

# **REPORT OF THE 17<sup>th</sup> MEETING OF THE ASCOBANS JASTARNIA GROUP**

**Virtual / Online  
25 - 27 May 2021**



**Agreement on the Conservation of Small Cetaceans  
of the Baltic, North East Atlantic, Irish and North Seas**

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## REPORT OF THE 17<sup>TH</sup> MEETING OF THE ASCOBANS JASTARNIA GROUP

### 1. Opening of the Meeting

#### 1.1. Welcoming remarks

The Chair, Ida Carlén (Coalition Clean Baltic - CCB), called the meeting to order, welcoming the participants, hoping that they could meet in person in the future. She explained that Action Points will be discussed on Day 3 of the meeting.

The ASCOBANS Coordinator, Jenny Renell (Secretariat) ran through some of the technical aspects of the online meeting, including referring participants to the [Online Meeting Protocol](#).

#### 1.2. Adoption of the Agenda

The Chair drew attention to the [Provisional Agenda](#), highlighting two items (2.3 and 3.3) to be discussed jointly and some schedule changes to allow for when presenters are available. She also noted that under AOB there is an information document from CCB which would be mentioned under Agenda Item 3.1. The Secretariat proposed including a presentation from Signe Sveegaard (Denmark) on the results of MiniSCANS-II during the discussions on Item 3.6 (Updates on Recent Research).

There being no other comments, the revised agenda was adopted as presented.

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

#### 2.1. Overview report on progress

The Chair [presented](#) an overall report on progress on ASCOBANS Recovery Plan for Baltic Harbour Porpoises (Jastarnia Plan) since 2020 ([Progress Report on the Jastarnia Plan](#) and [Progress Report on the WBBK Plan](#)), highlighting the infringement case against Sweden on harbour porpoises, which was opened in July 2020, and noting that Sweden has responded and was waiting to see if the European Commission (EC) will move on to Step 2 of the process.

On joint recommendations (JR) from BALTFISH on Mitigation measures to prevent bycatch of harbour porpoises in Baltic Sea fisheries: JR1 had been submitted by BALTFISH to the EC in December 2020 and this had now been evaluated by the STECF (Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries) and Sweden was waiting for a decision from the EC; the JR2 on measures outside of marine protected areas (MPAs) was yet to be finalised and there would be an update from Estonia (currently Chair of BALTFISH) during the meeting. There were still no emergency measures (EMs) in place for the Baltic Proper populations, and military concerns on pingers were hindering EMs and JRs.

On fisheries and bycatch, ASCOBANS and HELCOM had been invited to a joint meeting with Regional Coordination Group (RCG) Baltic and RCG NANSEA to discuss options for improvement of bycatch monitoring on 10 June 2021.

The HELCOM ACTION<sup>1</sup> project had produced bycatch risk maps for the Baltic, which Laura Kaikkonen (HELCOM) would present under Agenda item 3.3.

On surveys and monitoring: there would be an update on SAMBAH II LIFE project proposal by Michael Dähne (Germany) and Kylie Owen (Sweden); she hoped for an update from the meeting on the status of new SCANS IV/MMANA; a MiniSCANS-II survey took place in July 2020, which Signe Sveegaard (Denmark) would present on under Agenda item 3.6; and she shared a map outlining national monitoring programmes.

On MPAs and population management: the German management plans were put out for consultation in Autumn 2020 and Patricia Brtnik (Germany) would update on this; the Swedish plan for Hoburgs Bank och Midsjobankarna and the Swedish Harbour Porpoise species action plan were put out for consultation in Spring 2021; a two-part ASCOBANS workshop on Management of MPAs for Small Cetaceans Management plans is taking place (on 18 May and 7-9 June 2021); and the HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan was underway and should be finalised by the end of 2021.

The Chair also noted that the following internal action points from JG16 had not been completed and should be carried over:

- Letter to Baltic navies on underwater noise and available mitigation methods;
- Instructions for genetic sampling, including a request to countries to try and fund these activities.

On implementation tables, the Chair flagged the Status assessment of Progress of the Implementation of the actions in the Jastarnia Plan. Germany was the only country that had scored a 3 and there were quite a few zeros. The Chair also shared the Qualitative Assessment of Progress in the implementation of the ASCOBANS WBBK Conservation Plan. She confirmed that the draft report on progress would be circulated for comments.

Actions from the Jastarnia Plan		Priority	SE	DK	DE	PL	FI	LI	LA	EE	RU	
1	Implementation of the CP: co-ordinator and Steering Committee	High	Co-ordinator for 2020									
2	Increase involvement, awareness and cooperation	High	Public awareness	2	1	2	2	2	1	0	0	1
			Involvement and cooperation	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0
3	Monitor and estimate abundance and distribution	High	Population-wide (including modelling)	SAMBAH II planned								
			Regional/national monitoring	2	2	2	1	2	0	0	0	0
			Population structure in the Baltic Region	2	1	3	1	2	0	0	0	0
4	Bycatch	High	Monitor bycatch	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0
			Estimating bycatch	1	1	1	0	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
			Reducing bycatch	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0
5	Monitor and mitigate impact of underwater noise	High	Improve knowledge and develop threshold limits	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0
			Mitigating effects	1	1	2	0	1	0	0	0	0
6	Monitoring and assess population health status	Medium	2	0	3	1	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	
7	Investigate habitat use and protect important areas	Medium	Investigating habitat use	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	0	
			Protecting important areas	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0

Summary of progress in the implementation of the Recovery Plan (see [Progress Report on the Jastarnia Plan 2020](#), p.55).

<sup>1</sup> Action to evaluate and identify effective measures to reach GES in the Baltic Sea marine region, <https://helcom.fi/helcom-at-work/projects/action/>.

Actions from the WBBK Conservation Plan for HP		Priority	SE	DK	DE	
1	Implementation of the CP: co-ordinator and Steering Committee	High	Co-ordinator for 2020			
2	Actively seek to involve fishermen in the implementation of the plan and in mitigation measures to ensure a reduction in bycatch	High	1	1	1	
3	Cooperate and inform other relevant bodies about the conservation plan	High	0			
4	Protect harbour porpoises in their key habitats by minimizing bycatch	High	1	1	1	
5	Implement pinger use in fisheries causing bycatch	High	1	1	1	
6	Replacement of high risk gillnets with alternative gear	High	1	1	1	
7	Estimate total annual bycatch	High	Estimate total annual bycatch	0	1	0
			Facilitate landings of bycaught harbour porpoises	1	1	1
8	Estimate trends in abundance in the Western Baltic, the Belt Sea and Kattegat	High	Population-wide surveys	1		
			Reg/survey	2	2	2
			Identify a survey interval for population-wide surveys	0		
9	Monitoring population health status, contaminant load and causes of mortality	Medium	2	0	3	
10	Ensure non-detrimental use of pingers by examining habitat exclusion and long-term effects of pingers	Medium	1	1	0	
11	Include monitoring & management of important prey species in national HP management plans	Medium	0	0	0	
12	Restore or maintain habitat quality	Medium	1	1	0	

Summary of progress in the implementation of the Conservation Plan (see [Progress Report on the Conservation Plan for the Harbour Porpoise Population in the Western Baltic, the Belt Sea and the Kattegat 2020](#), p.38).

Ms Sveegaard proposed creating a reporting template for national updates for the next meeting to support consistent reporting. This was agreed to be added to the list of internal action points.

## 2.2. National progress reports on activities since June 2020

The Chair asked Party representatives to make a brief report.

### National Updates

#### Denmark

Ms Sveegaard [presented](#) a progress report for Denmark.

On national monitoring for the Belt Sea, this was the last part of the second monitoring period since the MPAs were appointed and Denmark has: CPODs in the Northern Sound and Fehmarn Belt; monitoring in Great Belt, Kalundborg Fjord, Little Belt, and Flensburg Fjord has shown a steady increase in detections since 2012. There was a MiniSCANS-II conducted by aerial survey in June-July 2020 coordinated and funded by Germany, Denmark, and Sweden with the report being available soon. For the Baltic Proper, there was monitoring around Bornholm from June 2018 to June 2019, which will be repeated every third year or be included as part of SAMBAH-II.

On bycatch, there were several projects, including the HELCOM Action Project; a large pinger project testing different types of pingers in fisheries and including a drone study of reaction to pingers; a project monitoring bycatch with videos on fishing boats which was now part of the DCF (Data Collection Framework); and a report analysing REM (remote electronic monitoring) data on porpoise bycatch, which should be out shortly. Ms Sveegaard also highlighted new projects to estimate drop-out rates, trials of gillnets with thinner twine, and fishing trials of pearl nets to look at effects on target species catch rates.

On conservation projects and research, work continued on the HELCOM Indicator for abundance and distribution group, and work on a HELCOM indicator for health and reproduction had been initiated. She then reported on several research projects, including: the TANGO project, changing the route of a major shipping line and assessing the impact on noise and on harbour porpoises; the continuing collection of 20 carcasses annually to be examined; the SATURN 2021-2025 project studying the impact of disturbances on marine populations, including tagging of porpoises.

In response to questions from Fabian Ritter (Whale and Dolphin Conservation - WDC), DrMs Sveegaard said she expected the results from the pinger study to be available by the end of 2021, and suggested contacting Finn Larsen or Lotte Kindt-Larsen. The Chair noted that the military concerns on pinger use was sensitive due to the national defence aspect, and that data would likely have to be gathered by the military defence agencies. In response to a question from Michael Dähne (Germany) about the thinner fishing net lines project, Ms Sveegaard again suggested contacting Mr Larsen or Ms Kindt-Larsen.

### Finland

Olli Loisa (Finland) gave an update on Finland, noting that acoustic monitoring and the opportunistic sight data collections are still ongoing and there were no activities related to bycatch and strandings because no such events had been reported. Harbour porpoise distribution and underwater noise monitoring had now been added as components in the national programme and the draft programme of measures related to the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD).

