

**PRIORITY RECOMMENDATIONS
 FROM THE 12TH MEETING OF THE ASCOBANS NORTH SEA GROUP**

(Adopted by the ASCOBANS Advisory Committee)

NSG12 /Rec #	Recommendation	Long-/short-term + Deadline if possible	Priority (High / Medium / Low)
Evaluation on fisheries with respect to extent of porpoise bycatch			
1.	Parties and Non-Party Range States to focus monitoring and mitigation effort on suspected high-risk fisheries and areas, bearing in mind that the latest bycatch estimates for porpoises in the North Sea indicate the annual numbers bycaught likely exceed thresholds from RLA analysis. There still remains great uncertainty around all bycatch estimates in the region due to a stratified random sampling approach not yet having been implemented, where appropriate. (NSG10/Rec1*)	Ongoing, review annually	High
2.	Parties are encouraged to share training resources with each other to automate bycatch detection in electronic monitoring.	Ongoing, review annually	High
3.	Parties are encouraged to further develop and implement fishing effort monitoring such as inshore VMS for small vessel fisheries (less than 12 metres), following the example of the UK.	Ongoing, review annually	High
4.	Parties are encouraged to incorporate metrics such as soak time, net length, mesh size in fishing effort reporting	Ongoing, review annually	High
5.	Given that the OSPAR threshold for bycatch has already been exceeded, Parties and Non-Party Range States are urged to take mitigation action (e.g. fisheries restrictions, ADDs, etc.) to reduce bycatch levels.	Ongoing, review annually	High
6.	Parties and Non-Party Range States are encouraged to take mitigating action to minimise impacts to porpoises from continuous and impulsive noise.	Ongoing, review annually	High
Finalise a management procedure approach for determining target limits of anthropogenic removals including bycatch in the region			
7.	Attention is needed to revise the current ASCOBANS conservation objectives to i) take account of the long-term objective to drive anthropogenic removals (i.e., including all pressures) towards zero (NSG10/Rec2*); ii) appraise their effectiveness, and to iii) to operationalize the objective with a timeframe and agreed-upon risks of failing as in all management procedure approaches. (NSG11/Rec5)	NSG12	High
8.	Parties, Non-Party Range States, and relevant national bodies to engage and take into regard stakeholder interests, in addition to the fishing industry, to reach common solutions to fulfil conservation aims. (NSG10/Rec3*)	Long-term, review annually	High
Development of alternative mitigation measures to reduce bycatch			
9.	Parties to support further investigations of approaches to mitigate harbour porpoise bycatch taking into account potential adverse impacts on other taxa such as birds and seals. (NSG10/Rec4)	Ongoing, review annually	High

NSG12 /Rec #	Recommendation	Long-/short-term + Deadline if possible	Priority (High / Medium / Low)
10.	Parties to support the testing of bycatch mitigation actions at a fleet level and implement those that have proved to be effective and practical. (NSG10/Rec5)	Ongoing, review annually	High
11.	Parties to support more research on the behaviour of harbour porpoises in the wild around fishing gear, especially static nets, including their sensory capabilities and auditory health, for a better understanding of factors leading to bycatch. (NSG10/Rec6*)	Ongoing, review annually	High
Monitoring trends in distribution and abundance			
12.	In addition to SCANS surveys, Parties are encouraged to collaborate on conducting surveys and analyses of regional trends by season (at least two) and year in porpoise distribution and abundance at a North Sea-wide scale, and examine potential explanations for any observed changes. (NSG10/Rec7*)	Long-term, review annually	High
13.	The North Sea Group to note any information on trends in abundance and distribution from the most recent intermediate assessments and QSRs by OSPAR, Habitats Directive etc., and consider the implications of the findings. (NSG10/Rec.8*)	Ongoing, review annually	Medium
Investigation of the health, nutritional status and diet			
14.	Parties are encouraged to do collaborative research on the extent and seasonality of grey seal predation on harbour porpoises. (NSG10/Rec9*)	Ongoing, review annually	Medium (in some regions)
15.	Parties to facilitate rapid collaboration with stranding networks in the event of an unusual mortality event to identify potential causes of death. These should also include new potential sources such as bacterial infections, e.g. <i>Erysipelothrix rhusiopathiae</i> , and other pathogens such as avian influenza. (NSG10/Rec10*)	Ongoing, review annually	High
16.	Parties are strongly encouraged to further support North Sea-wide monitoring of life history parameters and nutritional status (diet, body condition) through the collection and analysis of stranded and bycaught animals in order to assess evidence of temporal changes in those parameters and explore links to anthropogenic drivers. (NSG10/Rec11*)	Ongoing, review annually	High
17.	Parties are encouraged to collect and analyse a sufficient number of stranded and/or bycaught harbour porpoises for assessing trends and status of persistent chemicals and other pollutants, with particular attention to emerging chemicals in the Greater North Sea. (NSG11/Rec15)	Ongoing, review annually	High
18.	Parties and Non-Party Range States to encourage research investigating the impacts of chemical contaminants from discarded munition material and unexploded ordnance on harbour porpoises and their prey.	Ongoing	Medium
19.	Parties to consider adding a question to the National Report template covering chemical contaminants from discarded munition material and unexploded ordnance.	MOP10	Medium
Investigation of the effects of anthropogenic sounds on harbour porpoises			
20.	Parties to make every effort to monitor and mitigate the effects on porpoises of activities involving explosions (including ordnance clearance in preparation for offshore wind developments). (NSG10/Rec13*)	Ongoing, review annually	High

NSG12 /Rec #	Recommendation	Long-/short-term + Deadline if possible	Priority (High / Medium / Low)
21.	Collaborative studies are encouraged to quantify the impact of both impulsive and continuous noise on individual harbour porpoises. (NSG10/Rec14*)	Ongoing, review annually	High
22.	Parties and Non-Party Range States to encourage research to establish the population level impacts of noise levels and exposure duration. (NSG10/Rec15)	Ongoing, review annually	Medium
23.	Parties and Non-Party Range States to encourage international harmonisation of noise exposure criteria for regulatory purposes. (NSG10/Rec16*)	Ongoing, review annually	High
24.	The Secretariat to request the Joint Noise Working Group to compile the noise criteria used by individual Parties for regulatory purposes.	Short-term, NSG13	High
25.	In the light of projected wide-scale developments of offshore renewable energy, Parties and Non-Party Range States are encouraged to give focused attention on both the short-term and long-term implications for porpoises during the construction and operational phases at the sites and at broader basin-wide scales.	Ongoing, review annually	High
Other			
26.	Parties and Non-Party Range States are urged to consider the cumulative effects upon porpoises of human activities including offshore industrial development so that they are incorporated into spatial planning.	Ongoing, review annually	High
27.	Parties and Non-Party Range States are encouraged to work with international fora to establish a joint industry programme to pool and make publicly available relevant data collated during EIAs and continuous monitoring of sites.	Ongoing, review annually	High

* Wording added/edited.