

Agenda Item 4

Annual National Reports 2008

Document 43

Reports received from Belgium
a) Annual National Report

Action Requested

- Briefly present highlights from reports (max. 5 minutes)
- Take note of the information submitted
- Comment

Submitted by

Belgium

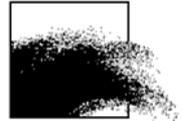


NOTE:
IN THE INTERESTS OF ECONOMY, DELEGATES ARE KINDLY REMINDED TO BRING THEIR OWN COPIES OF DOCUMENTS TO THE MEETING

ROYAL BELGIAN INSTITUTE OF NATURAL SCIENCES

MANAGEMENT UNIT OF THE NORTH SEA
MATHEMATICAL MODELS (MUMM)

SECTION 15
MARINE ECOSYSTEM MANAGEMENT



ASCOBANS Annual National Report 2008

MUMM
100 Gulledelle
B-1200 Brussels
Belgium

ASCOBANS Annual National Report 2008

A. General information

Belgium Name of party	1 January 2008 – 31 December 2008 Period covered
Compiled by Jan Haelters (MUMM/RBINS). Additional information provided by Thierry Jauniaux, Francis Kerckhof, Sigrid Maebe, Alexandre de Lich- tervelde, Dominique Verbelen, Paul Van Daele and Geert Raeymaekers Name of report compiler	20 March 2009 Date of the report
<p>Since 2006 the national co-ordinating authority is the Federal Public Service Health, Food Chain safety and Environment, Eurostation II, Place Victor Horta 40 box 10, 1060 Brussels. Contact person: Paulus Tak, Paulus.Tak@health.fgov.be. The RBINS (MUMM) participates on behalf of Belgium to the work of the Advisory Committee.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Any changes in co-ordinating authority, appointed member of advisory committee</p>	

B. New measures/action towards meeting the resolutions of the 2nd Meeting of Parties

1. Direct interaction of small cetaceans with fisheries

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Investigations of methods to reduce by-catch
<p>No concrete measures were taken with the objective to avoid bycatches in recreational or professional fisheries. The inconsistencies between the regional fishery legislation concerning the use of static gear in recreational fisheries and the local (municipal) legislation remains unresolved in certain local communities. At the Community of De Haan (11 kms of coastline) the use of gillnets for recreational use was restricted in early 2009 to 2 stretches of beach of 300 m each – recreational beach gillnet fishermen started a petition in 2009 to obtain changes to this restriction; up to 20 March 2009 73 recreational fishermen had requested authorisation to use gillnets at this community.</p> <p>Although the European Commission sent a 'reasoned opinion' to Belgium (on 16 October 2008) in the framework of the infraction number 2003/2081 (on the non-compliance with article 12, 1a, of Directive 92/43), indicating a term of 2 months to take additional measures for recreational beach gillnet fisheries (known to incidentally kill harbour porpoises), no concrete measures were taken by 20 March 2009.</p> <p>The Flemish authorities responsible for nature conservation prepared a draft ministerial decree concerning species protection; this might form the basis for future measures to address bycatch of harbour porpoise in recreational beach fishing, although the competence for taking concrete fisheries measures remains with the administration dealing with fisheries. The infraction was an article 226 of the EC Treaty proceeding, initiated for not implementing Community law correctly.</p> <p>In 2008 four Belgian fishing vessels deploying static gear were active in and outside Belgian waters: Inside and outside territorial waters (small vessels): 3 vessels, on average active 107 days per year, although mostly not 100% of their fishing days with static gear (also potting for cuttlefish, angling for seabass, etc.); outside territo-</p>

rial and/or outside Belgian waters 1 larger vessel active for 143 days (data provided by Dienst voor de Zeevisserij, Flemish Community).

