretariat in Wilhelmshaven, Germany, could be made available to the Group. Should this offer be accepted, Ms Frisch would propose that the meeting should be held back-to-back with that of the North Sea Group, with a joint session to allow exchange on common concerns. Parties welcomed this idea.

For future meetings, Parties were encouraged to consider hosting on a rotational basis. To enable advance planning, the Secretariat was requested to prepare an overview of the requirements and related costs to be covered by the host.

Katarzyna Kaminska (Poland) urged that the date for the next meeting be chosen in a way avoiding overlap with other related meetings, such as HELCOM State & Conservation.

Action Point

- 55) Parties are encouraged to take turns hosting the meetings of the Jastarnia Group and to ensure that the necessary funding for this purpose is made available. The Secretariat should prepare a general overview of related costs to be expected. – Priority: High

9. Close of Meeting

After thanking the participants for their contributions, the hosts for their hospitality and the note-taker for her hard work, the Chair closed the meeting.

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AGENDA

1. Opening of the Meeting
 - 1.1 Welcoming Remarks
 - 1.2 Adoption of the Agenda
2. Presentation by Invited Expert
3. Recovery Plan for Baltic Harbour Porpoises (Jastarnia Plan - JP)
 - 3.1 Bycatch Reduction
 - 3.1.1 JP Recommendation 1: Reduce Fishing Effort in Certain Fisheries
 - 3.1.2 JP Recommendation 2: Involve stakeholders in the work of reducing bycatch of harbour porpoises
 - 3.1.3 JP Recommendation 3: Replace fishing methods known to be associated with high porpoise bycatch (i.e. set nets) and introduce alternative gear considered less harmful
 - 3.1.4 JP Recommendation 4: Implement a pinger programme on a short-term basis
 - 3.2 Research and Monitoring
 - 3.2.1 JP Recommendation 5: Analyze stock affinities of harbour porpoises in the “transition zone” of the south- western Baltic
 - 3.2.2 JP Recommendation 6: Develop and apply new techniques (e.g. acoustic monitoring) for assessing trends in abundance
 - 3.2.3 JP Recommendation 7: Develop interactive pingers or pingers using frequencies not audible to seals
 - 3.2.4 JP Recommendation 8: Investigate possible detrimental effects of various types of sound and disturbance (including pinger signals, noise from vessels, wind parks or construction and seabed exploration for oil and gas) on harbour porpoises
 - 3.2.5 JP Recommendation 9: Monitor bycatch in fisheries known to be harmful to harbour porpoises to be able to estimate bycatch levels
 - 3.2.6 JP Recommendation 10: Further develop sustainable alternative fishing gear with no bycatch of harbour porpoises
 - 3.2.7 JP Recommendation 11: Compile data on fishing effort
 - 3.2.8 JP Recommendation 12: Examine habitat preference for harbour porpoises
 - 3.2.9 JP Recommendation 13: Investigate the prevalence of derelict (“ghost”) gear and the feasibility of its removal
 - 3.3 Marine Protected Areas
 - 3.3.1 JP Recommendation 14: Expand the network of protected areas in the Baltic Sea and improve its connectivity to ensure the development of appropriate harbour porpoise management plans for these areas
 - 3.4 Public Awareness
 - 3.4.1 JP Recommendation 15: Develop a comprehensive public awareness campaign

