



## Draft Outcome of the Thirteenth meeting of HELCOM Expert Group on Marine Mammals (EG MAMA 13-2019)

### Introduction

0.1 In accordance with the decision of SEAL 12-2018 (Outcome paragraph 8.2), the thirteenth Meeting of the HELCOM Expert Group on Marine Mammals (EG MAMA 13-2019), was held on 24–26 September 2019 in Helsinki, Finland, at the premises of Ministry of the Interior.

0.2 The Meeting was attended by delegations from all Contracting Parties except the EU. The Meeting was also attended by observers from Coalition Clean Baltic, WWF and Nordic Hunters Alliance. The List of Participants is attached as **Annex 1**.

0.3 The Meeting was chaired by Mr. Anders Galatius, Denmark, Chair of the EG MAMA group. Ms. Jannica Haldin, Professional Secretary, and Ms. Laura Hoikkala, Associate Professional Secretary acted as secretaries of the Meeting.

0.4 Ms. Penina Blankett, Ministry of the Environment, welcomed the participants to Helsinki.

### **Agenda Item 1 Adoption of the Agenda**

Documents: 1-1, 1-2

1.1 The Meeting adopted the Agenda as contained in documents 1-1 and 1-2.

### **Agenda Item 2 Information by the Chair, HELCOM Secretariat and Contracting Parties**

Documents: 2-1, 2-2, 2-2 rev.1, 2-3, 2-4, 2-5, 2-5 rev.1, 2-6, 2-7

2.1 The Meeting took note of the overview of the HELCOM structure and work processes as presented by the Secretariat (presentation 1).

2.2 The Meeting took note of the following relevant national information:

- The Swedish government is changing the hunting ordinance from protected hunting to licensed hunting for grey seals starting from November. Agencies, including the EPA, are to decide on the hunting quota.
- Denmark is working on a new management plan for seals which is intended to be ready by the end of 2019.
- Germany will conduct aerial surveys for grey seals in Mecklenburg-Prepomerania area next year. Regarding management of grey seals there is new legislation to preventing seals entering fish traps, by limiting the entrance circumference to 75 cm in the main distribution area of grey seals. A compensation for seal induced losses for fishermen will potentially be agreed in 2020 based on fish losses estimated during a research project FIUM Rostock. Acoustic monitoring for harbour porpoises continues.
- Poland has established a joint team under the Ministry of Environment and Ministry of Maritime Economy to work on issues related to seal-fisheries interactions. Poland also has a system in place to compensate for losses caused by grey seals for cod and salmon fisheries.

2.3 The Meeting welcomed the news that Finland will resume annual monitoring of grey seals.

2.4 The Meeting took note of the Terms of Reference for the Meeting, adopted by STATE & CONSERVATION 9-2018 (**document 2-1**).

2.5 The Meeting took note of extracts from recent HELCOM meetings of relevance for EG MAMA (**document 2-3**).

2.6 The Meeting took note of the HELCOM [biodiversity database](#), published in July 2019, as presented by the Secretariat. The Meeting noted that the database was developed as part of the update of Baltic Sea species check list (the BaltiCheck project), and that whenever possible biodiversity data collated under previous HELCOM projects related to biodiversity has been included in the database.

2.7 The Meeting noted that in the process of validating the data available at the Secretariat and in populating the database, some of the data did not fulfill the requirements for inclusion and was consequently excluded. This is especially the case where data has been submitted lacking one or more of the required parameters or where the source of the information is not fully traceable. The Meeting noted that data identified to be missing from the database can be resubmitted in order to be included.

2.8 The Meeting took note of the concerns from Estonia on the possible misinterpretation or misuse of data available in public databases.

2.9 The Meeting noted the comment from Germany on the importance of such a database to enable reviewing available data and identifying need for corrections and gaps.

2.10 The Meeting invited the Secretariat to clarify in what format seal survey data can be included in the database, as spatial observations not including numbers of individuals or as separate observations of individual animals, as the surveys can result in observation of a large number of individual animals by site.