Implementation of methods to reduce by-catch

Observed bycatch in 2008

Species	Estimated number of by-caught animals	Area (ICES area or more detailed)	Notes (type of fishery, effort, seasonal variations, etc.)
Estimates are provisional			
<i>Phocoena phocoena</i>	13 (+) ; this is the number of bycaught animals obtained; this number has not been extrapolated to stranded animals with unknown cause of death or to an estimation of actual by-catch	IVc	Recreational beach fisheries and professional fisheries (indirect evidence)

2. Reduction of disturbance to small cetaceans

The monitoring of the effects of the construction and operation of offshore windfarms has started. In 2008, 6 wind turbines of 5 MW each were constructed offshore on the Thornton Bank. Underwater noise measurements were made, and a monitoring programme for marine mammals was initiated. Given that gravity foundations were used, no important disturbance effects originating from underwater noise over large areas were expected to occur in 2008. From 2009 onwards, the construction of more wind turbines is planned, amongst which a number which will be based on monopiles, driven into the seafloor.

Next to the monitoring of underwater noise, also basic information was gathered about the presence of porpoises in Belgian waters, inside and outside the (future) windfarm areas, using different methods: aerial surveys, collection of ad hoc information about sightings (info collected during seabird surveys – effort related, reports of opportunistic sightings), use of C-PoDS (from 2009 onwards). A first estimation of harbour porpoise abundance in Belgian waters was made from observations during an aerial survey on 8-9 April 2008. It was estimated that in Belgian waters an average density of 0.61 (0.40-0.92) animals/km² occurred, or in total (in 3.600 km²) 2.192 (1.449-3.316) animals (preliminary data; 90% confidence limits; Haelters et al., in prep.). An aerial survey on 5 May 2008 yielded lower numbers (0.19 animals/km²), but large confidence limits. Aerial surveys will be continued in 2009.

Information on levels of disturbance
(e.g. seismic surveys, new high-speed ferry routes, studies about acoustic impacts on cetaceans, etc.)

For both licensed offshore windfarm projects the impact on cetaceans is being/will be monitored. For pile-driving operations, measures such as ramp-up procedures and the deployment of pingers are in force. More information concerning the offshore windfarm projects in Belgium is available at MUMM's website (<http://www.mumm.ac.be>).

Flemish authorities are planning a review of the legislation in Flanders, dating from 1980, on the protection of species (see above). It will take account of the original legislation and the requirements in the Habitats Directive, and will most probably enter into force in 2009 (notified by Véronique Verbist, Agentschap voor Natuur en Bos, Flemish authorities).

The federal public environment authority has prepared a new Royal Decree for permits of non-industrial and non-commercial activities in the Belgian Part of the North Sea (formal adoption and publication in OJ foreseen in 2009). This allows the competent administration to assess the impact of non-industrial and non-commercial activities on the marine environment, i.c. protected species.

Implementation of guidelines, new legislation, etc. to reduce disturbance

3. Protected areas for small cetaceans

The Special Area of Conservation Trapegeer-Stroombank, ((181 km²) has been designated by Royal Decree (KB 14.10.2005) under the EU-Habitats Directive, but it was not designated specifically for porpoises.

Management / policy plans for the marine protected areas in the Belgian part of the North Sea have been drawn up in 2008 by the FPS Public health, Food Chain Safety and Environment, Marine Unit, and have gone through public consultation. These plans propose a number of actions, a.o. to maintain or restore the harbour population to a 'favourable state of conservation', taking into account the socio-economical and recreational requirements.

The competent authority (FPS Public health, Food Chain Safety and Environment, Marine Unit) has contracted the KBIN-BMM (IRSnB-MUMM) to draw up a list of potential sites of community importance (pSCIs – EU Habitats Directive) for Annex I Habitat types and Annex II species (e.g. harbour porpoise) in the Belgian part of the North Sea. The report of this project will be available by fall 2009.

Measures taken to identify, implement and manage protected areas

4. Further research on small cetaceans

Preliminary data for 2008 indicate that in total 62 porpoises washed ashore, were bycaught or were found dead at sea. Many were in an advanced state of decomposition. Most of the carcasses were available for research, and were investigated according to the state of decomposition. The following figures are preliminary, given that some carcasses still need to be investigated.

