

REPORT OF THE 14TH MEETING OF THE ASCOBANS JASTARNIA GROUP

Copenhagen, Denmark

12-14 March 2018



**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 of the Jastarnia Group, Ida Carlén of Coalition Clean Baltic (CCB) opened the meeting by thanking the Danish Environmental Protection Agency for providing the venue and catering, and the University of Aarhus for organizing the logistics and for sponsoring a reception. She noted that all Parties were present, including Lithuania after some years of absence. She also welcomed a representative of HELCOM and the new coordinator for the Harbour Porpoise conservation plans, Tiu Similä (Sea Watch Foundation).

Melanie Virtue (CMS) added her thanks to the hosts and said that she did not usually come to Jastarnia Group meetings, but given the impending changes of personnel in the Secretariat, it had been decided that she should attend on this occasion. She noted with gratitude that Lithuania would be hosting the 24th meeting of the Advisory Committee (AC) in Vilnius later in the year (25-27 September 2018). She explained that plans to find a temporary replacement for Aline Kühl-Stenzel as ASCOBANS Coordinator had been abandoned and that Ms. Kühl-Stenzel's contract would be extended until a permanent successor was found.

Signe Sveegaard (Denmark) welcomed participants to Copenhagen, explained some of the administrative arrangements for the meeting and extended an invitation to all to attend a reception on the evening of the second day.

Ms. Kühl-Stenzel (ASCOBANS Coordinator) noted that this was the first time in ten years that all Parties had been represented at a meeting of the Jastarnia Group and welcomed Ms. Carlén, the sole representative of an NGO present, who would be chairing the Group for the first time.

For years, the Jastarnia Group had wanted a coordinator for the Action Plans on harbour porpoises, and now Ms. Similä had been appointed on a one-year contract. Parties had all agreed that the post should be longer-term and all were therefore expected to contribute to paying for it. Ms. Similä, who had only been appointed in February, would also be attending the AC24 in Vilnius where she would present a full progress report on implementation of the three harbour porpoise Action Plans for Parties to review and a full update on her activities.

Under agenda item 2.2 Parties would give brief updates on their activities and the status of implementation under the Recovery Plan for Baltic Harbour Porpoises (Jastarnia Plan) and the Conservation Plan for the Harbour Porpoise Population in the Western Baltic, the Belt Sea and the Kattegat (WBBK Plan). With the new reporting system following Resolution 8.1 in place, the Jastarnia meetings would place emphasis on those issues covered in 2018, especially bycatch. Because Ms. Similä would tackle progress reporting in great depth later in the year much less meeting time would address reporting, instead it was hoped that more time could be dedicated to planning future activities, focusing on priority actions and cooperating with other actors such as the EU and HELCOM.

The Chair also conveyed the good wishes of her predecessor, Rüdiger Stempel.

1.2 Adoption of the Agenda

The Chair proposed that the agenda be adopted. There was no opposition to this and the agenda was adopted as presented.

The Chair conducted a *tour de table*, allowing all participants to introduce themselves. A full list of participants appears as Annex 1 to this report.

2. Progress under the Jastarnia Plan and the Western Baltic, Belt Sea and Kattegat Plan

2.1 Overview report on progress under the Jastarnia Plan (JP2016) and the Western Baltic, Belt Sea and Kattegat Plan (WBBKP 2012)

The Chair had looked at the Terms of Reference for the Jastarnia Group and had ascertained the need to add a reference to the WBBK Plan at AC24.

The Chair said that, as Ms. Similä had only started her job as Plan Coordinator in February, she had not had a chance to receive progress reports from Parties. The Jastarnia Group could look to the North Sea Group (NSG) to see how it had operated with the help of a Coordinator in the past and adapt procedures as appropriate.

Geneviève Desportes, the previous North Sea Plan Coordinator from 2011-2015, had developed a spreadsheet, which the NSG Chair, Peter Evans, had taken over and updated.

The Jastarnia and WBBK Plans both had considerably more Action Points than the North Sea one, but Ms. Desportes had also presented detailed reports to the AC (e.g. in [2014](#)).

Ms. Similä commented that some of the entries on the North Sea Plan spreadsheet seemed to be quite subjective and vaguely phrased, while other actions were indicated to have not made any progress.

Ms. Kühl-Stenzel asked, as most present had experience of managing Single-Species Action Plans, what formats worked most effectively in their experience. She noted that reporting and reviewing progress was of critical importance for ASCOBANS, not least since the agreement did not have sanctions or other enforcement mechanisms. For the stakeholders and the general public to see which countries were performing well for specific mandates and which performed poorly was vital to push for improved implementation.

Ms. Sveegaard asked whether the Jastarnia Group considered acoustic deterrent devices (“pingers”) to be permanent nor temporary solution.

The Chair also asked what level of reporting was required, given that the Jastarnia Plan was quite detailed.

Sara Königson (Sweden) suggested mirroring the national reports under ASCOBANS so as to avoid duplication. Ms. Kühl-Stenzel said that the requirements differed as the ASCOBANS National Reports were less detailed and covered all species listed under the Agreement, whereas the Jastarnia Plan dealt only with Harbour Porpoises. Under the new cyclical reporting arrangements (see Resolution 8.1), many subjects would not be covered in any given year. Ms. Königson agreed, but stressed that Parties should not be expected to report on the same activities in two different ways.

Ms. Kühl-Stenzel said that the United Kingdom had just circulated a draft national reporting template for comments and Ms. Similä would report to the next AC and would have access to the

national reports so would not have to seek information direct from Parties again. Every effort was being made to avoid duplication of reporting, both within and beyond ASCOBANS.

2.2 National progress reports on activities since June 2017 (15 min each)

Denmark

Finn Larsen (Denmark) made a [presentation](#) detailing recent research undertaken by the DTU Aqua relevant to the Jastarnia and WBBK Plans.

With regard to improving electronic monitoring, Denmark had switched from Canadian to Danish equipment as it was easier to influence developments. Bycatch data were being collected from nine vessels, and the amount of bycatch in the fleet was being extrapolated. With regard to mitigation, acoustic deterrent devices (“pingers”) were being developed and tested, and trials would be conducted using lights and setting nets lower. The development of acoustically reflective gillnets with the Thünen Institute had so far failed to identify a suitable material.

Denmark was collaborating with Sweden on alternative gear such as cod pots, and was also working on push-up traps and Danish seine nets.

Ms Sveegaard (Denmark) said in her [presentation](#) that monitoring Baltic Harbour Porpoises was to be undertaken under the Marine Framework Strategy Directive (MFSD) between June 2018 and June 2019, using ten SAMBAH C-POD stations in the Baltic Proper, in addition to stations within the Belt Sea. Using all sites used under the [SAMBAH project](#) would be too expensive.

The first monitoring period in the Belt Sea had been completed and a small-scale Inter-SCANS survey had been conducted with the participation of Denmark, Germany and Sweden. From this it appeared that the WBBK population was stable.

The monitoring period for the next surveys ran from 2017 to 2020 and would be conducted from the air as chartering ships was too expensive.

Denmark (as well as Sweden and Germany) was working with HELCOM on an indicator for Harbour Porpoise abundance, and research was being undertaken using satellite tracking to investigate anthropogenic effects (e.g. noise from shipping and wind farms).

The spatial distribution modelling for the Belt Sea population was being updated using new data.

Germany

Patricia Brtnik and Michael Dähne (both Germany) reported in their [presentation](#) that a voluntary agreement had been in place with fishermen since 2013 in Schleswig-Holstein, resulting in a reduced length of gillnets deployed in the months of July and August. In total, almost 1,700 alternative porpoise deterrent devices, so called Porpoise Alerting Devices (PALs), were being used and handed out to fishermen through the Baltic Information Centre (OIC) in Eckernförde. PALs worked by replicating the sounds made by Harbour Porpoises rather than trying to frighten the animals away. Trials by the Thünen Institute had indicated that a 70% reduction in bycatch was possible using PALs.

Ms. Brtnik also mentioned the “Stella” project, investigating alternative management approaches and the use of alternative fishing gear in Germany’s EEZ in the Baltic Sea. The project had a number of strands: building data, modifying gillnets, investigating the feasibility of alternative gear, creating incentives for data collection, synthesizing the results and promoting social responsibility.

A project on strandings was being conducted by the Institute for Terrestrial and Aquatic Wildlife Research/ Institut für Terrestrische und Aquatische Wildtierforschung (ITAW) in Büsum and the Stralsund Museum in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania.

In 2017 there had been over 1,000 sightings of Harbour Porpoises reported.

Projects were also being carried out on population abundance and distribution, using aerial and C-POD surveys.

Regarding research into the effects of noise, Germany hoped to be able to present some results later in the year, possibly at the AC.

Recent publications covered topics such as the effects of vessel noise on foraging; bubble curtains; auditory frequency weighting; regulating underwater noise; marine debris; and dietary composition.

Finland

Olli Loisa (Finland) said in his [presentation](#) that it had been mandatory to report e.g. harbour porpoise bycatch since 2016 but no incidents had been recorded. Acoustic monitoring was being undertaken, using SAMBAH methodology in the Northern Baltic and the Åland and Archipelago Sea. Preliminary results of the project, funded by the Finnish Ministry of the Environment and Åland Government, showed similar, regular occurrence of low numbers of Harbour Porpoises.