- 3.5 ASCOBANS Cooperation with Other Bodies
 - 3.5.1 JP Recommendation 16: Strive for close consultation and cooperation between ASCOBANS and other relevant regional and international bodies
4. Revision of the Jastarnia Plan
5. Cross-cutting Issues
 - 5.1 Baltic Sea Coordinator
 - 5.2 CFP Expert
 - 5.3 Projects
6. Conservation Plan for the Harbour Porpoise Population in the Western Baltic, the Belt Sea and the Kattegat (WBBKP)
 - 6.1 Involvement of All Stakeholders in the Implementation of the Plan and its Evaluation
 - 6.1.1 WBBKP Recommendation 1: Actively seek to involve all stakeholders in the implementation of the Plan and its evaluation
 - 6.1.2 WBBKP Recommendation 2: Cooperate with and inform other relevant bodies about the Conservation Plan
 - 6.2 Mitigation of Bycatch
 - 6.2.1 WBBKP Recommendation 3: Protect harbour porpoises in their key habitats by minimizing bycatch as far as possible
 - 6.2.2 WBBKP Recommendation 4: Implement pinger use in fisheries causing bycatch
 - 6.2.3 WBBKP Recommendation 5: Where possible replace gillnet fisheries known to be associated with high porpoise bycatch with alternative fishing gear known to be less harmful
 - 6.3 Assessment of the Bycatch Level
 - 6.3.1 WBBKP Recommendation 6: Estimate total annual bycatch
 - 6.4 Monitoring the Status of the Population
 - 6.4.1 WBBKP Recommendation 7: Estimate trends in abundance of harbour porpoises in the Western Baltic, the Belt Sea and the Kattegat
 - 6.4.2 WBBKP Recommendation 8: Monitor population health status, contaminant load and causes of mortality
 - 6.5 Ensuring Habitat Quality Favourable to the Conservation of the Harbour Porpoise
 - 6.5.1 WBBKP Recommendation 9: Ensure a non-detrimental use of pingers by examining habitat exclusion and long-term effects of pingers
 - 6.5.2 WBBKP Recommendation 10: Include monitoring and management of important prey species in national harbour porpoise management plans
 - 6.5.3 WBBKP Recommendation 11: Restore or maintain habitat quality
7. Any other Business
8. Date and Venue of the 13th Meeting of the Jastarnia Group
9. Close of Meeting

ACTION POINTS

Jastarnia Plan

Bycatch Reduction

Agenda Item 3.1.1

- 1) ASCOBANS should urge relevant authorities to investigate ways of limiting part-time and recreational set-net fisheries. – Priority: High to medium, depending on area
- 2) With respect to recreational fisheries, Parties should work towards banning those types of gear known to pose a threat to harbour porpoises. – Priority: High
- 3) Parties should step up action to reduce fishing effort involving gear known to cause high porpoise bycatch rates as required under the Jastarnia Plan, and to provide information documenting the magnitude and location of such effort to ICES. – Priority: High
- 4) Finn Larsen and Sara Königson will present to the Jastarnia Group information on development of gillnet fishing effort in the Baltic Sea. – Priority: High
- 5) In order to achieve a favourable conservation status for Baltic harbour porpoises as required under the Habitats Directive, Parties should make concerted efforts to eliminate bycatch especially in current and future Natura 2000 sites (SACs) where harbour porpoises form part of the selection criteria. In these areas, this could be achieved by replacing set nets and introducing alternative gear that is considered less harmful. – Priority: High

Agenda Item 3.1.2

- 6) A small drafting group should develop briefing notes on ASCOBANS positions regarding bycatch, insofar as possible in consultation with the North Sea Group. These should be used by anyone representing ASCOBANS at Baltic ACs and other meetings of relevant EU and Baltic Sea bodies in order to maintain a consistent and appropriate approach. – Priority: Medium
- 7) Parties should establish national processes to develop guidelines and methods for reducing and monitoring bycatch in the relevant fisheries, as called for in Jastarnia Plan Recommendation 2, and to report on progress in achieving this. – Priority: High
- 8) A targeted approach to involving stakeholders such as fishermen and fisheries organizations should be adopted. Jastarnia Group Members and the Secretariat should make efforts to encourage fisheries organizations to participate in the Jastarnia Group Meetings. – Priority: High
- 9) Parties should involve stakeholders, including fishermen and fisheries organizations, and urge them to accept responsibility for eliminating the potential risk of bycatch in gillnets and to take the necessary actions to obtain this goal. One way of making this into a positive market force is to develop a green policy for the fisheries, promoting a “porpoise free fish” label. In such a process it is recommended to seek advice from similar label initiatives on the market and to integrate this green policy into the public relations and awareness campaigns discussed below. – Priority: High
- 10) Parties are encouraged to make funding available for a consultant to advise on a) whether a “porpoise free fish” label would best be managed nationally, regionally, ASCOBANS-wide or in another manner, and b) how best to devise an operating system for such a label assuring the appropriate reception by markets, transparency and clarity of the labelling process. – Priority: Medium

Agenda Item 3.1.3

- 11) Parties should undertake or continue efforts to test and implement pots, traps and other porpoise-friendly gear. Parties are encouraged to report to the Jastarnia Group on related initiatives or research even where the intention is not primarily the conservation of marine mammals. – Priority: High
- 12) The Jastarnia Group recommends that the Secretariat approach the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) and other similar certification organizations to urge them to prioritize bycatch of cetaceans in the evaluation criteria applied for certifying fisheries and to promote porpoise-friendly fishing gear and other mitigation measures as described in the Jastarnia Plan. (*see also Agenda Item 7.2.1*) – Priority: High
- 13) Parties should promote research on the development of new porpoise-safe fishing gear. Included in the responsibility of the stakeholders for mitigating bycatch is the active participation in this research and development. The implementation of resulting new fishing gear can be considerably facilitated by including the new gear in a green label, e.g. as outlined above, since it will increase acceptance of a higher value of the catch, which in turn would serve as an incitement for the fishermen to adopt the new gear. – Priority: High