2.11 The Meeting took note of the current state of the update of the Baltic Sea Action Plan (presentation 2). The Meeting noted that the current plan will run out in 2021, and it is intended to have the new plan in place by then.

2.12 The Meeting took note of the survey regarding HELCOM science agenda, and the proposals by Denmark to the survey (document 2-5 rev.1) as presented by the Chair. The Meeting took note that the deadline for submitting proposals for the survey has been extended for EG MAMA so that proposals can be submitted based on discussions at the Meeting.

2.13 The Meeting took note of the information by the Secretariat that the agenda is to outline existing and foreseen HELCOM regional science needs. It will serve the development of activities in HELCOM as well as to inform external funding mechanisms on the research needs of HELCOM.

2.14 The Meeting noted that the intention is for the science agenda to function as a living document throughout the term of the updated BSAP.

2.15 The Meeting discussed additional proposals for the survey document from the Health Team, Denmark, Germany and Sweden. The Meeting provided further input to the list of proposals and agreed to send the list, as contained in document 2-5 rev.2, as proposals by EG MAMA to the Secretariat (ullali.zweifel@helcom.fi), to be submitted to STATE & CONSERVATION 11-2019 for review.

2.16 The Meeting took note of the updated HELCOM data and information strategy, adopted by HELCOM 40-2019 (document 2-6).

2.17 The Meeting took note that a Joint HELCOM-Baltic Earth expert network on climate change (EN CLIME) was established in early 2019, and currently contains nearly 60 experts. The Meeting noted that the first planned deliverable of EN CLIME is Fact Sheets on the expected effects of climate change in the Baltic Sea environment. The Meeting further noted that the key messages for primary (chemical and physical) parameters are now being finalized and the work on secondary (impact) parameters is starting.

2.18 The Meeting took note that an invitation for nominations for experts to take part in the work on secondary parameters will be sent to contacts of State & Conservation shortly, but that in addition the HELCOM the expert groups on relevant topics will be approached directly with invitations to participate in the work. The Meeting further noted that the work on secondary parameters will commence in October.

2.19 The Meeting took note that the experts of EG MAMA are invited to contribute to key messages under the secondary parameter marine mammals. The Meeting welcomed that Mart Jüssi, Antti Halkka, Anders Galatius, Markus Ahola, Penina Blankett, Ida Carlen, Michael Dähne and Iwona Pawliczka, Kristina Lehnert, Morten Tange Olsen all expressed interest to take part to the work. The Meeting noted that any other interested experts can inform the Secretariat ([Jannica.haldin@helcom.fi](mailto:Jannica.haldin@helcom.fi)).

#### *Registered mortality of marine mammals*

2.20 The Meeting took note of the annual registered mortality of marine mammals as reported by the Contracting Parties (document 2-2 rev.1). The Meeting took note that Finland, Germany, Poland and Sweden have updated the excel table with values for 2018. The Meeting invited the Secretariat to differentiate cells representing no reporting from those representing 0 with the abbreviation NR (Not Reported).

2.21 The Meeting considered the overlap in reporting harbor porpoise data to the marine mammal mortality database and the HELCOM/ASCOBANS harbor porpoise database. The Meeting further noted that the harbour porpoise database is not updated annually, and agreed that reporting to the marine mammals mortality database should continue also for harbor porpoise. The Meeting acknowledged that at the moment the databases serve somewhat different purposes, the harbor porpoise database being more concentrated on distribution and marine mammal mortality database on total numbers.

2.22 The Meeting agreed that hunting quotas for seals should also be included into the database where relevant.

2.23 The Meeting took note of the information on the high number of strandings of harbor porpoise which that took place in Poland and Mecklenburg-Prepomerania in 2018. The Meeting took note of the comment from Poland that the majority of stranding took place on the west coast of Poland and that there is clear correlation between number of strandings and weather conditions, especially wind strength and direction.