Opportunistic sightings were being reported and three sightings involving five animals had been validated in 2016. The sighting database had records of 65 sightings involving 115 animals, since 2000 when the sighting campaign started.

Finland was involved in the work on the HELCOM abundance and distribution indicators.

The Harbour Porpoise was on the national Red List and had been categorized as regionally extinct in the most recent assessment (2010).

Two stations used in the BIAS project were being used to monitor underwater noise.

Lithuania

Ignas Kazlauskas (Lithuania) said that there had been no live sightings but four animals had stranded, all in a high state of decomposition. The last reported incident of bycatch occurred in 1982. In Lithuania, all bycatch (of seals, birds and Harbour Porpoises) had to be entered in ships' log books. Local authorities had responsibility for removing carcasses from public beaches in the interest of health. Capacity to undertake necropsies would be increased.

An education project including a video had been conducted and only one participant had been able to identify a Harbour Porpoise. Harbour Porpoises were on the national Red List but did not appear on the national fauna list.

A more comprehensive written report would be sent to the Secretariat (see [presentation](#) sent post-session).

Poland

In her [presentation](#) Iwona Pawliczka (Poland) described a pilot project on marine species covering two areas, one in the west and one in the central area related to the Habitats Directive and the MFSD.

The "Blue Patrol" of volunteers looked for stranded animals and eleven carcasses had been recovered. Occasional reports from volunteers were received concerning Harbour Porpoises in Polish waters and Puck Bay was one "hot spot".

Static acoustic research was investigating Harbour Porpoise occurrence in Poland. Twenty-five C-PODs had been deployed in November 2017 resulting in a number of detections. Other activities set out to measure fisheries effort. Data would be analyzed for the number of vessels

and for the amount of gear used. The number of vessels registered had varied between 95 and the current 112, having peaked at 145.

Education and outreach activities were being continued.

Katarzyna Kaminska (Poland) showed a video about the project “Clean Baltic” aiming at removal of ghost nets from the Baltic with involvement of Polish coastal fishermen. Those engaged in removing nets were paid for the time spent rather than for the number of nets retrieved. The video could be made available to others (see ASCOBANS facebook page).

Sweden

Ms. Königson (Sweden) gave a [presentation](#) describing advances on mitigating methods including the development of cod pots (with DTU Aqua and the Thünen Institute). Three fishers were now using cod pots in the Baltic. The equipment was loaned to the fishers, who had to commit to their use for a defined period.

Twenty fishers were also volunteering for a “pinger” programme and the SLU (Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences) was devising new research projects.

REM (remote electronic monitoring) was being conducted with one fisher but the project lacked funding for expansion.

A third model “pinger” designed to be not audible for seals had now been developed. Difficulties had been encountered concerning audibility.

Investigations of Harbour Porpoise behaviour in areas where commercial fisheries used “pingers” showed that the animals were deterred but did return quickly when the “pingers” had been switched off.

Julia Carlström (Sweden) said in her [presentation](#) that there had been some opportunistic sightings of live and dead specimens, and twenty dead animals had been necropsied in 2017. Donated samples from 660 individuals had been collected since the 1990s.

Acoustic monitoring was being conducted on 11 stations, ten from SAMBAH and one from BIAS. The Blekinge County Board was also doing some survey work.

The Swedish Agency (SwAM) was conducting a project called “Symphony” to develop a spatial planning tool similar to HELCOM’s HOLAS.

Sweden was participating in the HELCOM Indicator Working Group, and collaborating with Sven Koschinski’s work on drowned mammals and seabirds and on Harbour Porpoise distribution.

The Armed Forces were conducting studies on underwater explosions.

Coalition Clean Baltic

The CCB had commissioned a sculptor Wojciech Czuchryta to make a Harbour Porpoise out of ghost nets, which had been shown at the HELCOM Ministerial Meeting on 6 March 2018, and could be made available for some events in the future.

2.3 Open discussion on progress

The Chair recalled that at the 13th meeting the Jastarnia Group had decided that the WBBK Plan did not need to be revised at that time and had suggested that the issue be raised again this year. The most recent version of the plan dated from 2012 and a revision had originally been foreseen after five years.

If the Jastarnia Group were to decide to review the WBBK Plan, Ms. Similä would be available to assist. As considerable amounts of research were being carried out, the status assessment and introductory parts of the Plan were probably out of date. Ms. Sveegaard said that after Mr. Larsen had finished his work on bycatch, the HELCOM and OSPAR indicators were in place and there was a clearer idea of population trends, it would make sense to review the WBBK Plan.

Ms. Königson suggested following the example of the North Sea Group and that a progress report be done first. The Jastarnia Group could then decide whether to conduct a revision based on that report. In the meantime, she suggested reviewing progress regarding the mandates within the Plan.

The Chair said that reviewing progress could be very time-consuming and therefore suggested that the Group might wish to consider the level of detail that it required before the new coordinator tackled the matter for the AC24.

The Chair proposed to proceed with the meeting and to see if anything substantial arose indicating that the WBBK should be revised.

3. Updates from across the Baltic and Belt Seas

3.1 Baltic Sea CBD-EBSAs: outcomes of the Helsinki workshop

Penina Blankett (Finland) gave a [presentation](#) on the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) Ecologically or Biologically Significant Areas (EBSAs) Workshop for the Baltic Sea, held in Helsinki 19-24 February 2018.

In all CBD had held 13 global regional workshops, covering 74 per cent of the oceans (82 per cent excluding the Antarctic Ocean). EBSAs were not Marine Protected Areas and there was no designation or management regime attached to them. EBSAs could be used in marine spatial planning and were chosen on the basis of a series of criteria for which they were rated high, medium, low or unknown. The criteria were: the areas' uniqueness or rarity; their special importance for life history stages of species; their importance for threatened, endangered or declining species or habitats; their vulnerability, fragility, sensitivity or slow recovery; their biological productivity; their biological diversity; and their naturalness.

The Baltic Workshop had been attended by 30 participants from seven countries and included representatives from IGOs and NGOs. The Workshop had been preceded by a day's training session. The national representatives had been nominated by CBD National Focal Points (two representatives per country).

Nine areas had met the EBSA criteria: Bothnia, Kvarken, Åland, the Eastern Gulf of Finland, the Western Estonian Archipelago, the South-East Baltic, the Southern Gotland Harbour Porpoise Area, the Fehmarn Belt and Floden, Stora and Lilla Middelgrund. In total, 23 per cent of the area of the Baltic had been identified with many of the areas belonging to more than one country. An annex to the report highlighted the uniqueness of the Baltic Sea.

The workshop report would be submitted for consideration to the 22nd meeting of the CBD Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA), scheduled for 2–7 July 2018, and subsequently to the 14th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP) to the CBD, scheduled for 10–22 November 2018. Once approved by CBD COP, the Baltic Sea EBSAs were expected to be included in the CBD EBSA repository and a summary report would be transmitted to the United Nations General Assembly and its relevant processes as well as other relevant UN/international organizations.

Poland had not been present at the Workshop, so the question arose whether any Polish areas should be considered. However, this was not possible at the current moment in time. There had been discussions about proposing the entire Baltic as an EBSA, but the Workshop was operating at a regional level so this was not appropriate. The areas described did include Harbour Porpoise habitat and the results from the SAMBAH project had been taken into account.

3.2 New EU Technical Measures (2016/0074(COD)): how will these be implemented in the Baltic?

Ms. Kaminska gave a [presentation](#) on the new EU technical measures, pointing out that the associated Regulation had yet to be adopted. The European Parliament (EP) had passed a resolution on 16 January 2018 and on 23 January a trilogue among the European Commission, EP and the European Council was announced; this would be launched before Easter 2018. Each body had entered the discussion with differing initial positions.

The draft Regulation contained several Articles relevant to ASCOBANS concerning bycatch of sensitive species, the use of drift nets and acoustic deterrent devices. There were provisions concerning the protection of species and habitats and it would not be allowed to keep bycaught specimens on board vessels except for scientific purposes. The EP wanted bycatch to be recorded. Annex VIII related to the Baltic Sea and foresaw the use of “pingers” for vessels of 12 metres or more; this provision was being opposed by the Council.

Future arrangements after the new EU technical measures regulation was in place would involve the Baltic Sea Fisheries Forum (BALTFISH) serving as the principal body for mitigation measures, consultations with the Baltic Sea Advisory Council (BSAC) and with both HELCOM and the Jastarnia Group.

Some of the technical measures would be straightforward for EU Member States to implement, while others would lend themselves to a regional approach.

Ms. Kühl-Stenzel said that the EP had slightly improved the shortcomings of the original proposal, but that the current drafts and options on the table were much worse for the conservation of the marine environment than what Regulation 812/2004 delivered. That being said the position was more favourable for cetaceans than some other taxa. NGOs wanted the whole process to be cancelled and it was clear that the comments provided by ASCOBANS had been largely ignored. A representative from the European Commission invited to the current meeting had sent apologies, but had signalled a willingness to engage. An alternative approach might be for members of the Jastarnia Group dealing with the European Commission to engage bilaterally. The prospect of greater regionalization was welcome.