Agenda Item 3.1.4

- 14) Parties are reminded to implement urgently the pinger use recommended in the Jastarnia Plan, which calls for pingers to be made mandatory in probable high-risk areas and fisheries associated with bycatch of harbour porpoises on a short-term basis irrespective of vessel size. In the meantime, Parties must develop long-term measures to mitigate bycatch, such as alternative fishing gear.² – Priority: High
- 15) Parties should ensure more monitoring and enforcement of pinger use. – Priority: High

Research and Monitoring

Agenda Item 3.2.1

- 16) Parties are urged to continue to submit, as they become available, all results on genetic, morphological and other biological research dealing with the stock identity of Baltic porpoises, including results from ongoing relevant studies. – Priority: Medium

Agenda Item 3.2.2

- 17) ASCOBANS and the Parties should explore the possibility of co-funding and/or otherwise supporting dedicated follow-up studies for SAMBAH, among other things with a view to assessing trends. – Priority: High
- 18) The monitoring of population developments should be considered an ongoing project that should continue for many years to come. – Priority: High

Agenda Item 3.2.3

- 19) Parties should promote studies on alternative fishing gear, the development of pingers not audible to seals, and alerting devices other than pingers. – Priority: High

Agenda Item 3.2.4

- 20) Germany issued recommendations on the reduction of sound emissions associated with construction of offshore wind farms and set an upper limit for pile driving operations. This good example and the results of current studies should be reflected both in the

² This recommendation may be subject to review dependent on the outcome of the revision of the Jastarnia Plan.

- national legislation of Parties and in the relevant indicators for Good Environmental Status to be developed for the Marine Strategy Framework Directive. – Priority: High
- 21) Parties are invited to commission research on whether pingers or other alerting or harassment devices cause undue habitat exclusion and habituation. – Priority: Medium
 - 22) Parties and the Joint CMS/ACCOBAMS/ASCOBANS Noise Working Group are asked to give special consideration to the particular requirements such as the sound propagation conditions in the Baltic and the conservation status of the Baltic Sea harbour porpoise with regard to mitigating the impact of anthropogenic noise on porpoises, such as the destruction through explosion of old ammunition or during the construction of sea bed pipelines, seismic surveys, as well as pile-driving for wind turbines. – Priority: High
 - 23) Parties are asked to undertake baseline studies of underwater noise in their respective waters as a reference point for future impact assessments. – Priority: Medium
 - 24) Parties should investigate possible detrimental effects of various types of sound and disturbance on harbour porpoises (including pinger signals, noise from vessels, seismic surveys, wind parks or construction). Parties should initiate and support studies on the effect of anthropogenic noise on the harbour porpoise both on the individual and on a population level. – Priority: Medium
 - 25) More research should be conducted on the behaviour of harbour porpoises near pingers. – Priority: Medium

Agenda Item 3.2.5

- 26) Parties should consider the recommendations of the October 2015 ASCOBANS Workshop on REM and implement this technique for bycatch monitoring as appropriate in the national context. – Priority: High
- 27) Bearing in mind the Parties' commitments under the Habitats Directive and EC Regulation 812/2004, Parties are required to establish a system to monitor bycatch on all vessels regardless of size. – Priority: High

Agenda Item 3.2.6

- 28) Parties should promote studies on alternative fishing gear. – Priority: High

Agenda Item 3.2.7

- 29) Based on a standardised reporting format, the Secretariat should ask Parties to provide information as to the definitions of the term 'fisheries', and rules and regulations applicable to the various types of fisheries in their national legislation. This information should be provided in time for the next JG meeting. – Priority: Low

Agenda Item 3.2.8

- 30) Parties should continue to explore the possibility of a joint monitoring effort and to promote the collection of data at the sub-regional and local levels based on the methods adopted by SAMBAH. Progress should be reviewed in 2017. – Priority: High