### Germany

Patricia Brtnik (Germany) [reported](#) on the ongoing long-term monitoring and assessment of harbour porpoise population status with aerial surveys and ongoing acoustic monitoring stations, referring to the website of the Federal Agency for Nature Conservation (BfN), where maps with the results are provided<sup>2</sup>. Germany was also involved in MiniSCANS-II in June/July 2020. The sightings programme conducted by the German Oceanographic Museum, Stralsund was ongoing, with >1300 sightings of the Harbour Porpoise in 2020. Ongoing long-term projects include the strandings programme in the Federal States of Schleswig-Holstein and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern and the assessment by the Institute for Terrestrial and Aquatic Wildlife Research (ITAW) of bycatch and health of harbour porpoises.

There would be a presentation on microplastics findings in the North Sea and Baltic Sea in harbour porpoises and on behavioural studies in relation to gillnets under Agenda Item 3.6.

The PAL (Porpoise Alerting Devices) Monitoring project was still in the planning phase due to budget constrictions but is hoped to start before the end of 2021.

The management plans for the N2k sites in the German EEZ of the Baltic were still under consultation, which started in November 2020 with negotiations between the Fisheries and Environment Ministries, but the most important measures for harbour porpoises would relate to static nets and, although there was some preparation work going on, these measures were on hold awaiting the outcome of the STELLA Project. Mr Ritter referred to the (missing) management plans in the Baltic Sea, noting differing views of the Ministries regarding hindrances to the development of the management plans. The drafts were out in the next couple of weeks, and it was likely that the process would be postponed until after the federal elections.

### Poland

Monika Lesz (Poland) [reported](#) that in April 2021, the Council of Ministers adopted the regulation on the spatial development (MSP) plan of internal waters, territorial sea and the EEZ which included,

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.bfn.de/themen/meeresnaturschutz/marines-monitoring.html>

inter alia: protection of key maritime area habitats and the connectivity between them; environmental research on lesser known areas as well as monitoring within the State Environmental Monitoring framework; taking into account coastal rivers as important ecological corridors to ensure access to the sea as well as valuable natural areas on land.

Ms Lesz highlighted the launch of SIPAM, the public Geoportal of the Administration Spatial Information System, providing up-to-date knowledge on Polish waters, including 34 datasets such as closed or hazardous zones to shipping and fishing, Natura 2000 nature conservation plans in marine areas, port boundaries, and safety zones around artificial islands. There was an increasing number of companies and institutions interested in monitoring e.g. harbour porpoises, and she hoped that results of such studies would be available for the 27<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the ASCOBANS Advisory Committee.

In November 2020, as part of a Marine Station project, sixty C-PODs were deployed in a strip of coastal waters between the Eastern and Western borders of Poland which will record the presence of harbour porpoises over a twelve-month period. The results would enable the determination of temporal and spatial variability and provide a basis for recommendations for the conservation and management of the species in Polish marine waters.

From 2017 to 2019 there was a drastic increase in strandings of harbour porpoises, with 10-15 animals per year being found. However, in 2020 eight individuals were found on the beach and only one so far in 2021.

Since JG16, considerable time and effort had been spent investigating the applicability of bubble curtains for large-scale (1,000 TNT) explosions. The findings were that bubble curtains are effective up to 300 TNT mines but not, so far, for larger mines due to technical challenges. While work continued, currently mandatory use of curtains was restricted to smaller-scale explosions and pile driving, etc. Ms Lesz thanked members for their input. The Chair asked what the challenge was on noise mitigation for big detonations, with Ms Lesz explaining it was an engineering issue along with technical safety requirements.

Wojciech Gorski (Krzysztof Skóra Hel Marine Station, Poland) [presented](#) on a pingers project with Fishtek Marine Ltd. Pingers were distributed to twenty-four fishermen operating on boats >12m and using gillnets in coastal areas. Vessels were equipped with pingers mainly from the western Polish coast. There was CCTV monitoring on a <12m fishing boat. The Chair queried whether data was collected from the fishers on their experience with the pingers. Mr Gorski said that in 2018 and 2019 more than 100 reports were collected but that there was no data from 2020 as they could not use gillnets because of the cod fishing ban.

In the ensuing discussion, Mr Gorski confirmed the reported figures on strandings and explained that the animals were very decomposed but there was some sampling that could be brought for necropsy. Mr Ritter and Julia Carlström (Sweden) asked about sampling of the stranded animals, outlining the potential for genetic sampling, including, supported by Mr Dähne, of bones. The Chair queried whether there was an ASCOBANS agreed protocol on what samples to take and Mr Dähne referred to the ASCOBANS-ACCOBAMS Best Practice on Cetacean Post-mortem Investigation and Tissue Sampling protocol<sup>3</sup>, which contained a list of sample types and when they can be taken. There was no standardisation in terms of bones. At the Swedish Museum of Natural History (SMNH) in Stockholm there was a different sampling scheme.

## Sweden

Kylie Owen (Sweden) [reported](#) on the ongoing national monitoring programmes in the Baltic and Kattegat, regional monitoring in Blekinge and Öland counties, as well as the plan to establish a larger regional monitoring program in the Baltic region of Sweden. The SAMBAH abundance manuscript was close to submission, and there was a new manuscript out on temporal trends in monitoring data,

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.ascobans.org/en/document/small-cetacean-stranding-response-0>

comparing the results of the detection frequencies from the SAMBAH study with the national monitoring programme in the Baltic, indicating that there was a 29% increase between the two studies which would be presented under agenda item 3.4. There were five partners from Sweden involved in the SAMBAH II LIFE application submission in February 2021.

There was also a WWF-funded project focused around the Baltic Natura 2000 site. Some preliminary results showing that high frequency pingers do not cause an increase in the rate of seal damage to catch in set nets in the Baltic Proper. Additionally, the impact of noise on porpoise detections was examined, preliminarily showing that there is no influence if the noise is sampled instantaneously, and that there is a negative correlation between excess noise and porpoise detection rate, but a positive correlation with median noise. There was also a plan to use an individual-based model (DEPONS) on the effect of windfarms and pingers on the Baltic Proper Harbour Porpoise population; however, this was delayed by COVID. Sweden was also involved in the MiniSCANS-II project which Ms Sveegaard would report on.

Sweden was also involved in the TANGO study, looking at the impact of re-routing a major shipping lane, with data already indicating that there has been a change in the noise levels. Data collection was due to finish on 30 June 2021 and the manuscript to be completed by 31 December 2021.

Sweden had also been involved in a study on group hunting behaviour in harbour porpoises, which had been published (Ortiz et al 2021), and indicated role specialisation which is considered the most sophisticated form of collaborative hunting.

There was a plan by the Swedish Museum of Natural History (SMNH) to complete analysis on the calculated potential biological removal (PBR) for the Belt Sea population using the OSPAR Marine Mammal Expert Group (OMMEG) PBR code and ASCOBANS conservation objective in time for HOLAS III. The Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (SLU) had been doing a lot of work on bycatch, including: investigating bycatch numbers in Kattegatt and Öresund (HELCOM ACTION project); completing risk maps for Kattegatt, Öresund and the Central Baltic; developing camera systems to monitor bycatch in small-scale fisheries; and studying the effect of pingers on porpoise bycatch and abundance.

The SMNH had launched a new web reporting form (<https://tumlare.nrm.se/>) for live and dead observations and Rappen (funded by the Swedish Agency for Marine and Water Management - SwAM) had an updated reporting site for all marine species. The Swedish National Veterinary Institute (SVA) were continuing their collaboration with SMNH on a National Health and Disease Surveillance Programme of Marine Mammals in Sweden, which has been ongoing since 2008. In 2020, they designed a new surveillance programme which includes seals, porpoises and occasional strandings of larger whales. The data indicate a female bias and includes a map of the strandings.

Ms Owen also mentioned a number of other actions within Sweden including: the HELCOM BLUES project on improvement in bycatch indicators and harbour porpoise indicators and assessments for HOLAS III; the updating of the monitoring programme for National Implementation of the Marine Strategic Framework Directive; and the finalising of the National Action Plan for Harbour Porpoises which was due to be wrapped up soon.

She completed by referring to the legal action against Sweden by the EC in July 2020. Within four months the Swedish government would provide time plans for how to analyse possible improvements to the bycatch monitoring and how to evaluate the needs for further protection measures. SwAM was developing a proposal for fisheries regulations in protected areas. The government agrees that Swedish environmental legislation has not been applied for fishing permits in Natura2000 sites, and other legislation implementing Article 6.2 is not fully applied on fisheries, and will develop a proposal on improved incorporation of Council Directive 92/43/EEC Articles 6.2 and 12.4 in national legislation by the end of 2021, and finalise the Action Plan on Harbour Porpoises by March 2021.

Ms Sveegaard asked if it was a surprise for Sweden to get this critique given how much activity is taking place in Sweden. Mr Ritter expressed surprise that Sweden received the infringement procedure and not Germany given the delays in Germany, suggesting that from enquiries with the EC, an infringement procedure might be on the doorstep.

### **2.3 Available bycatch risk maps**

This Agenda item was discussed together with Agenda item 3.3.

### **2.4 Report back on potential effects of the cod fishing ban**

The Chair asked country representatives if they had anything to report on the potential effects of the cod fishing ban in the Baltic Sea.

Katarzyna Kamińska (Poland) [presented](#) a map of gillnet fisheries fishing efforts for 2019 and 2020, demonstrating a drastic decline in fishing efforts for cod. Referring to the EU Regulation 1579/2020 (cod fishing ban), she noted complex derogations in ICES areas 24, 25, and 26, with a total fishing ban from 1 May to 31 August 2021 for ICES areas 25 and 26. She said that for ICES the situation with Baltic cod was not improving so far as she knew but the ICES advice for cod for 2022 was not available as yet.

The Chair noted that the cod ban went into effect in 2019 and suggested the reported decrease in stranded porpoises in Poland might link to the ban.

Iwona Pawliczka (Poland) suggested including on the Agenda for JG18 a review of whether fishing effort using other types of set nets have increased as a result of the cod ban, and this was noted as an internal action point.