3.3 Updates on Harbour Porpoise population structure in the Baltic Sea region

Per Palsbøll (University of Groningen) had been selected as invited speaker by the Jastarnia Group this year and gave a presentation concerning genetic evidence for the existence of distinct Harbour Porpoise populations in the North Sea/Baltic Sea region. He explained how he had used restriction-enzyme-based sequencing methods for genotyping thousands of single nucleotide polymorphism (SNP) loci using data from 73 harbour porpoise samples from the Baltic and North Sea. He had reanalysed the data published by Lah et al. (2016)¹ and had arrived at the same conclusion as Lah et al. (2016) using the statistic (termed deltaK) employed by the authors.

¹ Lah L, Trense D, Behnke H *et al.* (2016) Spatially Explicit Analysis of Genome-Wide SNPs Detects Subtle Population Structure in a Mobile Marine Mammal, the Harbor Porpoise (*R. Cimmarruta*, Ed.). *Plos One*, **11**, e0162792.

However, deltaK did not consider the hypothesis of $k=1$ (i.e., no population genetic structure) and hence studies based solely on deltaK would always conclude the presence of population genetic structure even in cases when there was none. In contrast the likelihood-based approach developed by the authors of the approach to estimate k did consider all values of k , including 1. Several studies had recently shown that the likelihood-approach outperformed deltaK, apart from the observation that deltaK ignored $k=1$. The re-analysis of Lah et al's data had revealed strong support for $k=1$ and little support for $k=3$ (the value reported by Lah et al.). On the other hand, the SNP data generated by Palsbøll and colleagues, which was filtered at a more stringent level than Lah et al. (2016), suggested that the most likely value of k was two, irrespective of which statistic was employed. Individuals assigned to both clusters were distributed throughout the Inner Danish waters and the Baltic Sea. The same was the case for the few pairs of closely related individuals detected among the samples, i.e., there was no apparent geographic structure. Palsbøll concluded that neither of the genetic data sets (Palsbøll et al. and Lah et al.) supported the notion of a separate, genetically unique harbour porpoise population in the Baltic proper. The results of these analyses had not yet been published, but publication is intended in due course.

Mr. Larsen asked what conclusions could be drawn from the perspective of managing the populations, while Ms. Sveegaard pointed out that there was evidence of morphological differences (angle of the beak associated with different feeding habits). Participants also questioned how the two studies using essentially the same data could have come to such different conclusions, and Ms. Pawliczka asked about the geographic spread of the sample. It was clarified that Palsbøll's re-analysis of the data of Lah et al. (2016) did not yield different results with regard to cluster assignment when the assignment was forced to a model of $k=3$ proposed by Lah et al.. As outlined above, the most likely estimate of k from the Lah et al. data was 1, and from Palsbøll et al's data 2. Mr. Tiedemann argued that the population structure hypothesis forwarded by Palsbøll (i.e. a single population) is unable to explain the significant differences in genotype frequencies of the genetically unlinked mitochondrial DNA among the genetic clusters identified by Lah et al. (2016). Mr. Palsbøll questioned the inherent logic in arguing for the addition of thousands of genetic markers, only to subsequently validate those results with a single marker (represented by the mitochondrial DNA).

Ralph Tiedemann (Germany) gave a [presentation](#) in which he provided an enlarged SNP data set, encompassing over 4000 SNPs from 146 porpoises from North and Baltic Seas. He stated that SNPs improved population resolution for the Harbour Porpoise in the North Sea, Skagerrak, Kattegat, Belt Sea and Baltic Sea. He said that haplotype HT7 was indicative for the Belt Sea and that the population in the North Sea was more closely related to the one found off Iceland (the North-East Atlantic population) than to the Baltic Sea ones. He applied an additional analytical tool, namely spatial Principal Component Analysis (sPCA) which he utilized for population assignment. This analysis provided evidence for two separate subpopulations in Belt Sea and Inner Baltic Sea, differing also in their genotype frequency at the mitochondrial DNA, in particular regarding the occurrence of the typical Belt Sea HT7. There was however evidence that Belt Sea specimens occasionally migrate into the Baltic proper.

Ms. Sveegaard said that tagging of animals from the Belt Sea indicated some West-to-East movement but none in the other direction.

Mr. Tiedemann said that, in the light of the currently available evidence, he sees sufficient supporting evidence for the existence of different populations, whereas Mr. Palsbøll was more cautious stressing that potential genetic differences did not inform about demographic isolation in lieu of additional analyses, i.e., genetic divergence needed to be "transformed" into the demographic connectivity that would yield the observed putative differences. Sub-sequent demographic modelling in relation to management targets were necessary to determine what levels of demographic connectivity warranted division into separate management units (Palsbøll,

Berube and Allendorf 2007)². Mr. Tiedemann also said that the Baltic population was very small compared with the Belt Sea one, so it might be difficult to find Baltic individuals in the sample.

Ms. Pawliczka asked how important it was to have fresh DNA samples. Mr. Palsbøll said that modern DNA technology provided advanced techniques to allow DNA strands to be extracted from older samples (i.e. hybrid capture). Nonetheless, Mr. Tiedemann emphasized that for population genomics approaches like those adopted here, the fresher the samples the better. Although older samples might yield less genetic information, it is worth collecting them, as they may be directly targeted for population-informative SNP loci.

Ms. Sveegaard asked whether there was an age bias in the sample given that mature animals tended to migrate less. Ms. Pawliczka said that bycaught specimens in Poland tended to be younger animals.

3.4 Overview of HELCOM matters related to Harbour Porpoises

Petra Kääriä (HELCOM) gave a [presentation](#) on recent developments under HELCOM relevant to Harbour Porpoises, based on the 2007 Baltic Sea Action Plan and Ministerial Agreements.

The 2018 HELCOM Ministerial Meeting in Brussels focussing on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) had decided to strengthen the implementation of the Baltic Sea Action Plan by 2021 as a top priority. The Ministers agreed upon [a declaration](#) of which the following actions were of relevance for the conservation of harbour porpoise: developing conservation plans for species at risk of extinction, working towards the full achievement of Aichi Target 11 (management of terrestrial, inland water, coastal and marine habitats), regarding the management, ecological representativeness and connectivity of the Baltic Sea Protected Area network (HELCOM MPAs) and drawing up an Underwater Action Plan by 2021.

HELCOM was aligning its activities to the SDGs notably SDG 14.2 (sustainable management and protection of marine and coastal ecosystems), including e.g. the Red-Listing of species.

The State of the Baltic Sea report was a holistic assessment of the ecosystem health of the Baltic Sea with the 2017 version due to be updated 2018 to take account of data from 2016. The current version was based on information from the period 2011-2015.

A total of 17 biodiversity core indicators had been applied to the sub-basins within the Baltic Sea. Progress in achieving targets varied, with Grey Seal abundance and trends faring well (coded green). As the HELCOM candidate indicator 'Harbour porpoise distribution and abundance' was still under development, harbour porpoises had been included in the report in a descriptive way, utilizing the results from the SAMBAH project (see p. 137-139 from [the report](#)).

The harbour porpoise candidate indicator still needed work on the development of Good Environmental Status definitions, abundance estimates for the two populations, and information on distribution and seasonal changes between sub-basins and populations. Germany was the lead country for this work with Denmark, Finland, Poland and Sweden as co-leads. Ms. Blankett asked what baselines were being used to assess the overall health of environment. For some species, such as seals, trend data were more readily available over longer periods.

Regarding the HELCOM pre-core indicator "Number of drowned mammals and waterbirds", Germany, Poland and Sweden were co-lead countries. The HELCOM Correspondence Group for fisheries data (CG FISHDATA) would produce a road map on fisheries data for

² Palsbøll PJ, Bérubé M, Allendorf FW (2007) Identification of management units using population genetic data. *Trends in Ecology and Evolution*, **22**, 11–16.

operationalizing this and another specific HELCOM indicator related to fisheries, used for the purposes of MSFD implementation for the Contracting Parties which are also EU members.

Poland led on revising HELCOM Recommendation 17/2 on the protection of Harbour Porpoise in the Baltic for discussion at the forthcoming HELCOM State & Conservation Meeting (14-18 May 2018, Klaipeda, Lithuania) and work was focussing on the differences between the Belt and Baltic populations.

As agreed in 2018, HELCOM would address underwater noise through the adoption of an Action Plan scheduled to be in place by 2021. A map showing areas worst affected by noise coincided with the main shipping channels and many crossed important areas for Harbour Porpoises.

The [HELCOM/ASCOBANS harbour porpoise database](#) on the HELCOM website was projected on screen. A list of all the countries that had appointed an NFP was circulated, only Latvia and the Russian Federation were missing.

Ms. Carlström said that there was another site in Sweden where sightings were reported but some records did not mention whether the animal was alive or dead. She confirmed that she was the Swedish NFP for the database.

Ms. Kühl-Stenzel said that the development of the "[Web-accessed Database for Marine Mammal Strandings and Necropsy Data](#)" by the Zoological Society of London as discussed at AC23 was about to start. Unlike the HELCOM/ASCOBANS database this would only focus on dead harbour porpoises and go into detail on necropsies. In the national reporting format this year (covering 2017) Parties were being asked to nominate focal points within their respective countries.

The Harbour Porpoise ecosystem component map in Ms. Kääriä's presentation showed colour-coded areas, with light blue indicating rare occurrences and dark blue indicating common occurrences and breeding (with two intermediate shades). Ms. Königson asked for a definition of regular occurrences. Ms. Sveegaard said that originally there had been a fifth category dividing rare from very rare, but this had been deleted since there would be no different management options. Mr. Dähne said that HELCOM had definitions of regular occurrence for seals but these did not include reproduction. He also asked how the isolated patch of light blue off the Polish coast would be handled.