- For 31 porpoises the cause of death is (still) unknown
- For 18 porpoises the cause of death was probably natural
- For 13 porpoises the cause of death was probably or certainly bycatch; amongst these at least 4 can be attributed to recreational beach fisheries (March and April); for the others it is unclear in which fishery they were caught, but at least some were taken in professional fisheries

None of the bycatches was reported by fishermen, although reporting bycatch in Belgian waters is required by legislation. The number of porpoises washing ashore has decreased for 2 consecutive years, but remains high compared to a decade ago.

In 2008 one white-beaked dolphin washed ashore alive; the animal died on the beach. Another white-beaked dolphin was observed floating at sea (decomposed; notified by INBO).

Implementation of schemes to use and gain information from stranded cetaceans

Sightings

Next to sightings made during dedicated surveys for marine mammals or birds, the public has ample opportunity to report sightings; eventually all these are collected in MUMM's database, which can be consulted (partly) online.

Other sites where sightings are reported are:

dolphin@mumm.ac.be : the dedicated email address for reporting sightings to MUMM.

<http://www.waarnemingen.be> (sightings with species, number of animals, geographical location, ...)

<http://www.zeezoogdieren.org> (sightings and strandings, Belgium, The Netherlands, and interesting news on marine mammals from around the world)

In 2008 the Flanders Marine Institute (VLIZ) acquired a (towed) hydrophone system for tracking porpoises and other cetaceans. This system is used during ship based surveys of seabirds. MUMM acquired 4 C-PoDs (passive acoustic monitoring).

Harbour porpoises:

Numerous sightings of harbour porpoises were reported in 2008.

White-beaked dolphins:

9 sightings of white-beaked dolphins were reported, of which 8 between February and June (the 9th in December). Average group size reported was 3 animals.

Bottlenose dolphins:

Numerous observations were reported of a single animal, apparently having been present irregularly between January 2008 and the beginning of August 2008 (with confirmed sighting until 7 August). This probably concerned the animal that was present at the same location during 2007 (see national report 2007).

Research projects

WAKO

Uitbreiding: Evaluatie van de milieu-impact van WARrelnet- en boomKORvisserij op het Belgisch Continentaal Plat (WAKO-I): 2006–October 2007

This project, aimed at a preliminary evaluation of the environmental impact of beamtrawling against bottom set gill net fisheries in Belgian marine waters, was finished in 2008. It will be followed up by a more extensive project which includes also activities in the field in 2009-2010.

Contact persons: Jochen Depestele: Jochen.Depestele@ilvo.vlaanderen.be and Jan Haelters: j.haelters@mumm.ac.be).

MARIN

The Federal department of Science Policy funded a veterinary pathologist at the MUMM department of the Royal Belgian Institute of Natural Sciences (2006–2008). This veterinary pathologist dealt with the autopsies of marine mammals washing ashore in Belgium, the co-ordination with neighbouring countries, and the inventory of a tissue bank of marine mammals.

Systematic collection and preservation of marine mammal tissues started in 1990 and was extended since 1995 with samples from other regions in the southern North Sea through international co-operation with France and the Netherlands. This collection now constitutes the Belgian Marine Mammal Biobank (BMMB) placed under the joint management of RBINS and the University of Liège, with the purpose to provide high quality samples of marine mammals

(small and large cetaceans as well as pinnipeds) to scientists in a non-profit scientific collaboration. Samples may be used for studies in pathology, microbiology, toxicology, life history, etc. Contact persons: Thierry Jauniaux: t.jauniaux@ulg.ac.be and Johan De winter j.dewinter@mumm.ac.be.

