

North Sea harbour porpoise plan progress report



Recommendations from NSG8 – 1

1. Work nationally and regionally to improve quality and availability of fishing effort data
2. ASCOBANS to write to the North Sea RCG to introduce our work and its relevance to data collection. Parties should contact their own fisheries administrations to facilitate representation of ASCOBANS interests at RCG meetings.
3. ASCOBANS to request a seat in the North Sea Regional Advisory Council.
4. Make better use of funding from the EU (e.g. EMFF) to jointly implement better bycatch monitoring and mitigation.

Recommendations from NSG8 – 2

5. Further analysis of fine-scale bycatch risk-mapping to better understand factors determining high bycatch and to direct resources
6. Investigate gear specific solutions to mitigate bycatch
7. Pass on bycatch monitoring and mitigation recommendations to appropriate persons at a national level, to facilitate engagement internationally.
8. Ensure that future meetings of the ASCOBANS Advisory Committee and North Sea Group has a fisheries representative from the respective Party present.

Recommendations from NSG8 – 3

9. Identify further ways to directly engage relevant sectors of the fishing industry.
10. Information on life history parameters to be collected and analysed from strandings and bycaught animals, to assess for evidence of temporal changes that may have resulted from anthropogenic activities.
11. Identify and fill gaps in stranding networks within the North Sea Region.
12. Encourage adopting the ‘Best Practice on Cetacean Post Mortem Investigation and Tissue Sampling’, when available, which includes instruction on how one can define “bycatch” in strandings.

Recommendations from NSG8 – 4

13. Promotion (and funding) of a workshop on Harbour Porpoise conservation and management of the North East Atlantic
14. Fill in gaps in monitoring and survey data / data analysis to determine trends in distribution and abundance, and identify causes for observed changes.
15. Parties to support coordination of SCANS-type surveys through a central body and undertake these ideally at a six-year frequency.



Key conclusions and recommendations

Action 2: Implementation of existing regulations on bycatch of cetaceans

- Most EU Member States submit annual reports for Reg 812/2004
- Often a time delay content not fulfilling the objectives of reliable bycatch estimates adequate mitigation
- Consistency required across National reports with comparable level of detail
- Obligations under EU such as the Habitats Directive, DCF and EU-MAP, as well as ASCOBANS resolutions, should be fully implemented

Key conclusions and recommendations

Action 3: Establishment of bycatch observation programmes on small vessel (<15 m) and recreational fisheries

- Small vessels and recreational net fisheries are known to cause porpoise bycatch in and around North Sea, and yet are inadequately monitored.
- Despite challenges, remote electronic monitoring proven successful in Denmark and the Netherlands
- More effective bycatch monitoring needed of fisheries that, although required under Reg 812/2004, is rarely implemented

Key conclusions and recommendations

Action 4: Regular evaluation of all fisheries with respect to extent of harbour porpoise bycatch

- Estimates of bycatch rates suffer from low sampling rate
- Measures of fishing effort (e.g. days at sea) inadequate and for different sizes of vessels, measures of effort are often not easily equated with one another
- Currently far from obtaining target of spatio-temporal measures of net length and soak time for static gear
- Sampling procedure required that adequately reflects actual number of porpoises bycaught per unit effort across all vessels causing bycatch

Key conclusions and recommendations

Action 5: Review of current pingers, development of alternative pingers and gear modifications

- Pingers mandatory in certain gillnet fisheries in the North Sea for EU Member States but not all countries using them and level of enforcement very variable between countries
- More research needed to find mitigation measures that are both practical and effective
- Development of alternative gears may be the most desirable long term solution to porpoise bycatch

Key conclusions and recommendations

Action 6: Finalise a management procedure approach for determining maximum allowable bycatch limits in the region

- Setting as conservation objectives; RLA approach sets numerical parameters to establish an environmental limit and potential trigger for action for hp bycatch
- Assumptions have to be made
- Current levels of bycatch in the North Sea believed to be insufficient to cause serious depletion of the harbour porpoise population
- Consistent and well defined conservation objectives needed, as well as environmental limits and triggers over a practical time scale, bearing in mind a number of uncertainties with the RLA approach

Key conclusions and recommendations

Action 7: Monitoring trends in distribution and abundance of harbour porpoises in the region

- The population in the North Sea estimated to be 250,000-350,000 animals. No significant change since mid-1990s
- Regular visual monitoring by aerial survey occurring on a seasonal and annual basis in many countries the southern North Sea involving. Winter months less covered, and areas in the central and northern North Sea not as well monitored. Northernmost part of the North Sea relatively poorly monitored
- It is recommended that gaps in monitoring are filled and that every Member State has a regular programme of monitoring across its entire EEZ

Key conclusions and recommendations

Action 8: Review of the stock structure of harbour porpoises in the region

- Still some uncertainty on if there is sub-structuring of hp populations in North Sea, with one, two, or three areas suggested as Management Units. For now kept as one (NAMMCO & IMR 2019)
- Further samples for some of the boundary areas would be useful for analysis using a range of approaches
- Further sub-structuring should be explored in central North Sea since there are signals of differentiation on an east west as well as north south axis.
- Analyses are best conducted on samples where the precise original location is known.