

Priority Recommendations from the 9th Meeting of the North Sea Group

(Adopted by the Advisory Committee)

Development of alternative pingers and gear modifications

1. 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.
2. Parties to support more research on the behaviour of harbour porpoises around fishing gear, especially static nets, including their sensory capabilities and auditory health, for a better understanding of factors leading to bycatch.

Monitoring trends in distribution and abundance

3. Encourage Parties to collaborate on analyses of regional trends in porpoise distribution and abundance at a North Sea-wide scale, and examine potential explanations for any observed changes.
4. The North Sea Group to note any information on trends in abundance and distribution from the forthcoming OSPAR QSR2023, and consider the implications of the findings.
5. Urge Parties and non-Party Range States to support a SCANS-IV survey of shelf and offshore waters being planned for summer 2022 that will include delivery of updated abundance estimates for the Greater North Sea.

Investigation of the health, nutritional status and diet

6. Encourage collaborative research by Parties on the extent and potential reasons for grey seal predation on harbour porpoises.
7. Encourage Parties to further support North Sea-wide monitoring of life history parameters 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.

Investigation of the effects of anthropogenic sounds on harbour porpoises

8. In the light of recent studies demonstrating acoustic trauma in porpoises due to explosions in the Baltic (Siebert et al. 2020), serious concern is expressed over similar activities occurring in the North Sea. Surviving animals might have impaired hearing which, among other things, could affect their ability to detect nets and find prey. The Secretariat is asked to bring these studies to the attention of all North Sea States and relevant bodies carrying out explosions.
9. Parties to make every effort to mitigate the effects on porpoises of activities involving explosions.
10. Collaborative studies are encouraged to quantify the impact of impulsive noise events on harbour porpoises.