### **2.5 Possible adjustment of delimitation between Jastarnia, WBBK, and North Sea Harbour Porpoise plan areas**

The Chair explained that during the 9<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Steering Group for the ASCOBANS Conservation Plan for Harbour Porpoises in the North Sea (NSG9), there was a discussion on the delimitation between ASCOBANS Harbour Porpoise conservation plans as, because as they look now, they do not align with what is currently known as the Management Units (MUs) or populations. At NSG8 there was general agreement that they should be aligned with MUs so she asked what the JG considered. She [shared two maps](#), one with current delimitations between conservation plans (North Sea, WBBK and Baltic), and the second with proposed MUs. She proposed agreeing now on new delimitations and as the plans would be updated in the future that the new delimitations be agreed.

Ms Carlström pointed out that the proposed MUs were for the summer months and that at other times the porpoises might be outside the MUs. The plans should still cover, if needed, actions outside the MUs. Penina Blankett (Finland) suggested keeping in mind the current HELCOM boundary. The Chair suggested it was more logical to keep the MUs. Peter Evans (NSG Chair) suggested it was important to take into account practical considerations in terms of reporting and monitoring procedures. Ms Sveegaard agreed with Mr Evans but also noted that HELCOM/OSPAR were trying to align according to populations and now report on the basis of the proposed MUs so it would be difficult to keep the old ones. Ms Kaminska was in favour of proposed MUs for the Baltic Sea.

#### North Sea/WBBK delimitation:

Ms Sveegaard explained that in their study (Sveegaard et al. 2015<sup>4</sup>) they had analysed satellite tracking data for tagged porpoises and established this border based on the conclusion that the animals that spent 2/3 of their time South of the line were in the Belt Sea population and those that

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2351989415000384>

spent 2/3 of their time to the North of the line are part of that population. Obviously, there would be individuals that crossed this line. All of Kattegat was the transition zone. The Chair agreed that it is not an absolute line that the porpoises do not cross but suggested that for administrative purposes perhaps the line could be agreed upon.

Mr Evans explained that despite the strict delimitation between plan areas, the NSG also considers the transition zone between the North Sea and the WBBK area, so there might be some reporting of that area by both the North Sea and WBBK groups. He said the border may change over time as the population changes. He suggested it is worth having a watching brief over that area from both groups. The Chair, supported by Ms Sveegaard, agreed it would be important to consider the wording when the plans are updated. Ms Sveegaard said it is not really a transition zone and that the actual transition zone goes all the way over to the Belt Sea.

### Baltic/Belt Sea

Participants considered the Baltic/Belt Sea border. Discussion focused on whether to use 13°E or 13.5° for the Jastarnia Plan only. The Chair reminded the meeting participants that the ICES advice proposed 13°, whereas the study by Sveegaard et al. proposed 13.5°. Ms Carlström explained that a German study looking at environmental co-variants explains porpoise detections along the coast with different detections based on seasons to develop the maps and there is just a guesstimate that the Baltic Proper porpoises move to 13°E in winter. The transition zone was misleading as the eastern part of the border was based on the SAMBAH findings and the western on the aforementioned study, so the borders were based on different methods and used different datasets at least in part. She pointed out that the medium blue area in the [map discussed](#) is the target area for estimating the Belt Sea abundance, it does not suggest that the Belt Sea animals do not go further east, they do go further but not enough to justify managing them here.

Ms Carlström suggested calling it a “safety zone.” Ms Kaminska favoured 13°E to align with the BALTFISH group as this would make it more straightforward for non-experts regardless of the season. Ms Sveegaard shared a GIS programme from her study, indicating that the transition area would need to be much bigger to include all the animals. Mr Evans asked if she could show maps with juveniles separately from the adults to see if it makes any difference? She did so, setting parameters by length (>135cms) to indicate adults, and it was observed that they remain more within the area.

Mr Dähne (Germany) explained that the reasoning for the 13° was the depth of the Arcona Basin and supported 13°. Ms Sveegaard thought that the reasoning for including up to 13.5° was that the SAMBAH stations were a little higher but that in ecological terms it doesn't matter. The Chair, in response to Kenneth Patterson (European Commission), said that traditionally the delimitation between the plans does not take into account seasonal differences.

It was agreed that the Jastarnia plan should extend east from 13°E, and the WBBK plan should cover the area in the Kattegat and Belt Sea from 56.95°N to 13.5°E, so there would be a little overlap between the two plans. It was agreed that when the plans are updated next these changes could be implemented.

## **3. Updates from across the Baltic and Belt Seas**

### **3.1. Joint recommendations from BALTFISH to minimise bycatch of the Baltic Proper Harbour Porpoise**

Kaire Martin (Invited Expert, representing the Estonian BALTFISH Presidency) gave a background on BALTFISH as the Baltic Sea countries regional fisheries body. Speaking first about the recently submitted joint recommendations (JR), she said it had taken a great deal of work to reach agreement on the main distribution areas of the Harbour Porpoise in particular. Ultimately the JR was submitted

in December 2020, considered by STECF in March 2021, and is currently being assessed by the EC.

Ms Martin showed an illustrated map of the agreed distribution areas. She outlined the recommendations of the submitted JR, including: a year-round ban on static net fisheries and no-take zone except for pots, traps, and longlines, in the Midsea and Hogburg Banks; a ban on static net fisheries from November to January in a cluster of German, Polish, and Danish Natura 2000 sites; and obligatory pingers year-round in the extended Puck Bay area.

Discussions on additional mitigation measures would be continued (ICES Recommendation No 5/ADDs/pingers) within BALTFISH, for those areas not covered in JR1. There had been three dedicated meetings, but no agreement has been reached, so more time has been allowed for the member states to discuss these issues again at a high-level BALTFISH meeting in June 2021. An issue had been raised regarding using pingers in particular in national defence sensitive areas (“the defence issue”). The Estonian BALTFISH presidency had therefore put forward a compromise proposal that pingers should be used year-round in ICES Areas 24 and 25 except in the 4 nautical mile area, and from November to April in an area delimited by a line running from the Polish coast at longitude 19°E, thence due north to latitude 57°N, thence due east to longitude 20°E up to the line running from the Swedish coast at latitude 60°30' to the Finnish coast at latitude 61°N. The coastal fishery area was also excluded given that harbour porpoises tend to move in greater depths. She was hopeful that progress could be made in June 2021.

Thanking Ms Martin for her presentation, the Chair invited questions. Discussions after the presentation focused firstly on the “defence issue,” with a number of participants expressing concern and surprise at this being an issue and urging the need to present scientific evidence with at-sea tests to show that this is a real issue.

Ms Martin emphasised that the concern was the large number of pingers which would be in use, and that if pingers could not be used then the only alternative was to ban static net fisheries. She stressed that this was a decision for individual Member States and a compromise that had been hard-won. The only other option was to close down all fisheries and so she felt that a good first step had been made. The challenges of reaching a consensus meant that it was agreed not to make JR2 more strenuous than JR1 and stressed the need to make a first step.

Ms Owen asked for more detail on how pingers were a problem, specifically as opposed to other anthropogenic noise in the ocean. Ms Martin explained that the frequencies used in pingers were used in sonar activities and military equipment which is why excluding the coastal fisheries areas was proposed to reduce the amount of areas in which pingers are being used.

Mr Ritter mentioned the discussion on this topic that took place in the recent meeting of the Scientific Committee of the International Whaling Commission (IWC), where the defence issue caused concern among participants. He hoped for an openness on the side of the defence departments to look into this on a scientific basis. Speaking as Coalition Clean Baltic, Ms Carlén referred to [ASCOBANS/JG17/Inf.8](#), which had been discussed in the IWC Scientific Committee, highlighting the scientific community was concerned about a decision potentially being made without proper scientific investigation. The document included a graph indicating some overlap in frequencies, however also showing that the source level of pingers was low compared to boat sonars which meant that the distance that pinger noise would travel underwater compared to the boat sonar noise was quite low. Ms Carlén noted that many in the current meeting agreed that the conservation of the Baltic Proper Harbour Porpoise was being put at risk over something that had not been scientifically proven and would like to see testing done at sea before any decision was made.

Mr Patterson explained that the military position is that they have evaluated that the use of pingers is a problem and that others do not have the competency to judge whether it is a problem and suggested putting forward options for the conservation of harbour porpoises other than the widespread use of pingers where possible. Ms Owen responded that it was not workable to ask for

another option when there is a recognition that emergency measures are required because this is a critically endangered population.

Elo Rasmann (Invited Expert, representing the Estonian BALTFISH presidency) asked participants whether other governments had asked scientists for input on this issue or whether these decisions were made at the political level in their countries. Several people said they had not been approached by their governments but Ms Kamińska said that in Poland they had made inquiries with their military experts and that the range and noise produced by pingers is not such a problem. In other countries there may be other methodologies for military surveillance.

There was concern raised about the areas represented in the JR maps. Ms Martin emphasised that ICES advice is strictly followed at the political level. Several pointed out, however, that the ICES advice had not been fully followed, with many stressing that it is crucial that there is no bycatch across the whole area given the critical state of the population. The Chair highlighted that on the map Ms Martin had shown, the areas were not extensive enough; there was no buffer zone around the MPAs for example. Ms Carlström said that, although some areas with high detection rates are protected as MPAs, not all areas with high detection rates are protected and approximately 70% of the population is outside the MPAs. Ms Owen, supported by others, emphasised that harbour porpoises do use coastal waters and that the advice did not make an exception for coastal waters. As it states in the ICES advice that even if all emergency measures are implemented it would still not be enough to reach <1 bycatch per year, it is dangerous to water down the ICES advice. She said that in the ICES advice the Harbour Porpoise conservation perspective had already been compromised and urged that as a conservation body ASCOBANS should support following the ICES advice. Mr Gorski spoke on behalf of Ms Pawliczka, recommending to follow the ICES recommendation also for Puck Bay.

Ms Carlström also questioned whether the fisheries were as extensive as was being suggested and shared a map indicating that there are few large fisheries so there would not be such an extensive use. Ms Rasmann and Ms Martin said that the largest effort was of vessels of <12m close to shore which was not included in the map shown. A discussion ensued about how coastal harbour porpoises were. Even though results from SAMBAH modelling didn't render strong fine-scale information on their use of inshore waters, it was known from other harbour porpoise populations elsewhere, as well as local studies and reported sightings from the Baltic region, that they regularly use coastal waters. Therefore it was a valid assumption that the species was at risk in coastal areas.