Agenda Item 3.2.8

- 31) Parties should continue to collect data on the extent of ghost nets in their waters, including net types and locations. Regular assessments should then be made of the total quantities of nets lost or discarded, taking account of the distribution of different types of fisheries. – Priority: Medium
- 32) Taking into consideration the future requirements under the MSFD, Parties should continue to implement measures to prevent the loss of fishing gear, and mitigation measures for ghost nets, such as regular clean-ups, provision of disposal containers at ports, deposit systems, mandatory reporting of lost gear, marking of nets etc. Wherever

possible fishing communities and other relevant stakeholders should be actively involved. Periodic reviews of progress should be conducted by the JG. – Priority: High

Marine Protected Areas

Agenda Item 3.3

- 33) Parties, Range States and NGOs seeking to develop management plans for SACs and MPAs designated for harbour porpoises are encouraged to make use of the expertise available within the Jastarnia Group, and to consult or cooperate with other Parties that are in the process of developing or have developed management plans. – Priority: Low
- 34) Parties are strongly encouraged to use the data provided by SAMBAH, in particular in connection with the establishment of management plans for SACs and MPAs for harbour porpoises, as well as with regard to mitigation measures. – Priority: High

Public Awareness

Agenda Item 3.4

- 35) Each country is encouraged to designate one website for reporting of sightings and strandings by the public. The Secretariat should place the URLs on the ASCOBANS website. – Priority: High
- 36) There should be an exchange of information between the sighting and stranding databases as appropriate. GIS referenced data should be submitted to HELCOM regularly. – Priority: High
- 37) Parties should establish sightings and strandings programmes, preferably in a coordinated fashion for all Baltic Sea States. They should consider initiating sightings days or weeks, comparable to the National Whale and Dolphin Watch in the UK. They should also consider developing a sightings and strandings app for smartphones. – Priority: High
- 38) Information on the impacts of anthropogenic pressures (bycatch, noise, pollution, disturbance etc.) on cetaceans should be made available on the ASCOBANS website. The Jastarnia Group is invited to provide comments and suggestions for improvement of the existing pages. – Priority: Medium

Cooperation

Agenda Item 3.5

- 39) The recommendations of the Jastarnia Group should be forwarded to all relevant organisations active in the Baltic. – Priority: Medium
- 40) Parties are urged to ensure that calls for participation in the Jastarnia Group are relayed to the environmental and fisheries organizations in their respective countries. – Priority: Medium
- 41) Parties are strongly encouraged to fulfil their obligations under the current Regulation 812/2004 and the Habitats Directive. – Priority: High
- 42) Parties should convey positions agreed within ASCOBANS, such as those available at http://www.ASCOBANS.org/sites/default/files/basic_page_documents/ASCOBANS_Recommendations_EUBycatchLegislation_Final.pdf to the appropriate fora at the European level. – Priority: High

- 43) Parties are urged to provide all relevant data to the HELCOM harbour porpoise database. – Priority: Medium
- 44) Parties should designate contact persons dealing with the Baltic Harbour Porpoise Database operated by HELCOM. The Secretariat should remind Parties that have not yet done so (Lithuania, Poland and Sweden) to provide the details of these contact persons to the Secretariats of ASCOBANS and HELCOM. – Priority: High
- 45) The Secretariat should collaborate with HELCOM SEAL to obtain data on harbour porpoise strandings in the Russian territories of the Baltic Sea. – Priority: Medium
- 46) The Jastarnia Group acknowledges the progress regarding the cooperation between the Jastarnia Group and relevant meetings of HELCOM. The Jastarnia Group promotes further cooperation with HELCOM SEAL and will strive to cooperate with the HELCOM Fish Group. Further, HELCOM should continue to be invited to take part in the Jastarnia Group meetings. – Priority: High
- 47) The Jastarnia Group should step up cooperation with the Baltic Advisory Committee. – Priority: High
- 48) The Secretariat and Parties should continually contact fisheries organizations to make them aware of the importance of recovering bycaught animals. – Priority: High

Cross-Cutting Issues

Agenda Item 5.1

- 49) In light of the positive experience with the North Sea Coordinator, the Jastarnia Group recommends that the Parties ensure that a Baltic Sea Coordinator, or a joint coordinator for both regions, possibly attached to the Secretariat, be appointed. – Priority: High

Agenda Item 5.2

- 50) Coordinating Authorities of the countries hosting the Group's meetings are asked to ensure the attendance of an expert on the CFP at the respective meetings of the Group. The Secretariat should recall this recommendation to the Coordinating Authority of the host country in good time before the meeting. – Priority: High