Harbour porpoises in the southern North Sea

IFAW funded the project “Harbour porpoises in the southern North Sea: trends, threats and research & management proposals”, executed by MUMM and the Royal NIOZ (The Netherlands). The report deals with the decline and increase of porpoises in the 20th and 21st century, focus on the related conservation problems, and propose realistic management measures. Results will be printed in spring 2009, and will be distributed.

Contact persons: Jan Haelters (j.haelters@mumm.ac.be) and Kees Camphuysen (camphuys@nioz.nl).

Publications, communications

Depestele, J., Courtens, W., Degraer, S., Derous, S., Haelters, J., Hostens, K., Moulaert, I., Polet, H., Rabaut, M., Stienen, E. & Vincx, M., 2008. Evaluatie van de milieu-impact van WARrelnet- en boomKORvisserij op het Belgisch deel van de Noordzee (WAKO). Eindrapport. ILVO Visserij: Oostende, Belgium, 185 p.

Jauniaux T. Reducing the effects of oil spills on Marine Mammals, in ; RIOS PROJECT– Reducing the Impact of Oil Spills BACKGROUND DOCUMENT : Research and Development Needs for Reducing Impacts from Oil Spills on Wildlife. EU Programme “Global Change and Ecosystems”, 2008 Nordeconsult Sweden AB, Lund, Sweden.

Schnitzler J., Siebert U., Jepson P., Beineke A., Jauniaux T., Bouquegneau J.-M., Das K., Harbour porpoise thyroids: Histological investigations and potential interactions with environmental factors, Journal of Wildlife Disease, 2008, 44, 888-901.

Jauniaux, T., Berguerie, H., Camphuysen, K., Daoust, P-Y., Drouguet, O., Ghisbain, T., Garcia-Hartmann, M., Grondin, A., Haelters, J., Jacques, T., Kiszka, J., Leopold, M., Pezeril, S., Schnitzler, J. & Coignoul, F., 2008. Causes of death of harbor porpoises (*Phocoena phocoena*) stranded on the on the continental coastline of the southern North Sea (Belgium, France, and Dutch coasts) between 1990 and 2007. ICES Annual Science Conference, Halifax, Canada, CM 2008/D:09.

Jauniaux, T., Berguerie, H., Camphuysen, K., Daoust, P-Y., Drouguet, O., Ghisbain, T., Garcia-Hartmann, M., Grondin, A., Haelters, J., Jacques, T., Kiszka, J., Leopold, M., Pezeril, S., Schnitzler, J. & Coignoul, F., 2008. Mortality of harbour porpoises in the North Sea: evaluation tool for the population. Stratégies de suivi de l'état des populations de mammifères marins, La Rochelle, 21-23 novembre 2008, 10^{ème} Séminaire du Réseau National.

Jauniaux T., Rehabilitation of oiled marine mammals: an assessment. Reducing the Impact of Oil Spill Workshop, Albufeira, Portugal, 2008.

Jauniaux T., Causes of death of marine mammals in Europe : the North Sea case. Veterinary College of Prince Edouard Island (Canada), 2008, invited talk.

Jauniaux T., Causes of death of harbor porpoises on the on the continental coastline of the southern North Sea. 7th international Symposium “Propects for the 3rd Millenium Agriculture” Section: Veterinary medicine, Cluj-Napoca, Roumania, 2008.

Jauniaux, T. , Haelters, J., Coignoul, F. & Jacques, T., 2008. Sonar or not sonar? Necropsy workshop: protocols and interpretation of necropsy data. 22nd Annual Conference of the European Cetacean Society, Egmond aan Zee, Nederland.

Jauniaux, T., Haelters, J. & Jacques, T.G., 2008. Espèces marines strictement protégées (mammifères): prise en charge de l'accroissement des échouages et mise au point de la banque de tissus. Rapport scientifique pour la période 2007-2008. Sec 15 Ch.Suppl. BELSPO 2008, 19p.

Morell M., Degollada E., Alonso J., Jauniaux T., Leopold M., Camphuysen K., André M., 2008. Decalcifying Protocol of Odontocete Ear Samples with RDO[®], Acoustics 2008

Research on abundance, population structure etc.