Mr Ritter pointed out that we were at the end of a very long road where measures that had been scientifically founded had not been implemented for years, which is why the situation was now so dire. This was a conflict between ecology and economy.

Ms Kamińska, supported by Ms Blankett, suggested urging implementation of JR1 and then considering additional measures as a next step. Ms Carlström disagreed, given that in ICES there were extensive discussions on pingers within the Natura2000 site in Puck Bay. Ms Kamińska explained that the compromise reached enlarged the area with bycatch mitigation in Puck Bay compared to the ICES advice. There were a lot of small-scale fisheries in this area who cannot fish anywhere else, and it was hoped that this small bay would not significantly impact porpoise conservation. The compromise was to apply pingers rather than full closures, but the ICES advice had been followed for other areas. Ms Carlström said that ICES advice was to use pingers throughout the areas outside MPAs and that in the formulation of the ICES advice there was already a compromise as they had wanted closure across the entire Puck Bay, but the fisheries representatives were very much against this. The reasoning for having the outer part closed was based on scientific data that this area is very important for the population, so it was critical to have it closed.

### **3.2. Update from the European Commission**

Ursula Krampe (EC Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries - DG MARE) emphasised that the Harbour Porpoise is a high priority for the EC and that the EC is working on Emergency

Measures following the ICES Special Request Advice on Emergency Measures published in May 2020. The EC is also pursuing JRs for the Baltic Harbour Porpoise, with BALTFISH having submitted a JR in December 2020, which was assessed by STECF in March/April 2021. With small differences, the JR implements the ICES advice for closure areas, the Natura 2000 areas, and the STECF concludes that if these measures are implemented then the JR contributes to reducing the unintended incidental catches but does not eliminate them. BALTFISH is drafting a second complementary JR. The EC considers it is of utmost importance to have long-term measures in place and is working closely with BALTFISH on regional recommendations.

Ms Krampe also spoke on the defence issue where the EC had had a meeting with defence experts, underwater noise experts, Member States representatives, and pinger manufacturers to look further into the question of installation of pingers on static nets in the Baltic Sea, but said there was heavy resistance from defence experts, especially from Finland. The EC is actively looking into solutions to this problem, and she assured an update in the near future.

She also spoke on the potential biological removal (PBR) management strategy recommended by ICES stressing that, as no Member State had challenged this advice, except for France about the common dolphin issue in the Bay of Biscay where they applied the 1% ad hoc rule, the EC is planning to ask ICES to provide advice on a standard form of advice on sensitive species based on the current bycatch rate and the PBR which will feed into development of biodiversity restoration targets.

Sophie Ouzet (DG Environment) reported on the ongoing infringement procedure under the Habitat Directive against Sweden, noting that the EC was currently evaluating Sweden's response. The EC was also investigating other Member State compliance with these rules and further legal action was not excluded. The EC was working on the implementation of the main commitments under the EU Biodiversity Strategy and this work on enforcement was complemented by work on guidance for additional MPA designations to meet the Biodiversity Strategy target of 30% of EU waters to be MPAs, 10% of which should be strictly protected. Work also continued on the impact assessment of the legally binding nature restoration targets, which should be proposed by the end of 2021. Ms Ouzet linked to the PBR, stressing the need to set favourable reference values for the species protected under the Habitats Directive and that it is against these favourable reference values that bycatch and the maintenance of the favourable conservation status can be addressed.

Mr Patterson [presented](#) on the EC Action Plan to Conserve Fisheries Resources and Protect Marine Ecosystems (CFP) noting the overall political orientation of the European Green Deal, which has a lot of elements of marine environmental protection as well as land-based actions. It was included in the recent announcement on the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030, in line with the EC's commitment to propose a new action plan to conserve fisheries resources and protect marine ecosystems by 2021.

The CFP included measures to limit fishing gear most harmful to biodiversity and in particular on the seabed, as well as issues of financing, including the European Maritime Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF). It was based on four elements: an analysis of the state of play, under the reporting requirements of the Technical Measures Regulation Article 3; implementation of the Birds and Habitats Directives; implementation of the MSFD and its review; and addressing issues brought up by the EU Court of Auditors in their view on environmental protection.

The starting point on marine ecosystems was that they are under threat, with 65% of seabed habitats protected under the Habitats Directive which are under unfavourable conservation status. For many marine species there were large gaps in knowledge, in particular for cetaceans. The intention was to look at negative effects on the marine environment and incidental catch on marine mammals, reptiles, and all sensitive species. The CFP covered technical measures which include area closures, gear changes, and mitigation measures to reduce impacts on sensitive habitats and species. It was regionalised and had two parts: a set of basic common standards for fishing gears, prohibited fishing gears and some baseline closed areas which are fixed under co-decision; and a range of options where Member States put recommendations to the European Commission and those recommendations are adopted as legislation.

The main issues were selectivity and bycatch: increasing size selectivity of the fisheries; improving species selectivity among commercial species; and reducing and eliminating where possible bycatch of sensitive species, focusing on species which are critically endangered or in unfavourable conservation and environmental status. The EC looks for a broad range of measures addressing this with the priority of using the regionalised measures. On cetaceans, the ICES advice on PBR was not contested by Member States and so the EC thinks it would be useful for ICES to continue building on this advice and take a scientific approach to moving forward with this to help Member States to make decisions.

Mr Patterson emphasised that the EC was aware of the current shortcomings in relation to cetaceans and affirmed that they would be an important element of the CFP. There had been a public consultation with many responses from NGOs, some from academics and researchers, but few from the fishing industry. There had been requests for better use of the ecosystem-based approach, banning harmful practices, the need to involve stakeholders in the process, and the protection of artisanal fisheries.

During 2021 the EC will put forward three documents: an extensive working document looking at the history of species activity in respect of technical measures, looking at sensitive habitats and species with an orientation towards the IUCN Red list and ICES advice (due summer 2021); an executive summary/Technical measures report (due summer 2021); and an action plan which will set out a list of recommendations to Member States on technical measures to improve selectivity (due end of 2021). Member States would have two years to implement those measures and this reporting process will happen every three years.

Mr Ritter welcomed the presence of three representatives from the EC at JG17. He asked what the timeline was for the decision from the EC on JR1. He also informed that on JR2 he had learnt from the German Agriculture and Fisheries Ministry that there would be a significant delay due to the "defence issue". On the infringement procedure, he assumed that given the poor performance of many Member States on porpoise protection there were likely to be infringement procedures against other Member States. He commented that the rejection of the SAMBAH II LIFE project seemed at odds with the fact that the EC considered that bycatch of porpoises in the Baltic Proper in particular was a core issue. WDC had never been a fan of the PBR approach. There was scientific evidence that even one bycaught animal was too much for the Baltic population to withstand and PBR was not an appropriate approach for that population in particular.

Ms Krampe said there was no final timeline for the decision on JR1 but that there is an urgency and emergency measure is still in the pipeline. Ms Ouzet confirmed that the EC was also investigating compliance of other Member States and is assessing the replies from France and Spain to a bycatch infringement in relation to the Bay of Biscay in particular. In general, there are many instances of non-compliance with monitoring measures. On PBR, she asserted that there is work to be done to coordinate at the regional level to assess the favourable reference values and targets to achieve a favourable conservation status

On the SAMBAH II LIFE project, Ms Krampe only felt able to say that CINEA<sup>5</sup> was independent in its evaluation and encouraged getting in touch with them to find out the application shortcomings to be able to improve on the points when the proposal is resubmitted. The project was much needed and was going in the right direction fully to support conservation action. Mr Patterson said there can be a conflict between scientific projects, which need to be innovative, and monitoring projects, which should not be, suggesting that it would be worth considering the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF) instead, which supported a wide range of activities, including data collection and monitoring.

Ms Carlström noted that within OMMEG, the PBR concept has been developed further with the aim of applying it to the OSPAR bycatch indicators. One of the reasons that the PBR had not been

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<sup>5</sup> European Climate, Infrastructure and Environment Executive Agency

applied as is in Europe is that the conservation objectives of the US PBR were not in line with the ASCOBANS conservation objectives. If the PBR is applied as it is then the ASCOBANS conservation objectives are not being fulfilled. Scientists have been asking for many years to complete the ASCOBANS objective with no momentum from countries. OMMEG had used the incomplete ASCOBANS conservation objectives as a starting point, with the PBR being adapted through simulations and it was being trialled in the OSPAR region. Within the HELCOM BLUES project OSPAR has a task to try to apply it for the Belt Sea population. OSPAR countries are currently commenting on this. An action point was agreed on hearing more on this during JG18.

The EC was not preferring PBR over any other reference point, it is simply that the PBR within the ICES advice seems acceptable to Member States and so the EC has asked ICES to begin work from PBR or whatever conservation parameter that ICES puts forward. He suggested feeding into the ICES process and explained that the importance for the EC is that Member States agree on a conservation criteria for cetaceans that can be adopted as a “good environmental status” (GES) under the MSFD. He said that there was no specific timeline as the EC is asking for conservation criteria for all the sensitive species, so it is a huge iterative task. Ms Ouzet reminded that for species protected under the Habitats Directive, Member States were required to set favourable reference values.

### **3.3. Overview of HELCOM matters related to harbour porpoises**

Laura Kaikkonen (HELCOM) presented an update of the HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan (BSAP) with several actions related to harbour porpoises, and noted that HELCOM was also running the project HELCOM BLUES on dataflows and core indicators, the expert group on Marine Mammals (EG MAMA), and the expert network on Underwater Noise (EN NOISE).

