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| <b>Document title</b>  | Brief update on progress in ACTION project WP1 bycatch                   |
| <b>Code</b>            | 2-8                                                                      |
| <b>Category</b>        | INF                                                                      |
| <b>Agenda Item</b>     | 2 – Information by the Chair, HELCOM secretariat and Contracting parties |
| <b>Submission date</b> | 25.9.2019                                                                |
| <b>Submitted by</b>    | secretariat                                                              |
| <b>Reference</b>       |                                                                          |

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### Background

The [HELCOM ACTION Project](#) is an EU co-funded project for which HELCOM is the coordinator. The project is focussing on four major topics: by-catch (WP1), impacts on the seafloor (WP2), Marine Protected Areas, MPAs (WP3) and input of nutrients (WP4), as well as work related natural time lags influencing the achievement of good status (WP5). Work Package 6 (WP6) of the ACTION project is developing proposals on the methodology to analyse sufficiency of measures. In addition to developing information that can support the analysis of the sufficiency of measures these WPs will further assemble important data and deliver results that can support the BSAP update and long-term HELCOM work.

A brief overview of progress made in WP1 to date is provided in the document below. The inception report, the outcome of the project partner kick-off meeting, in which methods and plans for the work for each WP is available at [this link](#). Ongoing developments, such as workshops and reports, will be added to the [HELCOM ACTION website](#) as the project progresses.

### Action requested

The Meeting is invited to take note of this information.

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## The HELCOM ACTION Project – progress update on technical work packages



### WP1 By-catch

By-catch of marine mammals (and birds) has been documented in many gillnet fisheries and is regarded as a major anthropogenic impact on marine mammals. This work package (WP1) will identify high-risk areas for by-catch of marine mammals and birds, focusing on the south-western Baltic Sea, though other co-operations to expand this region of study are being explored. By identifying these high-risk areas, and by-catch estimates, it will be possible to evaluate the level of pressure on non-target populations from the fisheries industry and/or identify areas where monitoring of bycatch needs to be intensified. To facilitate this approach density data of harbour porpoises combined with gillnet fishing effort data will serve as input to model high-risk areas. To further verify the model CCTV footage will be used to confirm actual porpoise by-catches from commercial gillnet vessels. In other areas where the data depth or possibility to validate the models are not available (e.g. limited monitoring or no CCTV footage) then the possibility to predict high risk areas by combining fishing effort data and harbour porpoise distribution data will be explored. Overall, the work will aim to provide estimates of total by-catch of harbour porpoises.

A similar approach will be applied to explore the by-catch of certain bird species and other mammals. Although Baltic Sea scale density maps of sea birds (eider ducks, cormorants, and scoters) and seals (grey seal and harbour seal) are incomplete, the by-catches of these species are available from video footage. For these species by-catch estimates will be made as well as a gap analysis on the additional needs for data to identify high-risk by-catch areas.

The work on the above items is ongoing, with further details and the approach to be taken (e.g. data collection from logbooks and AIS databases) set out in the [inception report](#) (see page 8). The data collection phase is ongoing into autumn 2019, with data analyses planned to be complete by the end of 2019. The partners in WP1 will be heavily involved in the OSPAR-HELCOM workshop on by-catch (3-5 September) and initial findings will be briefly presented at that workshop.

In order to enhance the understanding of potential mitigation measures an evaluation of measures to reduce by-catch of harbour porpoises will be carried out. Existing approaches are generally quite limited, principally fisheries closures, alternative fishing gears and acoustic deterrents. For example, with the harbour porpoise the main method to reduce by-catch is the use of acoustic deterrent devices, so called pingers. Gaining a greater understanding of the effectiveness of these and their cost effectiveness will be furthered, considering the cost in terms of possible catch/landings losses and implementation (e.g. via the DISPLACE model analysis).

The data collection and rationalization phase of this work is ongoing and progressing well. A number of technical issues are currently being addressed such as the handling of seasonal data, appropriate gridding of data, how to handle gaps (e.g. for offshore bird data) during the further assessment work, and how to most suitably combine variable data sets (e.g. species density, fishing effort, CCTV, AIS and logbook data) in the final evaluation. A new software is being tested in the coming weeks to overcome certain issues related to some data collection/recording differences that occur within the region. In combination with this work a gap analysis is also being carried out.