Ms. Similä asked whether there was any biological reason for the entire Eastern Baltic to be light blue. The Chair and Mr. Loisa confirmed that this was based on SAMBAH data and opportunistic sightings, but Mr. Loisa did not think that all Finnish waters should be shaded light blue.

Ms. Carlström said that the SAMBAH project had not extended to the Gulf of Bothnia where there were occasional sightings. She said that if animals were present in an area, they probably reproduced there and suggested that these categories be deleted. The Chair said that the Jastarnia Group could make such a proposal but the HOLAS II team was responsible for the map.

Ms. Sveegard, Ms. Carlström and the Chair commented on the Harbour Porpoise ecosystem component map, saying that the area of highest importance for the Baltic proper population should be on the same level as the area for the Belt Sea population. Due to the lower population density, the Baltic Proper population never reached a higher "importance score" than 0.75, while basically the entire distribution range of the Belt Sea population was scored as 1.0.

Ms. Sveegaard questioned why the HELCOM Seal Group dealt with Harbour Porpoises and floated the idea that the Jastarnia Group might take over HELCOM's Harbour Porpoise work. The consensus was that the Jastarnia Group should increase cooperation with the HELCOM Seal Group rather than seek to replace it, while avoiding duplication of effort. The HELCOM Seal Group's name had been chosen years before and did not accurately reflect its wider remit. Several members of the Jastarnia Group were involved in the HELCOM Seals Group, which

originally dealt only with seals but now also covered the harbour porpoise. Ms. Sveegaard, however, said that it would not be worthwhile for her to attend a long HELCOM Seal Group meeting for a short session on Harbour Porpoises. The Chair said that there was pressure within HELCOM to promote Harbour Porpoises higher on the agenda.

Ms. Similä noted that the distribution map contained large areas of light blue indicating no or rare occurrences of Harbour Porpoises. She recalled seeing Harbour Porpoises around the Åland Islands and asked why the animals had disappeared from areas where they used to be present.

Ms. Blankett said that Finland had taken part in SAMBAH because it had been part of the historic range and in recognition of the need to promote Harbour Porpoise conservation and public interest in the species.

Ms. Kühl-Stenzel asked how feasible it would be to arrange back-to-back meetings of the Jastarnia Group or AC and the HELCOM Seal Expert Group. The regular timing of the Jastarnia Group in February/March did not fit the HELCOM schedule as the Seal Expert Group met in autumn. Synchronizing with the AC was therefore the better option, although it was questionable whether the AC was the most appropriate body to liaise with the Seal Expert Group. The venue and date of the 2019 HELCOM meeting would only be set later in 2018.

Ms. Kühl-Stenzel then introduced item 6. on the agenda, the review of action points from the 13th Meeting of the Jastarnia Group ([JG14/Inf.2.1/ActionPointsJG13](#)). She explained that where action points were relevant to items on the agenda, such as HELCOM under 3.4, the review of the specific action point would already be tackled to avoid a duplication of debate. Ms. Kühl-Stenzel made some general remarks about the Actions Points arising from meetings of the Jastarnia Group Action Points. It was important that the actions were specific, assigned to clearly defined actors and were time-bound. The Jastarnia Group reviewed the Action Points at each meeting and at the previous meeting, the number of Action Points had been reduced from 72 to just 42, in addition to a further 13 which were internal. Some of the language was quite dense and resembled MOP Resolutions and could therefore be simplified. The priority level of the Action Points should also be reviewed. Ms. Sveegaard expressed a preference for having fewer Action Points – 10 rather than 40 – as a smaller number would be more credible.

Ms. Kühl-Stenzel referred to Action Point 7 on cooperation with HELCOM. She proposed deleting some superfluous wording and making the Action Point more active.

Action Point 10 related to BALTFISH and the proposed EU Technical Measures Regulation, which had been the subject of Ms. Kaminska's [presentation](#).

Action Points 4 and 5 related to the website for strandings and necropsies being funded by the United Kingdom and the Netherlands. Ms. Kühl-Stenzel asked whether Parties had established single national databases dealing with strandings, necropsies and sightings. The consensus view was that sightings of live animals should be handled separately from strandings and necropsies which concerned dead ones. Ms. Carlström thought that bycatch could be added to strandings and necropsies. Ms. Blankett felt that the current wording implied that no action was being taken which was not the case.

Mr. Dähne said that there was no national database in Germany with each of the *Länder* maintaining records. It was inevitable that information kept by Schleswig-Holstein would be duplicated by Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania and *vice versa*. He suggested rewording the Action Point to fit German circumstances and he also warned about problems from “data dumping” from one source to another which often led to confusion.

Ms. Blankett said that there were two databases, one with and one without necropsies included. Mr. Dähne added that not all bycaught specimens were necropsied.

Ms. Pawliczka said that Poland also did not have a national database.

Databases existed in most countries but they were not always organized nationally as many were run by independent institutions.

The Jastarnia Group agreed to establish a dedicated Steering Group to ensure synergies between the HELCOM/ASCOBANS and the new web-accessed database for marine mammal stranding and necropsy data and to review the relevant Action Points at the 15th Meeting of the Jastarnia Meeting. The Steering Group should be led by Mr. Dähne, with Mr. Kazlauskas, Ms. Brtnik, Ms. Carlström and Ms. Pawliczka also participating. Anders Galatius is invited to join. One of the key tasks of the group is to liaise closely with Rob Deaville of the Zoological Society of London.

HELCOM Recommendation 17/2

Ms. Kaminska gave a [presentation](#) on HELCOM Recommendation 17/2. She reported that the previous meeting of the HELCOM Seal Expert Group had discussed the issue of the status of the western Baltic Harbour Porpoise population (ICES 21-23), which had been reported as being in a better state. Poland had been given the task of updating the recommendation, and Ms. Kaminska and Ms. Pawliczka together with the Ministry had devised revised wording, which was distributed to the meeting for consideration.

Ms. Blankett pointed out that the HELCOM Recommendation dealt with both Baltic and Belt Sea populations and Ms. Sveegaard suggested distinguishing clearly between the two. Mr. Larsen agreed as the two populations had different threat statuses.

The Chair speaking as the representative of CCB said that she would prefer to see references to establishing management plans as well as to the designation of MPAs.

3.5 Adoption of the CMS Family Guidelines on Environmental Impact Assessments for Marine Noise-generating Activities at CMS COP12

Ms. Virtue made a [presentation](#) describing the guidelines on Environmental Impact Assessments (EIA) adopted at the CMS COP12 in 2017.

Parties to CMS had passed resolutions at both COP9 and COP10 on underwater noise, and CMS, ASCOBANS and ACCOBAMS all had resolutions calling for effective EIAs. At COP12, CMS Parties had adopted [Resolution 12.14](#) (*Adverse Impacts of Anthropogenic Noise on Cetaceans and Other Migratory Species*) consolidating into a single text all previous provisions deemed to be still valid with the addition of guidelines for EIAs.

The guidelines had been developed with funding from the Government of Monaco. Parties to ASCOBANS and ACCOBAMS had also been invited to adopt them, and the previous ASCOBANS MOP had deferred a decision as some Parties wished to conduct further consultation.

The guidelines had been produced in a modular format, with species-specific and technical information presented in a separate document.

Action Points Related to Noise

Action Point 30 – Ms. Kühl-Stenzel proposed a minor amendment on baseline studies. The original text was retained as noise studies were needed before EIAs could be conducted.

The BIAS project covered frequencies not relevant to Harbour Porpoises, to which the Action Points under the Jastarnia Plan action had to relate.

Action Point 31 concerning investigating possible detrimental effects of sound and disturbance had led to a long discussion at the AC. Large quantities of information were emanating from the

Joint ACCOBAMS/ASCOBANS/CMS Working Group indicating that there were detrimental effects of noise on Harbour Porpoises. There was little reference to baseline data.

Action Point 32 on regulations for off-shore construction was retained. Germany had adopted a threshold in its national regulations.

4. SAMBAH II – What are the recommendations from the Jastarnia Group concerning a follow-up project on static acoustic monitoring of harbour porpoises in the Baltic?

The Chair gave a [presentation](#) and sought the views of the Jastarnia Group on what the aims of SAMBAH II should be.

4.1 Presentation of draft project aims

The principal aims of the project were likely to be to investigate abundance, distribution, best practice and dissemination of information.

SAMBAH I had not covered waters of depths greater than 80 metres, the detection function had proved difficult leading to a large confidence interval. There had also been some budgeting problems, no Russian involvement and Germany had not been a formal project partner.

The abundance estimate from SAMBAH I was 497 animals (80-1091). Maps had been produced showing distribution and detections and the deployment of C-POD sets. Ms. Sveegaard agreed that the estimate of approximately 500 animals was probably correct; other estimates suggesting between 10,000 to 20,000 seemed to be excessively high and it was unlikely that 9,500 animals were migrating into the Baltic proper.

SAMBAH I had just been nominated as one of the best LIFE projects.

4.2 Discussion on key SAMBAH-II issues

It was suggested that regarding abundance and distribution SAMBAH II should look at deeper waters although it was acknowledged that this would have financial implications. Stations set in deeper water often detected fewer animals, as Harbour Porpoises tended to swim near the surface. Mr. Dähne suggested using drifting stations fitted with GPS.