HELCOM had been revising the BSAP to “achieve a Baltic Sea in Good Environmental Status by 2021.” In 2019 and 2020, HELCOM received potential new actions from Contracting Parties, international projects, HELCOM observers, and the HELCOM 2020 Stakeholder Conference. Finalisation of the actions for the updated BSAP were ongoing, and actions concerning the Harbour Porpoise were under the biodiversity and sea-based activities segments. The updated BSAP was to be approved by Heads of Delegation meeting (HOD 60-2021) held on 3-4 June 2021 and was expected to be adopted by HELCOM Ministerial Meeting in October 2021.

The BSAP proposed measures include: by 2022 at the latest, to specify knowledge gaps on all threats to the Baltic Proper Harbour Porpoise population and, by 2023, for the WBBK population, including bycatch and areas of high bycatch risk, underwater noise, contaminants, and prey depletion; to strengthen the Baltic Harbour Porpoise population by 2025 identifying possible mitigation measures for threats other than bycatch and implementing such measures as they become available; to update and harmonise the 2016 BALTFIMPA decision-support tool approach with ongoing initiatives; and to ensure that by 2030 the HELCOM MPA network inter alia provides specific protection to species and biotopes listed as regionally threatened or near threatened in the HELCOM Red Lists.

There were also a number of measures to do with bycatch, including: cooperating with BALTFISH in order to promote effective mitigation measures to minimise bycatch; testing new bycatch mitigation measures; enhancing monitoring efforts; implementing operational conservation measures for the Belt Sea population of harbour porpoise; and implementing an effective data collection for more reliable data on bycaught birds and mammals.

On the ACTION Project, Work Package 1 included identifying high-risk areas for bycatch of mammals and birds, evaluating technical measures to reduce bycatch of harbour porpoise and estimating the effect and cost of these mitigation measures; focusing on the southern Baltic Sea Harbour Porpoise and a number of bird species; bycatch risk map development based on logbook data and porpoise distribution. The final report was available [online](#). Some of the key results include that there are significant levels of bycatch estimated for mammals and birds in all assessed areas

and that there are larger bycatch estimates than previous studies which are likely due to the inclusion of fishing effort of smaller vessels which are a large component of Baltic fleets.

On HELCOM BLUES project (Activity 2.4 on the Harbour Porpoise), Ms Kaikkonen summarised the key activities in 2021, including collating data and analysing trends which will contribute to the qualitative assessment of harbour porpoise abundance (to include in the Third HELCOM Holistic Assessment of the Baltic Sea environment, HOLAS III).

HELCOM had its own dataflows project going on with tasks including extending the HELCOM Biodiversity database model to be suitable for storing acoustic monitoring data on harbour porpoise and also to harmonise storing of information on monitoring efforts as there are quite a few differences between the Contracting Parties data processing and aggregation practices.

There was a State and Conservation intersessional meeting<sup>6</sup> in March 2021 looking at the status and development of core indicators on bycatch, harbour porpoise abundance and distribution (under development in HELCOM Blues), and marine mammal health status. There had been a lot of work in developing indicators in particular to the variables which don't have indicators such as for bycatch where the indicator was currently under development in parallel with the OSPAR indicator.

The EG MAMA 14-2020 Outcome was available [here](#), with one of the key outcomes being recommendation 17/2 adopted by HELCOM in 2020. The next meeting would be held on 14-16 September 2021 and there had been two intersessional meetings (HELCOM MAMA 14A ([Outcome](#)) and 14B ([Outcome](#)) on harbour porpoise data processing.

The Regional Action Plan (RAP) on underwater noise and accompanying Recommendation have been endorsed and hopefully will be adopted with the BSAP in late 2021. She also referred to EN NOISE (networking) national reporting to the HELCOM continuous noise database and impulsive noise registry and its relevance for underwater noise assessments in HOLAS III, as well as Activity 4 on underwater noise within the HELCOM BLUES project.

In subsequent discussions, the Chair queried why there were two separate maps on harbour porpoises in the [HELCOM Map and data service](#) with Ms Kaikkonen noting there had been some gaps in the HELCOM/ASCOBANS database and that she would come back later with an answer. The Chair suggested they should aim to have one database.

Mr Ritter asked whether HELCOM had heard about the "defence issue" allegations around interference between military sonars and pingers. Ms Kaikkonen explained that for HELCOM everything to do with underwater noise was in the very early stages, focusing on getting monitoring in place as there had not been joint monitoring. She believed that EN Noise group were aware but would pass this question on to them.

Ms Kamińska gave an update on the HELCOM bycatch indicator development, noting that currently there was an ongoing discussion about using ICES data and hope to use the next Regional Coordination Group meeting to reach this agreement.

### **3.4. SAMBAH II LIFE Update**

Mr Dähne expressed deep disappointment that the SAMBAH II LIFE application to the EU LIFE programme had not been successful, noting that the chances of getting a review seemed very slim and that he hoped that there would be agreement on making a further application. He explained that the project did not meet a sufficient number of points in particular in one category even though the scientific part of the evaluation was very good. The Chair expressed hope that the work done can be used when re-submitting the proposal.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://portal.helcom.fi/meetings/STATE%20-%20CONSERVATION%2013E-2021-830/default.aspx>

In her update, Ms Owen expressed her confusion and disappointment at the decision, saying that she felt the criticism of the proposal was not justified. She said she would be surprised if there would be a different outcome if they reapplied as it fit perfectly within the funding scheme. She asked country representatives whether they wanted to reapply or to use the 40% that is already secured for the purposes of the SAMBAH II LIFE project to start at least some of the higher priority tasks. Mr Dähne clarified that the 40% funding was not guaranteed for all countries. Most of the countries applied for co-funding under the LIFE+ project so all the funding that would have been available for the LIFE project is not available for harbour porpoises. It may be possible to start something new in between but he was hesitant to suggest that it would be possible to address all the original tasks.

Mr Dähne felt there was some merit to the review, the scientific part of the proposal was well-received but there were questions raised which were not clear and they would raise issues such as the methodology to address the particular approach to shipping costs, for example. Unfortunately there was no option to address the questions before the final decision was made. These issues would need to be clarified before any re-submission. He thanked all who had been involved in the huge task of preparing the proposal.

The Chair proposed retaining with slight amendments the action point on the SAMBAH II LIFE project, and agreed that the JG will support the project and urge countries to do the same.

Mr Patterson expressed concern that the project was not going ahead and that EC structures were not delivering any long-term monitoring process for sensitive species. He asked how the SCANS surveys are funded. Mr Dähne explained that SCANS I and II were funded by the LIFE funding scheme, but it was then deemed as a long-term monitoring programme and that it should be funded only by the countries through local monitoring funding, even though they are large roaming species. It has been an ongoing challenge to coordinate funding when there was no longer EU support. Mr Patterson asked whether there was any possibility of the Member States supporting SAMBAH II LIFE. Mr Dähne said it was very unlikely. There had been a request from Russia to join but this did not go ahead, which was disappointing as, even as a non-EU country, the scope of these tasks go beyond European waters. There was a long-standing monitoring programme in Germany fully supported by the German government, which is needed to react to short-term monitoring programmes, but there is a need for pan-European large-scale projects that cover the whole population.

Ms Carlström added that the SCANS IV application was part of the MMANA (Marine Mammal Assessment in the North-east Atlantic) project application. Due to a technical issue the application never reached the EU and so SCANS IV was being planned again using national funding only. However, when SCANS III was downsized to national funding, the countries only carried out the monitoring and calculation of abundance aspects of the project, not other tasks such as indicator work, acoustics, or evaluation of alternative monitoring methods, which were also needed.

Mr Dähne said that the LIFE funding scheme was a good one for these projects, if the application process was a bit more transparent. There were different kinds of co-funding available in different countries, which was also an obstacle as the SAMBAH II LIFE team had to find out how to do this for each country.

### **3.5. Workshop on Management of MPAs for Small Cetaceans**

The Chair [presented](#) on the ASCOBANS Workshop on Management of MPAs for Small Cetaceans. At the 25<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the ASCOBANS Advisory Committee, there was a discussion on the need to have more information available on how to manage MPAs for small cetaceans, including a toolbox for those not really working with cetaceans but have the responsibility to manage MPAs. It was originally planned to take place in April 2020, but had been postponed on account of COVID. It went ahead online, with the first session on 18 May 2021 and the second planned for 7-9 June 2021.

The aims of the workshop were two-fold: to give examples of conservation objectives which would be useful in relation to follow-up on whether measures are working; and to create a toolbox of

conservation measures for different types of threats for cetaceans. The report will be available after the summer of 2021.

Ms Ouzet expressed her thanks and said the objective of the workshop was coherent with what we need for MPAs and protected species and cetaceans in the marine environment. It fitted within the agenda of the EU bio-geographical process to support and promote the results of transboundary cooperation.

### 3.6. Updates on recent research

#### Temporal trend analysis comparing the detection rates of the Baltic Proper population during SAMBAH to those measured during the Swedish National Monitoring Programme (SNMP)

Ms Owen [presented](#) the results from a study completed with Ms Carlström and Martin Sköld from the SMNH on “An increase in detection of the critically endangered Baltic Proper harbour porpoise in Swedish waters in recent years.” The aim was to compare the detection rates in May-October (the breeding season) between the SAMBAH project (2011-2013) and the Swedish national monitoring program (2017-2020), to determine the trend, estimate the power to detect a 5% change over 10 years, and estimate the number of years required to have an 80% power to detect a 5% change in this region.

On average, they found a 29% increase in the detection positive hours/day compared to the SAMBAH data. A trend was present in the three stations with sufficient porpoise detections to compare across all years, and a combined increase of 2.4%/year was observed at these stations.

The three stations used in the trend analysis had >80% power to detect a 5% change over ten years. However, considering each station individually it would take approximately fifteen years to have enough power to detect a 5% change which supports the need to have continuous monitoring. She concluded that there is a potential indication that the decline may have stalled, or that the population has started to increase. The trend is much lower than what is possible for harbour porpoise populations that are healthy and free from threats. It was not possible to draw conclusions about the abundance, however, as these are only detection rates over part of the range.

There is still an urgent need for measures to reduce the threats, establish new abundance estimates and gain better data on bycatch rates, for example. The study<sup>7</sup> was published open access in mid-May 2021.