2.24 The Meeting took note of suggestion from Sweden, that if the harbour porpoises are kept in the mortality database, they should be reported for geographical areas proposed for management or population ranges. The Meeting concluded that currently it is challenging to delineate the spatial information to correspond with the population distributions. The Meeting considered that in order to know the origin of stranded animals genetic information needs to be taken into account. The Meeting further noted that many Contracting Parties take genetic samples during necropsies which could be used to identify to which population the individual belonged, but that the samples are currently not analysed.

2.25 The Meeting took note of the concern raised by Germany on the increasing in the quotas and reported hunted grey seals, harbor seals and also ringed seals and that the issuing of respective licenses in some CPs might not be in line with the HELCOM Rec. 27-28/2 on the conservation of seals. In particular the leveling off of the growth rate of grey seals without knowledge of the precautionary approach level leads to this concern, because “for populations between the Limit Reference Level (the Safe Biological Level) and the Precautionary Approach Level, licenses for anthropogenic removals can only be issued if in the population a significant positive long-term growth rate can be observed”

2.26 The Meeting noted that that the role of human induced mortality and approaching carrying capacity, respectively, in the slowing of population growth for seals are not fully understood. The Meeting discussed that the correlation of seal pregnancy rate with the quality of prey (fish) may

reflect approaching carrying capacity. On the other hand that the lack of expansion the full historical range of the grey seal indicates that the population is below carrying capacity.

2.27 Meeting took note of the suggestion by Germany that commonly agreed guidelines for estimating carrying capacity should be developed and agreed that this could be included in the survey on research needs. The Meeting considered that it is likely that the Precautionary Approach Level and Target Reference Level might in reality be close to each other, that carrying capacity is not a static value, and can likely be determined only retrospectively.

2.28 The Meeting noted that according to monitoring data from the Bothnian Bay rate of increase in the ringed seal population has been lower than the intrinsic rate of the specie which can partly be explained by the mortality resulting from bycatch and hunting.

2.29 The Meeting took note of information from Germany on progress within OSPAR and ASCOBANS in developing database for data collected on stranded and bycaught cetaceans. The Meeting took note that ASCOBANS and ACCOBAMS held a joint workshop in June which considered improved necropsy protocols, the results of which were presented in the 25<sup>th</sup> ASCOBANS AC meeting. The updated protocol gives guidance for areas where appropriate infrastructure to handle necropsies is still lacking. Parts of the protocol would also be useful for HELCOM areas. The intention is, when the protocol is published, to extend to necropsies of seals. The Meeting considered that combining information on necropsies from OSPAR and HELCOM would be useful.

#### Marine Mammal Health Team

2.30 The Meeting took note of the protocol of the Meeting of the HELCOM Marine Mammal Health Team, which took place 14- 15 August 2019 in Büsum, Germany (document 2-7), as presented by Ms. Ursula Siebert/ Kristina Lehnert. The Meeting took note that the Seal Health team changed its name to Marine Mammal Health Team. The Meeting noted that in the meeting the Team discussed e.g. necropsy protocol and indicator work, and also had a practical exercise on necropsies of marine mammals and bone density measurements. The Meeting welcomed the information that the health team will have its next meeting in Hel Marine Station in Poland.

2.31 The Meeting further took note of the information that the Health Team also considered health indicators, proposing target organs and preparing monitoring guidelines. The Meeting invited the team to share a draft of the guidelines with EG MAMA.

2.32 The Meeting took note of the draft revised monitoring guidelines for reproductive status of Seals, as edited by the Health team (document 2-4). The Meeting noted that the guidelines have been updated to include samples from spring. The Meeting further welcomed that the intention has been to make the guidelines as short and straightforward as possible.

2.33 The Meeting took note that Germany is working on health indicators. In relation to an OSPAR initiative, an indicator on PCB levels in marine mammal species is being developed, which may also be applicable also in the HELCOM area.