The Chair suggested that the Jastarnia Group should recommend that the project team, which had yet to be established, should look at all possible methodologies.

Ms. Kühl-Stenzel said that ASCOBANS currently had no funds to support third party projects, as available resources had been used to fund the coordination of harbour porpoise Action Plans. There had consequently been no recent call for projects. If Parties made voluntary contributions, there could of course be a call for small grants projects.

The Chair stressed the need to extend SAMBAH II to cover Russian waters, which might require an additional €300,000. According to Mr. Dähne, the German Baltic Foundation, which had been suggested as a possible source of grant money, did not fund marine projects.

Ms. Carlström asked whether the extension to Russian Waters would be confined to the Kaliningrad enclave or also the east of the Gulf of Finland. She also asked about the possibility of extending further north into the Gulf of Bothnia. Mr. Loisa said that not many Harbour Porpoises had been detected in Gulf of Finland and very few of those were in Russian waters.

Ms. Sveegaard proposed adding a national and sub-regional focus to the project.

Ms. Carlström suggested asking a statistician to advise on using grids or basing surveys on the findings of SAMBAH so that greatest effort could be concentrated in high density areas. The

stations deployed for national surveys could be complemented by deploying more in high density areas.

Mr. Dähne recalled that MAMBO had not been supported by the European Commission because of the lack of national authority involvement. The requirements of the LIFE Programme had to be closely followed. The Chair said that the Swedish Agency for Marine and Water Management (SwAM) had already confirmed its willingness to participate.

Ms. Carlström said that the SCANS III bid had also been unsuccessful as it considered to be a standard monitoring project.

Ms. Similä said that the tendency of fishers not to report bycatch was indicative of a lack of trust. It would therefore be advisable to include in the project an element of engagement with stakeholders.

Ms. Blankett suggested adding underwater noise.

Mr. Dähne suggested adding fishing effort. Some cod fisheries had to use an app which had been developed by the Thünen Institute to record the location and depth at which nets were set.

Ms. Pawliczka recalled that aerial surveys had been carried out in Sweden using planes rather than drones.

The Chair suggested adding an Action Point from the meeting setting out recommendations for priorities for SAMBAH II. For the project to succeed, SAMBAH II would have to have support from the national authorities of the countries involved and therefore NFPs should be appointed. **Parties were requested to provide the name of their NFP to the Secretariat by the end of April.** SAMBAH I had also operated through national teams. Some funds would be required to prepare the project proposal for submission in 2019.

It was pointed out that the bidding round for LIFE opened in April and closed in September. The Chair recalled that the process of developing SAMBAH I from inception to the start of implementation had taken three years.

5. Priority issues under the Jastarnia and WBBK Plans

Action Point 2 concerned the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) and Ms. Kühl-Stenzel drew attention to use of PALs under the voluntary agreement and the associated porpoise-friendly badge used by fishermen when selling fish in Eckernförde, Flensburg and elsewhere on the German coast. It remained to be seen whether monitoring of the scheme confirmed its effectiveness.

Peter Evans, Chair of the NSG and Ms. Kühl-Stenzel had approached the MSC, which had agreed to attend the next AC. The issue of porpoise-friendly certification extended beyond the area of the Jastarnia Group and affecting all seas covered by the Agreement. Ms. Brtnik, however, thought that the composition of the Jastarnia Group might be more suitable for discussions with the MSC to ensure that conservation considerations were fully appreciated by the MSC. Ms. Kühl-Stenzel suggested that a one-day training session on the MSC training could be arranged.

Ms. Sveegaard asked that the role of the Jastarnia Group and of the NSG be defined as well as the aims of the discussions with the MSC and how it was intended to influence MSC policy.

Mr. Dähne sought clarification of what the MSC porpoise-friendly label meant in practical terms. Ms. Sveegaard asked which other bodies ran dolphin-friendly schemes and how they were tested to check their legitimacy. Mr. Kazlauskas said that several such schemes existed and some were better than others; there was no uniform system.

The Chair said that discussions with the MSC should not be confined to dolphin-friendly labelling schemes but should cover a range of areas of possible collaboration. Ms. Kühl-Stenzel said that the MSC was quite complex and it was not clear how ASCOBANS could engage with it. The MSC had requested more data regarding cetacean bycatch to support individual fishery assessments.

Ms. Sveegaard commented that the MSC brand differed in each country. The MSC had also asked for REM data, but these were not always available.

Mr. Larsen sought clarification of what the Jastarnia Group was hoping to achieve through contacting the MSC, which already used bycatch as a criterion in making its assessments. As the MSC worked on a national level, it might not be appropriate for ASCOBANS as an international body to engage.

Ms. Pawliczka thought that it was appropriate to promote the policies and objectives of ASCOBANS. In Poland, the MSC had received information from the national authorities, but had not taken it into account, as the label had been issued despite bycatch. The MSC should invite ASCOBANS or the Jastarnia Group to its forums so that the bycatch issue and the threat to the Baltic Harbour Porpoise could be explained. The Hel Marine Station had used a label for educational purposes and the public seemed disappointed that the scheme lacked official backing.

Ms. Kühl-Stenzel suggested that Ms. Similä be asked to prepare an information pack about ASCOBANS to be sent to the MSC.

Mr. Larsen said that the MSC had contracted a company to undertake the assessment in Denmark and the company had contacted him to ask about bycatch. It was possible that the company's scoring system had not weighted harbour porpoise bycatch highly enough.

Ms. Kühl-Stenzel said that cetacean bycatch was a subject for National Reports this year and it might therefore be advantageous to engage the MSC and invite a representative from that organization to the AC. She recalled Action Point 6 from AC23 stating "Invite a representative of the Marine Stewardship Council to present at AC24 on how ASCOBANS stakeholders could strengthen their engagement with the MSC." and awaiting the outcome of the AC and including this issue on the agenda of the next meeting of the Jastarnia Group.

Action Point 3 concerned emulating the successful Natura 2000 dialogue forums held in Denmark. Ms. Kühl-Stenzel said that this raised the wider issue of communication and suggested that a round robin letter be sent from the Chair to stakeholders after each meeting of the Jastarnia Group to tackle these kind of update and communication matters.

Ms. Königson said that the Jastarnia Plan itself contained a suitable mandate and that a separate Action Point was not necessary.

Action Point 11 concerned the workshop on REMs which had taken place and the next step was to disseminate the results. Ms. Königson suggested referring the issue to the AC.

Action Point 12 was a general request for research into bycatch. This was considered superfluous and the Action Point was deleted.

Action Point 13 related to the appropriate percentage of fishing fleets that should be monitored to obtain robust bycatch estimates.

Mr. Tiedemann said it was necessary to have some data and an idea of the parameters and an indication of the desired level of certainty. Mr. Dähne said that the Thünen Institute had done a power analysis, but Mr. Tiedemann questioned whether a power analysis which would detect changes in bycatch rates was what was wanted. Ms. Kühl-Stenzel suggested undertaking a pilot

project and the Chair suggested that Mr. Tiedemann and Ms. Similä set up a steering group and see if there was an area with sufficient data to start on.

Ms. Carlström recalled an information document from MOP8 ([Inf.6.2.1.b](#), *Development of a Rationale for Monitoring Protected Species Bycatch*) prepared by Simon Northridge on how to focus effort.

Mr. Larsen said that it would be necessary to have REM data from a fishery, for which the limiting factors were lack funds and the low number of vessels covered.

Action Point 14 arising from the 12th meeting of the Jastarnia Group concerned developing Guidelines for reducing and monitoring bycatch. It was not clear to whom such Guidelines were to be addressed and the Action Point was therefore deleted.

Action Point 15 related to the Habitats Directive and other EU regulations, and monitoring all vessels regardless of size.

Mr. Kazlauskas asked how realistic it was to have a system to monitor all vessels, while Ms. Brtnik stressed the need to ensure that vessels below the threshold size could be covered. The wording of the Action was adjusted so that all sizes of vessels rather than vessels of all sizes were covered.

Ms. Pawliczka said that the quality of voluntary data collected from fishers was not the same as information gathered by observers.

Mr. Kazlauskas asked who was doing the monitoring and to what extent were data derived from entries in fishers' log books as opposed to data gathered by official observers.

Ms. Königson said that monitoring systems covered a variety of measures and did not necessarily require observers or REMs. She referred to the Fishpie project and the Petsamp Joint Workshop on bycatch of protected species, as well as the ICES Working Group on Bycatch (WGBYC). She agreed to report back to the AC on developments.

Action Point 16 concerned spatio-temporal risk assessment which had been carried out by Denmark in the Skagerrak.

Ms. Brtnik said that Germany had not yet carried out such an assessment but should be ready to do so by 2019.

Mr. Kazlauskas said that as all fishers in Lithuania had to have a log book, it would be feasible for the country to do such an assessment.

Action Point 17 on pots, traps and other porpoise-friendly gear was amended with the deletion of the wording "even where the intention is not primarily the conservation of marine mammals".

Ms. Königson said that alternative fishing gear was important in SACs in the WBBK area and Ms. Sveegaard added that this was preferable to "pingers".

Action Point 19 calling for funding for research was deleted as it seemed anomalous for one activity to be singled out.

Action Point 20 concerned bycatch in sensitive areas under the Habitats Directive and was retained with the deletion of the words "current and future" qualifying Natura 2000 sites (SACs).