The Chair said this was encouraging news. Mr Ritter welcomed the study and said it looks promising and asked whether the porpoise detections had been correlated with environmental factors. Ms Owen explained that they had not yet done any habitat modelling or comparisons except for investigating the impact of a change in temperature, and had held off doing further analyses as they were hoping for the SAMBAH II LIFE application to complete a similar analysis at a much larger scale. Potentially now that SAMBAH II LIFE was not funded they might prioritise it. She acknowledged that they were working in an area which is a hotspot and that Denmark and Poland have also seen an increase. She hoped that this shows that implementation of measures quickly would have an impact and that the population is not beyond the point of saving.

The Chair proposed an action point for JG18 would be for Germany and Poland to report on similar studies.

#### Microplastic findings in harbour porpoises from the North Sea and the Baltic Sea

Carolin Philipp (Institute for Terrestrial and Aquatic Wildlife Research, University of Veterinary Medicine Hannover, Germany) [presented](#) the results of a study showing the first evidence of retrospective findings of microplastics in harbour porpoises in German waters.

<sup>7</sup> <https://conbio.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/csp2.468>

Microplastics are synthesised particles <5mm and which can be distinguished between fibres and fragments. While there have been studies in the Netherlands and the UK, this was the first study in the Baltic Sea. Since links between microplastics and health status are scarce, the study tried to determine potential links or correlations between these two aspects.

The survey area was the coastline of Germany (including the North Sea and the Baltic Sea) and they investigated harbour seals, grey seals, and harbour porpoises, but for the purposes of this talk she would focus on the latter in the Baltic Sea. She described the process and said they had collected samples from 2014 onward and gained relatively clean results whereby they could identify the microplastic particles. The results of the study have been published<sup>8</sup>.

Ms Phillip explained harbour porpoises in the Baltic Sea had double the amount of microplastics found in the North Sea individuals. There were no significant differences considering sex or age, although further investigation might find such differences as this was really a pilot study.

She showed a graph indicating microplastic burden supporting the hypothesis that a good nutritional status relates to a higher microplastic load, presumably since the animals are feeding to maintain this nutritional status so are exposed to a higher microplastic load. The study had also identified high levels of polyester, polypropylene, and polyethylene. Potential sources of these microplastic findings are lost fibres of washed clothes or of decayed fishing gear and packaging material. This coincided with results from studies on beach plastics. She concluded that there is a higher level of microplastics in harbour porpoises in the Baltic Sea than the North Sea. There appeared to be no accumulation over the lifespan and there is a link between a good nutritional status and microplastic load, suggesting that a favoured prey/feeding strategy might play a role. There is a need to continue the study to analyse a larger sample size.

Mr Evans asked whether there was any evidence of a negative impact of microplastics. Ms Philipp said there was no indication of specific impacts from the particles themselves as they are quite small and the animals have large intestinal tracts, but that there is a lack of proper techniques to identify lesions in the intestinal tissue. What was known was that microplastics accumulate a lot of pollutants, thus acting as a vector, which is the higher impact of microplastics, but such effects were not included in this study. Ms Philipp said that they would like to do more studies on the correlation between the pollutant load and the microplastic load but that this depends on funding.

#### STELLA: Behavioural studies with harbour porpoises in relation to gillnets in Denmark

Isabella Kratzer (Thünen Institute, Germany) gave a presentation on research done by DTU Aqua (Denmark) and the German Maritime Museum into modifications to gillnets to reduce harbour porpoise bycatch as part of the STELLA project. The aim was to find an acoustically reflective adaptation to gillnets that did not reduce the efficiency in catching fish.

The research started in 2017, looking at how to make gillnets more visible to harbour porpoises by developing an acoustically visible gillnet, which led to the invention of attaching acrylic glass spheres (8mm), to create a modified net, now known as pearl net. Initial theoretical experimental results showed that it was feasible, so a short pilot trial was carried out in a commercial fishery in the Black Sea in Turkey, with ten hauls, finding a marked reduction in the number of harbour porpoises caught in the pearl net compared to the standard net, though the results were not statistically significant.

The next step, in summer 2021, will be to investigate further why harbour porpoises are still caught in the pearl nets by doing a behavioural study comparing the situation between no net, the standard net, and the pearl net around the island of Funen (Denmark) and, if possible, to also to combine the pearl net with PALs (porpoise alerting device) and LED lights. They would like to use theodolites to

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<sup>8</sup> Philipp et al. (2021). First Evidence of Retrospective Findings of Microplastics in Harbour Porpoises (*Phocoena phocoena*) from German Waters, <https://doi.org/10.3389/fmars.2021.682532>

do some visual tracking and also C-PODs and SoundTraps for acoustic tracking, and she invited collaboration in acoustic data analysis.

The second part of the project concerned the automated production of pearl nets. So far, they had been making the nets by hand but now have had meetings with net producers, polymer specialists, and a textile research institute. They think the automated function is feasible but requires additional research and so they plan to apply for funding to develop the automated process. She said they are open to collaborations and connections, and invited participants to reach out to the Thünen Institute.

Ms Sveegaard mentioned that there is evidence that harbour porpoise do see the nets but that they might not notice it if they are distracted by hunting, for example. She asked if they had carried out trials with different sphere sizes and how they measured what could be seen. Ms Kratzer suggested they might just see the float line so they are trying to make the whole net acoustically visible, so the animals realise it is a barrier. She said that this is why they are hoping to test the net combined with PALs or LED lights. They had found that 8mm was the best size through experiments in an acoustic tank. She referred to a master's thesis in Sweden in 2019/2020 where they used pearl nets with different distances between spheres, indicating that the pearls do have an effect on the porpoises, and they stay further away from the pearl net.

Ms Kamińska welcomed that this would be easily implemented by fishers and asked whether they had observed any changes in the catch efficiency of the gear. Ms Kratzer explained that they do not have extensive results on this as yet. Ms Mel Cosentino (Whalesafari, Norway) asked whether they had considered using drones to monitor the behaviour, with Ms Kratzer saying that they had used a kind of helicam but that it is a matter of available personnel as to whether they can use this again.

#### DPorCCA: the porpoise translator – new algorithms to detect click production patterns in continuous PAM data and to identify behaviours

Ms Cosentino presented results from her doctoral research on the identification of click production patterns from continuous Passive Acoustic Monitoring (PAM) data, and how these patterns could be used to detect behaviours. The algorithms are incorporated into a standalone desktop application: DPorCCA, the porpoise translator.

She explained that the background to her research was that she knew of a number of studies showing that patterns of click production was indicative of Harbour Porpoise behaviour, but that there was a knowledge gap and no tools existed to analyse the patterns. Her doctoral research focused therefore on developing those tools and describing the patterns found.

Harbour porpoises produce clicks in click trains – a series of clicks with regular or gradually changing inter-click intervals – but there is no real definition for this. Some of the patterns are known, and they are divided into three main categories: orientation, foraging, and socialising. Not so much was known about socialising and some of the patterns overlap between these categories.

The aims of her PhD were to develop a classifier, as well as an algorithm to extract the underlying patterns and identify behaviours. She used two data sets: one with data collected over a couple of years from the Firth of Clyde, Scotland; and one from 2015 from two locations in Denmark.

Various patterns relating to behaviour such as foraging and feeding were identified, and others that could be behavioural ones including: v-shaped, upsweep, downsweep, short and long, phrases, as well as unknown patterns. She had then developed a desktop app<sup>9</sup> for easy use. She concluded by saying that the results of the study can help conservation as they can be used for behavioural studies.

Mr Evans asked if she intended to link video footage to the research to connect the acoustic patterns to behaviour and Ms Cosentino said she hoped to do so dependent on funding for a post-doc. Mr

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<sup>9</sup> <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1XU8MuMkfrw37khCKR0xYzMNwVa5o3ZzL/edit>

Ritter welcomed the study and highlighted the complexity of porpoise communication, and noted the potential of using this understanding for interactive porpoise noise pingers. Ms Cosentino referred to a presentation at the Biennial Conference on the Biology of Marine Mammals in December 2019, where researchers had used a recording of a female call and all bycaught animals were males, indicating they were attracted to that call so agreed that it could be useful if it is first known the call would deter animals instead of attracting them.

Ms Brtnik asked if she had found a difference in the calls from different areas. Ms Cosentino said she was in the process of analysing data from the three areas in her research.

### MiniSCANS

Ms Sveegaard presented the upcoming results of the MiniSCANS survey in the Belt Sea, noting that there have been four different surveys. SCANS-I in 1994 and SCANS-II in 2005, showing a major decline in abundance between the two and resulting in the decision to repeat the survey as a MiniSCANS in 2012, which indicated a small increase. In 2016 SCANS-III was repeated for almost the same area and showed a similar result, which led to the conclusion that there was a fairly stable population. In order to report under the Habitat Directive, the surveys are being repeated every six years leading to the latest MiniSCANS in 2020.

All previous surveys (SCANS 1994, SCANS-II 2005, MiniSCANS 2012 and SCANS-III 2016) were conducted by ship and the transects were laid out randomly. Some areas were poorly covered due to bad weather. The extent of the covered area is very different for the different surveys. In 2015 the paper by Sveegaard et al. recommended an MU area which is the area from 2016 onwards.

In the latest 2020 MiniSCANS survey, which was a collaboration between Denmark, Germany, and Sweden, the population management area was covered as well as part of the transition area to the north. The method was changed to aerial survey which means the area can be covered more thoroughly. Over the 50,000km sq area there were 224 sightings, with many calves. There were some areas where high densities of Harbour Porpoises were expected, but where densities were low. During the survey period active pile driving for a windfarm was carried out, which led to three particular areas which are known to have high densities having no sightings. This could be a change in distribution but seems unlikely. She concluded that the number of sightings was lower than in previous surveys, but given the amount of variation around the surveys, it is difficult to explain or assess whether this is a permanent reduction. Some fishers indicated that they did not catch any fish in the Great Belt in 2020 or any bycatch of harbour porpoise, which may have to do with the decrease in sightings in this area. The recommendation is to redo this area in SCANS-IV.