Agenda Item 5.3

- 51) Parties should consider supporting any projects relevant for achieving the aims of the Jastarnia Plan. – Priority: High
- 52) Parties and NGOs are requested to ensure that the results of all relevant projects are made available to ASCOBANS. – Priority: High
- 53) Parties are encouraged to use SAMBAH results for harbour porpoise conservation in the Baltic Sea. – Priority: High
- 54) In view of the SAMBAH results and the requirement for regular reviews and updates of both the Jastarnia Plan and the WBBK Plan, a timely revision of the WBBK Plan is required. Parties are urged to provide the necessary funding. – Priority: High

Agenda Item 8

- 55) Parties are encouraged to take turns hosting the meetings of the Jastarnia Group and to ensure that the necessary funding for this purpose is made available. The Secretariat should prepare a general overview of related costs to be expected. – Priority: High

Western Baltic, Belt Seas and Kattegat Plan

Involvement of Stakeholders

- 56) The Secretariat, making use of a simple questionnaire, should request Parties to provide an overview of measures currently ongoing in their countries actively to engage fishing communities and other stakeholders in the implementation of the Plan, in order to identify existing gaps and lessons learnt of interest to all Parties. – Priority: Medium
- 57) Noting the successful Natura 2000 dialogue forums conducted in Denmark, Parties are encouraged to consider establishing a similar format for the stakeholder working group required under Objective a. of the Plan. – Priority: High

Mitigation of Bycatch

Agenda Item 6.2.1

- 58) The Secretariat will enquire with Parties regarding steps taken to develop their joint recommendations to the European Commission regarding the management of harbour porpoise SACs to minimize bycatch rates within these areas. – Priority: High
- 59) The Secretariat should relay the Jastarnia Group's request for advice as to whether the revised MSC assessment standards meet ASCOBANS' requirements to the Bycatch Working Group. – Priority: High
- 60) ASCOBANS should seek to influence existing eco-labelling programmes to take full account of the need to avoid cetacean bycatch in certifying fisheries. In the case of MSC, the Secretariat is requested to liaise directly with the organization in order to determine the appropriate means of influencing their eco-labelling programmes. – Priority: Medium
- 61) The Secretariat should invite an MSC representative to the next Jastarnia Group meeting. – Priority: High

Agenda Item 6.2.2

- 62) Parties are strongly encouraged to take all necessary steps to achieve as soon as possible agreement to implement immediately the use of pingers in gillnet fishery associated with bycatch irrespective of vessel size or type, as provided for in the Plan, and to enforce the use of pingers. – Priority: High

Agenda Item 6.2.3

- 63) Parties should continue to provide funding for research on alternative fishing gear and practices as needed. – Priority: High

Assessment of Bycatch Level

Agenda Item 6.3.1

- 64) Parties are encouraged to undertake or promote research regarding bycatch estimation. – Priority: High

Population Status

Agenda Item 6.4.1

- 65) Parties are strongly encouraged to continue to undertake and cooperate on inter-SCANS surveys of the Western Baltic (gap area) harbour porpoise population and evaluate trends in population density and abundance. – Priority: High

Agenda Item 6.4.2

- 66) Parties are strongly encouraged to coordinate and standardize their monitoring efforts and determine the number of stranded or bycaught animals to be collected for necropsies in the Western Baltic, the Belt Sea and the Kattegat by means of the coordination group established in 2016. – Priority: High
- 67) The Secretariat will contact the members of the necropsy coordination group to discuss their mode of operation and the facilitation of the group. – Priority: High
- 68) The animals collected should be necropsied and examined with regard to health status, contaminant load and causes of mortality. The resultant data should be fed into a common database, such as the future database required under MOP Resolution 7.4. – Priority: High

Habitat Quality

Agenda Item 6.5.1

- 69) Parties should continue to provide funding for research on non-detrimental use of acoustic devices and possible habitat exclusion through pingers. – Priority: High

Agenda Item 6.5.2

- 70) Parties should promote research on the consequences of impacts on prey communities for harbour porpoises. – Priority: Medium

Agenda Item 6.5.3

- 71) The Secretariat should ask Jacob Nabe-Nielsen of Aarhus University, the leader of the project “Disturbance Effects on the Harbour Porpoise Population in the North Sea” (DEPONS), to attend the next meeting of the Jastarnia Group as an invited expert. – Priority: High
- 72) Parties should ensure baseline studies and continual monitoring with regard to potential effects of activities with an impact on harbour porpoise behaviour and distribution. Research is also required on the context in which porpoises are using the habitats. – Priority: High