Ms. Pawliczka pointed out that: Harbour Porpoises occurred in SACs even where they were not one of the designation criteria.

Ms. Blankett suggested adding a reference to MPAs as well as SACs. She also sought clarification of the meaning of "habitat" in this context as the Baltic was not general considered to be a "habitat".

Revised wording was projected on screen and Mr. Kazlauskas questioned specific reference to gillnets, while Ms. Sveegaard suggested adding deployment of “pingers” to development of alternative gear. The Chair pointed out that different wordings applied to the Jastarnia and WBBK Plans, and the revised text was to apply to the Jastarnia Plan only.

Action Point 21 related to limiting part-time set-net fisheries. Ms. Kaminska explained the need for fisheries data to operationalize the HELCOM indicators that would be used by ASCOBANS Parties to meet their obligations as EU Member States under the MSFD, for which HELCOM was the regional implementation body. The first indicator concerned drowned mammals and birds in fishing gears. The Harbour Porpoise had been designated a priority species. The full list of species was extensive and monitoring all of them would be too expensive. The prioritization had been done on the basis of expert opinion.

A timeline had been established for the process involving meetings of the HELCOM State & Conservation Group, HELCOM Fish and the HELCOM Heads of Delegation as well as the EU correspondence group on fish data.

More work was needed, and it was not clear what funding would be available for monitoring bycaught species, so support for efforts to secure more resources would be appreciated. Ms. Kaminska agreed to report on further progress to the AC.

Definition of Fisheries

Ms. Kaminska gave a [presentation](#) highlighting the differences and similarities of various types of fisheries (see [excel file](#)). The presentation focussed on impacts of fisheries and the regulations affecting fisheries, and fisheries were categorized as professional, part time or recreational.

Ms. Königson said that she had filled in the form for Sweden, and had found the format easy to use, but it should be sent to colleagues working on fisheries. She asked though to what use the information would be put. At the ICES WGBYC fisheries would be examined to compare the different levels of fishing effort.

Ms. Kühl-Stenzel suggested a deadline for response of April 2018 and was prompted to issue a reminder to Parties that the Jastarnia Group should include representatives from fisheries departments and several countries had not nominated such a representative.

The Chair, speaking for CCB, made reference to a [report on recreational fisheries](#) around the Baltic, which included the number of fishers operating, the amount of fish taken and the regulatory framework. The report also covered the Russian Federation.

Mr. Larsen pointed out that there was a relevant Working Group under ICES.

Action Point 21 concerned investigating the impact of part-time set-net fisheries. Ms. Königson asked whether the Action Point applied to both Plans and Ms. Blankett confirmed that this was also a sensitive matter in Finland, and stressed that part-time fisheries were commercial rather than recreational. Different rules were in force for full time and part-time commercial fishers.

Ms. Sveegaard said that it was difficult to reduce the impact when the extent of the impact was not known.

The issue of part-time and recreational fisheries was pertinent for Germany. After some discussion, Germany proposed to cut the Action Point, which was accepted by the group.

Action Point 22 concerned the possible banning of recreational fisheries or limiting the types of gear used when these posed a threat to Harbour Porpoises. It was known that some countries

(Denmark, Sweden and Finland) allowed recreational fishers to use gillnets but others such as Germany did not.

Mr. Larsen said that the point was that the use of gillnets should be limited regardless of who was setting them. It was difficult to assess use by recreational fishers as they were regulated and monitored less strictly.

The Chair said that there were approximately 10 million people across the Baltic region engaged in some kind of recreational fishing, including angling which accounts for the largest part. Sweden provided an example where gillnets were largely unregulated – there were 1.1 million fishing occasions annually with passive gear, including east and west coasts, as well as lakes.

Ms. Blankett said that efforts were being made to educate the public, as there was a reluctance to impose bans.

Ms. Königson said that this Action Point was meant to spotlight the fact that recreational fisheries had an impact as well as commercial operations. She agreed that it was important to have an idea of how much impact recreational fisheries were having.

Action Point 23 on reducing effort with gear causing bycatch and passing information to ICES was deleted as it was deemed superfluous.

Action Point 28 on assessing the extent of ghost nets, although relevant for the 2019 reporting cycle when pollution was one of the topics, was deleted. Figures from Finland indicated that approximately ten seals were caught per annum in ghost nets,

Action Point 29 on mitigating the effects of and preventing ghost nets was also deleted.

5.1 Bycatch: Where are the priorities for action?

Ms. Sveegaard said that the emphasis on gathering more bycatch data in the Baltic proper was inappropriate as with just 500 Harbour Porpoises left action was needed not more assessments. This message should be added to the letter to be written by the Chair.

5.2 Pingers/PALs: How can we get fishermen to use them across the region?

It was agreed to retain Action Point 18 on “pingers” inaudible to seals and other devices.

Action Point 24 on research into habitat exclusion and habituation was deleted as it was covered by the Jastarnia Plan.

Action Point 25 calling for funding for research was also covered by the Jastarnia Plan and was deleted

Ms. Sveegaard said that Action Point 27 on the use of “pingers” in gillnet fisheries associated with bycatch raised the issue of whether “pingers” were considered a permanent solution or a temporary one pending the invention of something better. Again, the issue was dealt with in the Plans, so the Action Point was deleted.

Action Point 26 on monitoring the use of “pingers”, their application to vessels of all sizes and developing alternative gear was retained and applied to both Plans. The Chair pointed out that for “pingers” to be monitored, they first had to be deployed. There was a general discussion on the use of “pingers”, which were widely deployed in Germany, and whether they should be seen as a temporary or permanent solution.

Ms. Königson felt that the meeting was posing questions, the answers to which were well-known. There was little doubt that “pingers” were effective. Mr. Dähne said that as “pingers” worked, it

was important to ensure that fishers used them. Some fishers were willing to use them voluntarily but others might need financial incentives.

Ms. Sveegaard asked how the use of PALs in Germany was being monitored. She suggested writing to the German authorities recognizing that PALs were being used and stressing the importance of assessing the results. Mr. Dähne suggested writing to Oliver Schall at the Federal Environment Ministry and his counterparts in the Ministries of the Länder. Ms. Brtnik said that they should be encouraged to fund PAL use see letter in Annex 4 sent on 20 April 2018.

5.3 Where are the research, monitoring and knowledge gaps where the Jastarnia Group can add value? How should we assess progress?

5.4 Other priority issues under the Jastarnia and WBBK Plans

Ms. Kühl-Stenzel suggested discussing the niche for the Jastarnia Group and any gaps that it could fill, following on from the debate at the 13th meeting.

Ms. Sveegaard suggested resolving the apparent discrepancies between some genetic studies.

Mr. Tiedemann said that he did not think that there were any discrepancies. The same data had produced very similar results, and with a further 200 samples, he was confident that distinct differences between the Belt Sea and Baltic proper populations would become more obvious. There would also probably be more evidence of individuals from the Belt Sea going temporarily into the Baltic proper. Mr. Palsbøll's results were based on a smaller sample size with less geographic coverage and no samples from German or Polish waters. While Mr. Palsbøll did not see sizable genetic differences between the Belt Sea and the Baltic proper, Mr. Tiedemann advocated continuing research. This should be coupled with the HELCOM maps and further satellite data.

The German Nature Conservation Agency (BfN) was interested in SNP measurements to assign individuals to specific populations. The IWC was also preparing genetics work for presentation to non-specialists.

The Chair said that the Jastarnia Group should continue to follow this discussion and Ms. Sveegaard said that the Jastarnia Group should also recommend that abundance surveys continued to be carried out.

Mr. Dähne suggested having a presentation on the STELLA project and bycatch as a means of securing greater input from the fisheries side.

The Chair sought further nominations and suggestions for invited experts for future meetings.

Ms. Carlström raised the issue of the lack of management plans for sites within the areas covered by the plans and asked if there were any suggestions on how to address this. Ms. Kühl-Stenzel suggested that investigating this could be a suitable task for Ms. Similä. Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) under the Habitats Directive were supposed to have management plans and were subject to legally-binding deadlines.

The Chair said that CCB had a project relating to a large MPA and a conservation plan (as opposed to a management plan). She asked how other countries were dealing with MPAs. A legal expert contracted by CCB was looking into the requirements of EU law regarding management plans.

Ms. Blankett said that Finland had a number of SACs and a different approach was being adopted for the management of each of them.

Mr. Dähne suggested asking all Parties to provide an update on their implementation of SACs.

Responding to Ms. Sveegaard, who had asked about the disappearance of Harbour Porpoises, Ms. Pawliczka said that the reasons why they had disappeared might explain why they were coming back in some cases and not in others. The reduced bycatch figures in the Polish Baltic was more likely to be the result of Polish fishers having stopped reporting incidents. Observer programmes had shed more light on the problem. Ms. Pawliczka went on to say that national authorities were now using SAMBAH as their principal source of information.

Ms. Carlström and Ms. Sveegaard suggested that Parties coordinate national survey work and the Chair proposed an Action Point calling for monitoring activities to be aligned. This matter was later integrated into Action Point 1 (JG14/AP1, see Annex 3).

6. Review of Action Points

Ms. Kühl-Stenzel had already under agenda item 3.4 introduced and started item 6. on the agenda, the review of action points from the 13th Meeting of the Jastarnia Group ([JG14/Inf.2.1/ActionPointsJG13](#)). Those action points that had not been covered during the agenda (see above) were now being discussed and reviewed.