Ms Sveegaard said the report would be finalised and published soon, and that SCANS-IV would be carried out with national funding in 2022. The Chair asked Ms Sveegaard to present the results to JG18, which was agreed.

## **4. ASCOBANS MOP9 Resolutions**

The Secretariat [reported](#) on 11 relevant Resolutions adopted at the 9<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Parties (MOP9) to ASCOBANS:

- [Res.9.1](#) *Work Plan for the ASCOBANS AC and Secretariat 2021-24*
- [Res.9.2](#) *Baltic Proper Harbour Porpoise* which, inter alia, urges Parties to fully implement the Jastarnia Plan
- [Res.9.3](#) *Marine Debris* addressing, inter alia, single use plastic and lost fishing gear
- [Res.9.4](#) *Food Availability and Resource Depletion* encouraging Parties to prioritise relevant monitoring assessment and research
- [Res.8.5 \(Rev.MOP9\)](#) *Monitoring and Mitigation of Small Cetacean Bycatch* that calls upon Parties to decide a management procedure approach to ensure that ASCOBANS targets are met

- [Res.8.10 \(Rev.MOP9\)](#) *Small Cetacean Stranding Response*, adopting the *Best Practice on Cetacean Post-mortem Investigation and Tissue Sampling* protocol
- [Res 8.11 \(Rev.MOP9\)](#) adopting the *CMS Family Guidelines on Environmental Impact Assessment for Marine Noise-Generating Activities*.

## 5. Draft proposal to list the Baltic Proper Harbour Porpoise to CMS Appendix I

The Secretariat introduced this Agenda Item on the draft proposal to list the Baltic Proper Harbour Porpoise on CMS Appendix 1, noting that JG16 had requested that this draft proposal be discussed at JG17 to follow up to see which country could be the proponent for the next CMS COP. The draft proposal found in [ASCOBANS/JG17/Inf.5a](#) was presented at AC24 in 2018 – and [ASCOBANS/JG17/Inf.5b](#) showed the form for proposals. The deadline for listing proposals is 150 days before the COP and the next COP is in 2023.

The Chair said that there is already a draft proposal so the country volunteering would not have to do a lot of work, and Ms Blankett said that Finland would likely be able to be the proponent, potentially with Sweden as discussed during MOP9. Susanne Viker (Sweden) confirmed that Sweden would take this task on with Finland. Ms Blankett noted that EU coordination deadlines would be crucial in terms of submitting the listing proposal.

It was agreed to retain the existing action point on this matter.

## 6. Terms of Reference for the Jastarnia Group

The Chair introduced this item, reminding participants that a formal issue with the Terms of Reference for the JG had been raised, in that the JG Terms of Reference as published on the ASCOBANS website made no reference to the WBBK action plan. The Secretariat shared [ASCOBANS/JG17/Doc.6](#) with appropriate updates for the member's consideration.

The document was agreed to be submitted to AC26, with one clarifying amendment to the introductory phrase “The Conservation Plan for the Harbour Porpoise population in the Western Baltic, the Belt Sea and the Kattegat” to add “This population is also known as the Belt Sea population.”

## 7. Review and update of Action Points

The Chair conducted a review of the Action Points table. The list was shared on screen and each Action Point was discussed in turn. Amendments were shown using the ‘track changes’ function. In some cases, no changes were made, while in others, more substantive edits were made and new Action Points were added. The Action Points table can be found in Annex 1 of this report.

In a similar process, each Internal Action Point was discussed. The finalised Internal Action Points can be found in Annex 2 to this report.

## 8. Any Other Business

Ms Sveegaard proposed having a European workshop on consolidating views from the scientific community on minimum standards, thresholds, and information needed for impact assessments of different threats to small cetaceans. Mr Dähne supported setting thresholds, noting that Germany has set standards for windfarms, which provide a threshold to work with and reduce the ability to negotiate around it. Germany had introduced the ‘polluter pays’ principle during a recent MPA workshop (see agenda item 3.5), which turns around the burden of proof. He asserted that this needs to be applied into law throughout Europe to avoid a patchwork legislative landscape. Mr Sveegaard suggested there would need to be scientific guidelines on thresholds. Mr Evans also suggested

considering the cumulative effects and what the thresholds might be if there is more than one impact, which makes it more complicated yet important.

Ms Sveegaard suggested a common recommendation about the current practice that assumes there are safe periods where animals are less prone to bycatch, stating there is no so-called safe period. Mr Evans added that Dan Costa and colleagues at the University of Santa Cruz (USA) are now working on Harbour Porpoises to try and get a more refined consequence of disturbance model to take account of energetic costs and costs in terms of life history parameters along the lines of what they have done elsewhere in the world for other species. He proposed keeping in touch with them to see how that develops over the next few years.

The Secretariat said it could be a recommendation to the AC that ASCOBANS support Denmark in organising such a workshop and it was added as an internal action point.

Mr Ritter then reported on a recent scientific workshop co-hosted by the IWC and CMS on the ecosystem functions of cetaceans. Presentations highlighted the roles of cetaceans within the ecosystem and their contribution to ecosystem health and ecosystem services (including provision of nutrients over large areas, both horizontally and vertically, and their contribution to blue carbon). He said there is a need for more science on the issue and that the overarching theme of the ecosystem role will increase in the scientific arena in the future, and this provides an additional conservation argument, clarifying and emphasising that healthy oceans need healthy populations of cetaceans. He would be happy to circulate the report once it is published. Ms Blankett noted linkages to many ongoing initiatives such as the Convention on Biological Diversity post-2020 strategy as well as the International Seabed Authority and marine biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction (BBNJ) negotiations.

Ms Pawliczka gave a report from a ceremony that had been organised to unveil the memory plaque on the “Harbour Porpoise House” for Professor Krzysztof Skóra on the 5<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his death. COVID meant that it had to be very small and intimate event and shared photographs showing the dedication as “In grateful memory of our dear colleague and friend Prof Krzysztof Skóra whose vision, creativity, energy, enthusiasm and passion for the cause of cetacean conservation will remain a source of inspiration and encouragement to us all.”

## **9. Date and venue of the 18<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Jastarnia Group**

The Secretariat said that Sweden had offered to host JG16 and 17, both of which had to be held online due to the pandemic, and enquired whether Sweden would be willing to host the JG18 in 2022. Ms Carlström confirmed Sweden was happy to and the Secretariat thanked Sweden for continuing to extend the offer to host.

The Secretariat showed some possible dates, with 5-7 April 2022 being approved as tentative dates, and saying these dates would be confirmed with Sweden.

## **10. Close of the Meeting**

The Chair thanked everyone for participating, appreciating their commitment, and declared proceedings closed at 15.00 CET.

**Annex 1: Action Points from 17<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Jastarnia Group**

**Jastarnia and WBBK Plans**

*(to be presented to the 26<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Advisory Committee)*

Reference	Action Point (old reference)	Jastarnia Plan		WBBK Plan	
		App lies	Mandate	App lies	Mandate
JG17/AP1	Parties shall establish or further improve local and national monitoring programmes for Harbour Porpoise abundance and 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. (updated JG16/AP1)	X	<b>MON-01:</b> Implement and harmonize long-term continual acoustic Harbour Porpoise monitoring	X	<b>Objective d:</b> Monitoring the status of the population
JG17/AP2	All Parties, and other countries bordering the Baltic Sea, are strongly encouraged to support SAMBAH-II, specifically in terms of fundraising, in order for a project proposal to be submitted in 2021 and for the project to start in 2022. Noting that management authorities are required to be formal partners for a potential SAMBAH-II LIFE re-application. (updated JG16/AP2)	X			
JG17/AP3	Parties are strongly encouraged to continue to undertake and cooperate on the SCANS surveys, including the upcoming SCANS IV, planned for 2022.				X
JG17/AP4	Parties are strongly encouraged to use the data provided by SAMBAH, national monitoring programmes, and acoustic research projects, in particular in connection with the establishment evaluation of MPAs for Harbour Porpoises, as well as with regard to management plans and mitigation measures. (updated JG16/AP4)	X	<b>MIT-06:</b> 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		
JG17/AP5	Parties should investigate possible detrimental effects of various types of sound and disturbance on Harbour	X	<b>RES-07:</b> Improve knowledge on impact of impulsive and continuous	X	<b>Objective e:</b> Ensuring habitat quality favourable to the conservation of

Reference	Action Point (old reference)	Jastarnia Plan		WBBK Plan	
		App lies	Mandate	App lies	Mandate
	Porpoises and their detection (including pinger signals, noise from vessels, seismic surveys, underwater explosions, 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. (updated JG16/AP5)		anthropogenic underwater noise on Harbour Porpoises, and development of threshold limits of significant disturbance and GES indicators		the Harbour Porpoise
JG17/AP6	Parties are encouraged to seek cooperation with the HELCOM EN NOISE to develop HELCOM-wide harmonized national regulations on sound emissions associated with anthropogenic activities in the marine environment. Such regulations should set upper limits to sound emissions and be consistent with the relevant Indicators for Good Environmental Status to be developed for the Marine Strategy Framework Directive. Parties are also encouraged to develop HELCOM-wide coordinated guidelines for noise mitigation, taking into account the CMS Family Guidelines on Environmental Impact Assessments for Marine Noise-generating Activities. (updated JG16/AP6).	X	<b>MIT-05:</b> Implement regionally harmonized national threshold limits and guidelines for regulation of underwater noise	X	<b>Rec. 11:</b> Restore or maintain habitat quality
JG17/AP7	Parties are required to establish systems to effectively monitor bycatch covering all sizes of fishing vessels, in line with the HELCOM Roadmap on fisheries data in order to assess incidental bycatch and fisheries impact on benthic biotopes in the Baltic Sea and the ICES Special Request Advice on emergency measures to prevent bycatch of common dolphin and Baltic Proper harbour porpoise in the Northeast Atlantic. (JG16/AP8)	X	<b>MON-03:</b> Monitor and estimate Harbour Porpoise bycatch rates and estimate total annual bycatch	X	<b>Rec.6:</b> Estimate total annual bycatch
JG17/AP8	Parties are strongly encouraged to carry out spatio-temporal risk-assessments of Harbour Porpoise bycatch using Harbour	X	<b>RES-04:</b> Carry out a spatio-temporal risk assessment of	X	