5. Research on the effects of pollutants on cetacean health

Pierce G., Santos M., Murphy S., Learmonth J., Zuur A., Rogan E., Bustamante P., Caurant F., Lahye, V., Ridoux V., Zegers B., Mets A., Addink M., Smeenk C., Jauniaux T., Law R., Dabin W., Lopez A., Alonso Faré J., Gonzalez A., Guerra A., Garcia-Hartmann M., Reid R., Moffat C., Lockyer C. and Boon J., 2008. Bioaccumulation of persistent organic pollutants in female common dolphins (*Delphinus delphis*) and harbour porpoises (*Phocoena phocoena*) from western European seas: Geographical trends, causal factors and effects on reproduction and mortality, Environmental Pollution 153: 401-415.

Weijts, L., 2008. Bioaccumulatiemodel voor microcontaminanten bij de gewone zeehond (*Phoca vitulina*) en bruinvis (*Phocoena phocoena*). Master thesis, University of Antwerp.

Research on the effects of pollutants on cetacean health

6. Public awareness and education

Information on stranded animals and on sightings, is given on the website of MUMM (in Dutch, English and French): http://www.mumm.ac.be/EN/Management/Nature/search_strandings.php.

The NGO Natuurpunt organised a whale-watching trip to the Bay of Biskay from 16 to 21 August 2008 on the MV Princess Danae ('Ultimatepelagics'). People on board could participate in lectures on cetaceans and conservation initiatives. This trip was covered in the media (a.o. in the weekly magazine "Knack"; article by Dirk Draulans, and in the popular scientific journal "EOS", article by Tim Vanderjeugd)

During 2008 several observation daytrips (on a ship with a capacity of 30-40 people), called 'Ostend Pelagics' were organised, the first initiative in Belgium to present cetaceans in their natural environment to the wider public. More information on www.ostend-pelagics.be. The initiative was covered by national radio and television (a.o. Dutch television: VARA). Observations made during the Ostend Pelagics were reported to MUMM.

At the festival "Oostende voor Anker" MUMM presented (a.o.) information on cetaceans, windfarms and marine mammal conservation issues; on display were a life-size maquette of a white-sided dolphin and a skull of a pilot whale. Approximately 250.000 people participated in the festival, which ran from 22 to 25 May 2008.

On the 28th of August 2008 a life-size (fake but immensely realistic) stranded sperm whale was present in Antwerp, on the banks of the river Scheldt (Kunstenaarscollectief "Boomer"). Thousands of people made it to the spot, and it received a lot of media attention. The intervention network dealing with stranded cetaceans at the coast participated, and took the opportunity to inform the public on their interventions in case of real whale strandings, and on ASCOBANS (leaflets were distributed). More information and images of this event are available at MUMM' website, news sections: <http://www.mumm.ac.be/NL/News/index.php?page=4&total=128>.

Information panels on marine protected areas (Natura 2000 sites) will be installed in a number of coastal communities in front of the SAC *Trapegeer Stroombank*.

Measures taken in the fields of public awareness and education to implement or promote the Agreement

7. Other relevant news

In the framework of the International Whaling Commission, The Belgian Federal Ministry of Environment has produced a folder on ship strikes with cetaceans which includes information on the centralised ship strikes database hosted by the IWC Secretariat, as well as advice to help avoid collisions with whales. The folder will be available in June 2009 in six languages: English, Arabic, Chinese, French, Russian and Spanish. The database can be accessed and updated at www.iwcoffice.org/sci_com/shipstrikes.htm".

On December 8-12, 2008: a necropsy session of 81 harbour porpoises stranded on the Dutch coast was organized at the Utrecht Veterinary College; the Department of Pathology of the University of Liege, Belgium collaborated with the department of Pathology (Veterinary College) of Utrecht and IMARES/NIOZ, the Netherlands.