Action Point 1 on the involvement of stakeholders was considered to be rather general and was covered by the text of the Jastarnia Plan. It was therefore deleted.

Action Point 6 on the dissemination of recommendations arising from the plans was considered to be a standard task for the Secretariat. The dissemination of recommendations was to be strengthened by the Chair issuing a letter. A draft would be circulated and members of the Jastarnia Group would be given five days to comment.

Action Point 8 on joint monitoring efforts was retained.

Action Point 21 on part-time set net fisheries had been discussed earlier and a decision on whether to retain it or not had been deferred. Germany now supported its deletion.

Action Point 9 under WBBK related to inter-SCANS surveys and was retained.

Action Point 33 on strandings and necropsies was related to other Action Points concerning databases. Ms. Carlström asked what indicators might be developed that would require changes to the Action Point.

Action Point 34 related to specimens collected for necropsies and recording information in databases. There was a discussion about the development of the database, with the first step being to establish a basic structure which would become more complex over time. Some parameters to be added included health, age, reproductive status, nutritional status and contaminant load. Mr. Dähne suggested making reference to the European Cetacean Society's guidelines on necropsies.

It was suggested that tissue samples should still be taken from badly decomposed specimens that could not be necropsied since methods for e.g. DNA extraction had improved.

Action Point 35 on the establishment of a necropsy coordination group had been implemented.

Action Point 36 on the collection of specimens had now been covered by a previous Action Point and could therefore be deleted.

Action Point 37 on the use SAMBAH for identifying MPAs and associated management plans was retained.

Action Point 38 on conducting research into prey species was retained. Ms. Sveegaard said that one recent study showed that some Harbour Porpoises were eating more smaller fish rather than fewer larger ones. This had implications for energy use when Harbour Porpoises were hunting.

Action Point 39 requested the hosts of Jastarnia Group meetings to ensure the attendance of an expert on the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP). At the present meeting, Ms. Kaminska had been in attendance, who said that her involvement in the CFP was indirect. Ms. Blankett suggested inviting a fisher as an expert speaker. The Action Point was retained.

Action Point 40 concerned the new format for the national report and Ms. Kühl-Stenzel ran through the subjects which would occur in the next stage of the cycle, namely whale watching, recreational sea use, pollution, ship strikes, climate change, physical habitat change, MPAs and education (see [Resolution 8.1](#)).

Action Point 41 requested Parties to take turns in hosting meetings of the Jastarnia Group. Thanks were expressed to Denmark for hosting the present meeting and for organizing the evening reception.

Summarizing the outcome of the review of the Action Points, Ms. Kühl-Stenzel said that the number had been reduced further from 41 to 26 (some of which were applicable to just one of the two plans) and undertook to post the consolidated list on the ASCOBANS website as soon as possible.

7. Any other business

The Chair recalled that earlier in the meeting it had been said that it was not necessary at this stage to review the WBBK Plan. She sought confirmation that nothing had been raised at the meeting that would lead to this view being changed. It was agreed to consider when the WBBK Plan should be revised at the next meeting of the Jastarnia Group.

It was pointed out that the International Day of the Baltic Harbour Porpoise (IDBHP) would take place on 20th May 2018, with events envisaged for the associated week.

The animated film "[Hello Little Whale](#)" was shown and afterwards participants were asked whether it had been useful and whether all countries had received their own language version of it. The film had received tens of thousands of hits and had proved particularly popular in Lithuania and Estonia. Participants were also asked to detail what activities were being planned for IDBHP in 2018. Ms. Blankett confirmed that the film had been posted on the Finnish Ministry's website.

Since the closure of the dolphinarium at Tampere, the level of activities in Finland had declined, but there could be a possibility to arrange some events at the Finnish Museum of Natural History, although perhaps not this year.

Mr. Kazlauskas said that Lithuania had carried out activities for IDBHP for over ten years and would continue to do so.

Ms. Pawliczka said that another animated film had been produced ("Song for the Baltic Harbour Porpoise") by Timbretone and the proceeds had been donated to WWF for its work on Harbour Porpoises. The film was shown to participants and has since been shared on the [ASCOBANS facebook page](#). Events would again be held around the porpoise statue in Gdynia and the House of the Harbour Porpoise at Hel.

Mr. Dähne said that a public awareness event would be held featuring the [Be the Whale](#) app based on the Humpback Whale that had been sighted in the Baltic Sea in 2016 and on the Beluga in the Rhine in 1962.

Ms. Carlström said that some activities would be carried out at the Swedish Museum of Natural History.

Ms. Kääriä said that details of activities would be posted on the HELCOM website.

Ms. Sveegaard said that in Denmark a series of activities including tours would be organized.

8. Date and venue of the 15th Meeting of the Jastarnia Group

The Chair pointed out that pollution would be on the agenda of the next meeting (see [Resolution 8.1](#)), so inviting an appropriate expert would be useful. It was suggested that Rune Dietz might be a suitable candidate.

Ms. Sveegaard referred to a study into PCB poisoning of Orca, and the next phase of the project would examine Harbour Porpoises. Some Orca populations had not produced young for 20 years so were destined to die out.

When asked to what extent Harbour Porpoises showed effects of PCB poisoning, Mr. Dähne said that some specimens had decayed to such an extent that conducting necropsies was difficult. But they did see a surprising amount of females with birth complications.

The Chair presented a table listing recent venues of meetings of the Jastarnia Group and of the AC and invited Parties that had not hosted a meeting recently to volunteer. The meeting agreed that 18-20 March 2019 was the most suitable time for the next meeting. The current format of starting at midday on Day one and concluding by midday of Day three was welcome and should be retained.

Ms. Sveegaard recalled that consideration had been given to aligning meetings of the Jastarnia Group and the NSG in alternate years. The Chair and Ms. Kühl-Stenzel would consult the NSG and would confirm the dates in due course.

9. Close of Meeting

After the customary expression of thanks to all those that had contributed to the organization and successful execution of the Meeting, the Chair declared proceedings closed at 12:04 pm.

10. Participants List

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Annotated Agenda

Time	Agenda Item	Documents
Monday, 12 March		
13.00-15.00	1. Opening of the meeting	
	1.1 Welcoming remarks	
	1.2 Adoption of the agenda	Doc.1.2 (Provisional Agenda)
	2. Progress under the Jastarnia Plan (JP 2016) and the Western Baltic, Belt Sea and Kattegat Plan (WBBKP 2012)	
	2.1 Overview report on progress under the Jastarnia Plan (JP2016) and the Western Baltic, Belt Sea and Kattegat Plan (WBBKP 2012) <i>Presentation by Tiu Similä, Harbour Porpoise Action Plan Coordinator</i>	Inf.2.1 (Action Points JG13) Inf.2.2 (Internal Action Points JG13)
	2.2 National progress reports on activities since June 2017 (15 min each) <i>Presentations (ppt and/or oral) by all country representatives giving an overview of key activities. Country representatives are invited to comment and fill any gaps in the relevant parts of the overview report presented under 2.1.</i>	
	2.3 Open discussion on progress <i>All members are invited to discuss the extent of implementation of the Jastarnia and WBBK Plans and to identify limiting factors.</i>	
Coffee Break (15.00-15.30)		
15.30-18.30	3. Updates from across the Baltic and Belt Seas	
	3.1 Baltic Sea EBSAs: outcomes of the Helsinki workshop <i>Presentation by Penina Blankett, Finland</i>	

Time	Agenda Item	Documents
	3.2 New EU Technical Measures (2016/0074(COD)): how will these be implemented in the Baltic? <i>Presentation by Katarzyna Kaminska, Poland</i>	
	3.3 Updates on harbour porpoise population in the Baltic Sea region <i>Presentation by Per Palsbøll, University of Groningen</i> <i>Presentation by Ralph Tiedemann, Germany</i>	
Tuesday, 13 March		
9.00-10.30	3. Updates from across the Baltic and Belt Seas (continued)	
	3.4 Overview of HELCOM matters related to harbour porpoises <i>Presentation by Petra Kääriä, HELCOM</i>	
	3.5 Adoption of the CMS Family Guidelines on Environmental Impact Assessments for Marine Noise-generating Activities at CMS COP12 <i>Presentation by Secretariat</i>	UNEP/CMS/COP12/Doc.24.2.2 UNEP/CMS/COP12/Inf.11/Rev.1
	4. SAMBAH II – What are the recommendations from the Jastarnia Group concerning a follow-up project on static acoustic monitoring of harbour porpoises in the Baltic?	
	4.1 Presentation of draft project aims	
	4.2 Discussion on key SAMBAH-II issues	
Coffee Break (10.30-11.00)		
11.00-10.30	4.2 Discussion on key SAMBAH-II issues (continued)	

Time	Agenda Item	Documents
Lunch Break (12.00-13.30)		
13.30-15.00	5. Priority issues under the Jastarnia and WBBK Plans	
	5.1 Bycatch: Where are the priorities for action?	
	5.2 Pingers/PALs: How can we get fishermen to use them across the region?	
Short Coffee Break (15.00-15.15)		
15.15-17.00	5.3 Where are the research, monitoring and knowledge gaps where the Jastarnia Group can add value? How should we assess progress?	
	5.4 Other priority issues under the Jastarnia and WBBK Plans	
	6. Review of Action Points	
Dinner at Høst Restaurant, at the invitation of Aarhus University (18.00 – 20.15)		