Reference	Action Point (old reference)	Jastarnia Plan		WBBK Plan	
		App lies	Mandate	App lies	Mandate
	Porpoise distribution and fishing effort data. (JG16/AP10)		Harbour Porpoise bycatch		
JG17/AP9	Parties should implement and where needed further develop, in cooperation with stakeholders, any available fishing gear that does not cause, or is shown to significantly reduce, harbour porpoise bycatch, and strive to replace static nets with such alternative gear, especially in MPAs, as soon as possible. (updated JG16/AP11)	X	<b>RES-05:</b> Further develop and improve fishing gear that is commercially viable with no Harbour Porpoise bycatch <b>MIT-01:</b> Implement the use of fishing gear that is commercially viable with no Harbour Porpoise bycatch	X	<b>Objective b:</b> Mitigation of bycatch
JG17/AP10	For occasions where alternative gear is not sufficient to eliminate harbour porpoise bycatch, Parties should promote the development of pingers not audible to seals and alerting devices other than pingers. (updated JG16/AP13)	X	<b>RES-05:</b> Further develop and improve fishing gear that is commercially viable with no Harbour Porpoise bycatch	X	<b>Objective b:</b> Mitigation of bycatch
JG17/AP11	Parties should monitor the use and functioning of dedicated harbour porpoise deterrent and alerting devices, including studies to assess their effect on bycatch reduction and on harbour porpoise behaviour and distribution. (updated JG16/AP11)	X	<b>MIT-03:</b> Continue or implement the use of acoustic deterrent devices (pingers) and acoustic alerting devices proven to be successful when and where deemed appropriate <b>RES-06:</b> Improve the knowledge on potential population-level effects of the use of pingers, and develop acoustic devices for bycatch mitigation further	X	<b>Rec. 9:</b> Ensure a non-detrimental use of pingers by examining habitat exclusion and long-term effects of pingers

Reference	Action Point (old reference)	Jastarnia Plan		WBBK Plan	
		App lies	Mandate	App lies	Mandate
JG17/AP12	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, or introduce effective mitigation measures shown to significantly reduce or eliminate bycatch. (JG16/AP15)	X	<b>MIT-02:</b> 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	<b>Rec.3:</b> Protect Harbour Porpoises in their key habitats in minimizing bycatch as far as possible <b>Rec.5:</b> Where possible replace gillnet fisheries known to be associated with high porpoise bycatch with alternative fishing gear known to be less harmful
JG17/AP13	Parties are encouraged to coordinate and standardize monitoring of stranded and bycaught animals, determining the appropriate number of animals to be necropsied in each country, ensuring that health, contaminant load, life-history parameters and cause of death is examined in a coherent manner, and that tissue samples are collected from all carcasses from the Baltic Proper harbour porpoise distribution range. (JG16/AP16)	X	<b>MON-04:</b> Collect dead specimens and assess health status, contaminant levels, cause of mortality and life-history parameters of Harbour Porpoises	X	<b>Rec.8:</b> Monitor population health status, contaminant load and causes of mortality
JG17/AP14	Request the Advisory Committee to consider harmonization of what kind of samples to collect based on the level of decomposition of the carcass. Possibly to be included in the ASCOBANS-ACCOBAMS <i>Best practice on cetacean post-mortem investigation and tissue sampling</i> .	X	<b>MON-04:</b> Collect dead specimens and assess health status, contaminant levels, cause of mortality and life-history parameters of harbour porpoises	X	<b>Rec.8</b> Monitor population health status, contaminant load and causes of mortality
JG17/AP15	All Parties and range states should establish programmes for recording bycatch, strandings and opportunistic sightings for inclusion in a national database, and report annually to the ASCOBANS/HELCOM database. (JG16/AP17)	X	<b>PACB-01:</b> Improve communication and education for increased public awareness and collection of live observations and dead specimens of the Baltic Harbour Porpoise	X	<b>Objective d:</b> Monitoring the status of the population

Reference	Action Point (old reference)	Jastarnia Plan		WBBK Plan	
		App lies	Mandate	App lies	Mandate
JG17/AP16	ASCOBANS should join efforts with HELCOM to liaise with the European Commission and other relevant bodies to improve the implementation by Member States of the EU Technical Measures Regulation and the Data Collection Framework to better incorporate and tackle bycatch concerns. (JG16/AP19)	X	<b>COOP-02:</b> Strive for close cooperation between ASCOBANS and other international bodies	X	<b>Rec.2:</b> Cooperate with and inform other relevant bodies about the Conservation Plan
JG17/AP17	Parties should ensure that Belt Sea and Baltic Sea populations of harbour porpoises are assessed and managed as separate populations, e.g. in management plans and national redlists. (JG16/AP21)	X	<b>Other</b>	X	<b>Other</b>
JG17/AP18	Countries who have raised concerns on possible interference of acoustic deterrent devices on military underwater acoustic activities, are urged to promptly investigate the extent of the issue, to ensure that any decisions are based on evidence that is strong enough to justify any negative impact on the Baltic Proper harbour porpoise population or the fishing industry.	X	<b>MIT-03:</b> Continue or implement the use of acoustic deterrent devices (pingers) and acoustic alerting devices proven to be successful when and where deemed appropriate		
JG17/AP19	Although it does not align fully with the ICES advice, the Jastarnia Group urges the European Commission to adopt, as an initial step, the BALTFISH Joint Recommendation (of 22 Dec 2020) on Mitigation measures to prevent bycatch of Baltic Proper harbour porpoise in the Baltic Sea fisheries, without delay. Given that the ICES Special Request advice states that even 100% fulfillment of the advice is not enough to reach the PBR limit of 0.7 animals/year, the Jastarnia Group also urges for swift implementation of the recommendations on measures for bycatch mitigation made by ICES in areas of more than occasional Harbour Porpoise occurrence, in further steps as soon as possible.	X	<b>Objective:</b> Monitor, estimate and reduce bycatch		

Reference	Action Point (old reference)	Jastarnia Plan		WBBK Plan	
		App lies	Mandate	App lies	Mandate
JG17/AP20	Countries are urged to, without delay, prepare a second BALTFISH Joint Recommendation that includes effective bycatch mitigation measures outside MPAs, in areas of more than occasional harbour porpoise occurrence, noting that coastal habitats are also of high importance for harbour porpoises.	X	<b>Objective:</b> Monitor, estimate and reduce bycatch		
JG17/AP21	Parties are urged to ensure a proposal to list the Baltic Proper harbour porpoise in CMS Appendix I is brought to CMS COP14 in 2023. (JG16/AP23)	X	<b>Other</b>		
JG17/AP22	It was agreed that the delimitation between the North Sea and WBBK harbour porpoise plans should be the management unit border identified by Sveegaard et al 2015 in Kattegat at 56.95°N. The area for the WBBK should have its eastern delimitation at the management unit border identified by Sveegaard et al 2015 at 13.5°E, while the Jastarnia plan area should be east of 13.0°E, according to the ICES scientific advice of May 2020. The overlap of the WBBK and Jastarnia plans areas will be considered in the Jastarnia Group's discussions of the plans.	X	<b>Other</b>	X	<b>Other</b>

## **Annex 2: Internal Action Points from JG17**

1. The Coordinator for the HP Plans to provide a template for country progress reports (presentations) to the JG meeting. The Coordinator will then use those reports, as well as the ASCOBANS National Reports submitted by Parties, and in consultation with countries, to develop a comprehensive progress report that will be presented to the Advisory Group
2. The ASCOBANS Secretariat and the Chair of the Jastarnia Group to send a letter to all Baltic Proper Range States and their national navies, raising concern of the effect of underwater explosions to harbour porpoises, and to inform them about effective mitigation measures, draft letter to be circulated in the Jastarnia Group before being sent.
3. The ASCOBANS Secretariat and the Chair of the Jastarnia Group to send a letter to all Baltic Proper Range State defence, environment, and fisheries ministries, and their national navies, to request that navies or their research institutes closely investigate, through for example at-sea testing, the possible interference between pingers and military underwater acoustic activities, asking them to provide evidence of any interference (possibly to their national ministries), before any final decisions are taken that may negatively impact the survival of the Baltic Proper harbour porpoise. Draft letter to be shared with the Jastarnia Group before being sent. Letter to be sent to countries that potentially have an issue with interaction between pingers and military underwater acoustic activities. A copy of the letter and any replies will be shared with the European Commission.
4. The Coordinator for the Jastarnia and WBBK Plans to compile short guidelines on genetic sampling of stranded animals. Possibly include a table of tissues and what they can be used for in different states of decomposition for reference. Also include preservation methods and storage time of samples.
5. Countries to report to JG18 on the potential effects of the cod fishing ban, including whether the use of static nets other than cod nets has increased.
6. Draft proposal to list the Baltic Proper harbour porpoise to CMS Appendix I to be discussed at JG18, in advance of the 27<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the ASCOBANS Advisory Committee.
7. Regarding a forthcoming bycatch mitigation project in Schleswig-Holstein the Chair of the Jastarnia Group to send a letter to the Minister at the Federal State-Ministry for Energy Transition, Agriculture, Environment, Nature and Digitalization requesting the status of the project and urging for it to be implemented.
8. It was agreed that it would be useful to have a consolidated view from the scientific community on minimum standards, thresholds and information needed for impact assessments of different threats to small cetaceans. The Secretariat to bring this to the attention of the next meeting of the ASCOBANS Advisory Committee (AC), requesting the AC to consider that ASCOBANS support the organising, including logistics, of a European scientific workshop on the subject in 2022 / 2023.
9. A presentation on the OSPAR approach for bycatch threshold setting to be included on the agenda for JG18.
10. Following the presentation from the Swedish Museum of Natural History on an increase in detection rates in Swedish waters, presentations on similar studies in other countries are encouraged for JG18.
11. A presentation on the results of Mini-SCANS II to be included on the agenda for JG18.

### Annex 3: List of Participants

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