Wednesday, 14 March		
9.00-10.30	6. Review of Action Points (continued)	
	7. Any Other Business	
Coffee Break (10.30-11.00)		
11.00-12.30	7. Any Other Business (continued)	
	8. Date and venue of the 15th Meeting of the Jastarnia Group	
	9. Close of Meeting	

Action Points

Jastarnia and WBBK Plans

Reference	Action Point (old reference)	Jastarnia Plan		WBBK Plan	
		Applies	Mandate	Applies	Mandate
JG14/AP1	Parties shall establish or further improve local and national monitoring programmes for harbour porpoise occurrence and to further ensure these are aligned in terms of timing and methodology between countries, in order to complement large-scale international monitoring activities. (JG13/AP8)	X	MON-01: Implement and harmonize long-term continual acoustic harbour porpoise monitoring	X	Objective d: Monitoring the status of the population
JG14/AP2	Parties are strongly encouraged to support SAMBAH-II, specifically in terms of fundraising, in order for a project proposal to be submitted in 2019 and for the project to start in 2020. Noting that management authorities are likely to be required to be formal partners for Life+ applications. (JG13/AP9/JP)	X			
JG14/AP3	Parties are strongly encouraged to continue to undertake and cooperate on inter-SCANS surveys of the WBBK harbour porpoise population and evaluate trends in population density and abundance. (JG13/AP9/WBBK)			X	Rec.7: Estimate trends in abundance of harbour porpoises in the Western Baltic, the Belt Sea and the Kattegat
JG14/AP4	Parties are strongly encouraged to use the data provided by SAMBAH, in particular in connection with the establishment of MPAs for harbour porpoises, as well as with regard to management plans and mitigation measures. (JG13/AP37)	X	MIT-06: Expand the network of protected areas for harbour porpoises, improve its connectivity, and develop and implement appropriate management plans including monitoring		

			schemes for these areas		
JG14/AP5	Parties are asked to undertake baseline studies of underwater noise, relevant for harbour porpoises, as a reference point for future EIAs and other assessments. (JG13/AP30)	X	RES-07: Improve knowledge on impact of impulsive and continuous	X	Objective e: Ensuring habitat quality favourable to the conservation of the harbour porpoise
JG14/AP6	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. (JG13/AP31)	X	anthropogenic underwater noise on harbour porpoises, and development of threshold limits of significant disturbance and GES indicators	X	
JG14/AP7	Parties are encouraged to adopt regulations on the reduction of sound emissions associated with construction of offshore wind farms and to set an upper limit for pile driving operations. 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. (JG13/AP32)	X	MIT-05: Implement regionally harmonized national threshold limits and guidelines for regulation of underwater noise	X	
JG14/AP8	Parties should promote research on the consequences of impacts on prey communities for harbour porpoises. (JG13/AP38)			X	Rec.10: Include monitoring and management of important prey species in national harbour porpoise management plans
JG14/AP9	Parties are required to establish a system to monitor bycatch covering all sizes of fishing vessels. The Jastarnia Group would welcome a discussion at AC24, including a presentation on relevant outcomes from WGBYC, WGCATCH and PETSAMP. (JG13/AP15)	X	MON-03: Monitor and estimate harbour porpoise bycatch rates and estimate total annual bycatch	X	Rec.6: Estimate total annual bycatch

JG14/AP10	Parties should consider the recommendations of the October 2015 ASCOBANS Workshop on Remote Electronic Monitoring (REM) and implement this technique for bycatch monitoring as appropriate in the national context. Invite AC24 to revisit the recommendations. (JG13/AP11)	X	RES-03: Improve methods for monitoring and estimation of harbour porpoise bycatch	X	Objective b: Mitigation of bycatch
JG14/AP11	The respective steering group shall assess the uncertainty in bycatch rates and thereafter estimate the required effort for bycatch monitoring and to report back to JG15. (JG13/AP13)	X		X	
JG14/AP12	Parties are strongly encouraged to carry out spatio-temporal risk-assessments of harbour porpoise bycatch using harbour porpoise distribution and fishing effort data. (JG13/AP16)	X	RES-04: Carry out a spatio-temporal risk assessment of harbour porpoise bycatch	X	
JG14/AP13	Parties should undertake or continue efforts to test and implement pots, traps and other porpoise-friendly gear. Parties shall from the beginning engage all relevant stakeholders in mitigating bycatch, including in research and development. (JG13/AP17)	X	RES-05: Further develop and improve fishing gear that is commercially viable with no harbour porpoise bycatch MIT-01: Implement the use of fishing gear that is commercially viable with no harbour porpoise bycatch	X	
JG14/AP14	Parties should promote the development of pingers not audible to seals and alerting devices other than pingers. (JG13/AP18)	X	RES-05: Further develop and improve fishing gear that is commercially viable with no harbour porpoise bycatch	X	
JG14/AP15	Parties should monitor the use of deterrent and alerting devices. (JG13/AP26)	X	MIT-03: Continue or implement the use of acoustic deterrent	X	

			devices (pingers) and acoustic alerting devices proven to be successful when and where deemed appropriate		
JG14/AP16	Parties shall eliminate bycatch by replacing gillnets and introducing alternative gear that is considered less harmful, especially in Natura 2000 sites and other MPAs. (JG13/AP20)	X	MIT-01: Implement the use of fishing gear that is commercially viable with no harbour porpoise bycatch		
JG14/AP17	With respect to recreational fisheries, Parties should work towards banning or limiting the use of those types of gear known to pose a threat to harbour porpoises. (JG13/AP22) .	X	MIT-02: Reduce or eliminate fishing effort with gillnets or other gear known to cause porpoise bycatch in areas with higher harbour porpoise density or occurrence, and/or in areas with higher risk of harbour porpoise bycatch, according to spatio-temporal risk assessments	X	Rec.3: Protect harbour porpoises in their key habitats in minimizing bycatch as far as possible Rec.5: Where possible replace gillnet fisheries known to be associated with high porpoise bycatch with alternative fishing gear known to be less harmful
JG14/AP18	Parties are strongly encouraged to coordinate and standardize their monitoring efforts and determine the appropriate number of stranded or bycaught animals to be collected for necropsies. (JG13/AP33)	X	MON-04: Collect dead specimens and assess health status, contaminant levels, cause of mortality and life-history parameters of harbour porpoises	X	Rec.8: Monitor population health status, contaminant load and causes of mortality
JG14/AP19	The animals collected should be necropsied, tissue sampled and examined with regard to health, contaminant load, life-history parameters and causes of mortality. (JG13/AP34)	X		X	

JG14/AP20	All Parties and range states should establish programmes for recording opportunistic sightings, bycatch, necropsy and strandings for inclusion in a national database, preferably in a coordinated way for all Baltic Sea States, and report annually to the ASCOBANS/HELCOM database. (JG13/AP4)	X	PACB-01: Improve communication and education for increased public awareness and collection of live observations and dead specimens of the Baltic harbour porpoise	X	Objective d: Monitoring the status of the population
JG14/AP21	Parties and range states shall establish standardized interfaces between their national strandings, bycatch and necropsy databases and the new ASCOBANS web-accessed database for marine mammal stranding and necropsy data by 2019. (JG13/AP5)	X	6.5: Monitor and assess population status	X	
JG14/AP22	The Jastarnia Group promotes further cooperation with HELCOM SEAL and will strive to cooperate with the HELCOM Fish Group. The Jastarnia Group should invite HELCOM to its meetings. (JG13/AP7)	X	COOP-02: Strive for close cooperation between ASCOBANS and other international bodies	X	Rec.2: Cooperate with and inform other relevant bodies about the Conservation Plan
JG14/AP23	ASCOBANS should join efforts with HELCOM in seeking to influence Baltfish once the new EU Regulation on the conservation of fishery resources and the protection of marine ecosystems through technical measures is adopted. (JG12/AP10).	X		X	
JG14/AP24	Coordinating Authorities of the countries hosting the Group's meetings are asked to ensure the attendance of an expert on the Common Fisheries Policy (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. (JG13/AP39)	X	Other	X	Other
JG14/AP25	The Jastarnia Group agrees to align the agenda of its future meetings to the updated national reporting structure and cycle (see Resolution 8.1). Those issues which the AC would focus on, the Jastarnia Group	X	Other	X	Other

	would also focus on, unless there are other pressing matters. (JG13/AP40)				
JG14/AP26	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. (JG13/AP41)	X	Other	X	Other



**Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species
Agreement on the Conservation of Small Cetaceans
of the Baltic, North East Atlantic, Irish and North Seas**
Joint Secretariat provided by the United Nations Environment Programme



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

Bonn, 20 April 2018

Dear Minister Schulze, dear Minister Klöckner,

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

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

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

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

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

The forthcoming [24th Meeting of the ASCOBANS Advisory Committee \(25-27 September 2019, Vilnius\)](#) will focus on bycatch and would provide an excellent opportunity to spread the positive lessons learnt from Schleswig-Holstein across the [ASCOBANS region](#). <http://www.ascobans.org/en/meeting/AC24> Committee on tools such as the voluntary agreement in reducing bycatch and would welcome input and leadership from Germany.

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

Yours sincerely,



Ida Carlén
Chair of the Jastarnia Group

cc:

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

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

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