2.34 The Meeting took note that work is ongoing on developing monitoring guidelines for blubber thickness of seals.

#### *Marine mammals-fisheries interaction*

2.35 The Meeting took note of the outcomes of the joint OSPAR-HELCOM workshop to examine possibilities for developing indicators for incidental bycatch of birds and marine mammals, which took place 3-5 September in Copenhagen, as presented by Katarzyna Kaminska, HELCOM Chair of the Workshop (presentation 3).

2.36 The Meeting noted that work on producing the roadmap on data needs produced by CG FISHDATA has progress and that the document will be submitted to State & Conservation 11-2019 for approval, and if the document is approved, the intention is to forward it to relevant authorities.

2.37 The Meeting noted that the bycatch issue is dealt also in the BSAP UP process by the ACTION project.

### Agenda Item 3      Seals in the Baltic Sea

3.1 Documents: 3-1, 3-2

#### 3.2 Agenda Item 3.1 Report on the intersessional activities under the Seal Expert Group teams

3.3 The Meeting took note of recent activities of intersessional team for seal populations as follows:

##### Grey seal

The grey seal population survey numbers in 2018 have been high, however Finland did not survey the population in 2018. High grey seal numbers in the eastern part of the Gulf of Finland are presumably connected with warm winters, as there has been more open waters not covered by ice. For Russian part, counts were done slightly before normal seal counting period, in near shore waters. The weather for seal population surveys in this part of the Baltic was optimal.

##### Ringed Seal

Ice conditions rarely allow surveying the southern ringed seal population. The conditions for survey were good in 2018 for Gulf of Finland, western Estonia and Finnish southwestern archipelago.

In Bothnian Bay, ringed seal counts in the recent years have mainly given exceptional results due to early ice break. Year 2018 could be considered almost normal, whereas this year, some big seal concentrations were observed, making the total results exceptionally high.

##### Harbour seal

Kalmarsund harbour seal has been increasing quite steadily with annual rate of 8% on average. In central Limfjord, the population has been fluctuating for a long time, with an overall stable trend. For Kattegat, the Danish survey schedule has been changed to twice a year, whereas Sweden is still counting three times a year. How to produce the common count is still to be decided. The population was estimated to have a insignificant negative trend of 2% per year. Southwestern Baltic population has a significantly positive trend of 4.5% annually during the last 5 years which constitutes a much reduced rate compared to the previous period.

3.4 The Meeting took note of recent activities of intersessional team for seal distribution as follows:

- Breeding distribution: Harbour seals are relatively stationary and their breeding distribution is approximately the haul out distribution. For ringed seals, large efforts are done to survey seals on ice. In general breeding distribution for ringed seals is strongly depends on ice situation, and hence ice availability during regular ice winters can be used as proxy for breeding distribution within the distributional range. For offshore distribution, telemetry studies have been conducted in the Gulf of Bothnia and Gulf of Finland. Grey seal breeding distribution is unknown for large areas. The grey seal is breeding in very low numbers in the southern Baltic.
- Offshore distribution: The team is looking into the distribution indicator, which includes offshore distribution for which there is large data gaps. Regarding the methodology part, there are shortcomings in data collection e.g. grey seal offshore distribution is the challenging. Telemetry data coverage is poor for grey seals. As grey seals are highly mobile, the current sample is not sufficient to identify patterns and a larger number and wider spatial distribution of tagging gray seals for telemetry data is needed. Offshore grey seal data is one of the research needs identified in the document by Denmark. For harbour seals telemetry data is missing for many areas.
- The Meeting took note of high-resolution data for Gulf of Riga for ringed seals, showing geographical information on behavior, as presented by Mart Jüssi, and the

suggestion that the full telemetry data should be presented on 5x5 km grid cell maps, in order to provide more useful data output and better picture of seal behaviour.

- Finland noted that satellite images with higher resolution (30 cm) have become increasingly affordable. If seals are visible and countable, satellite images could be used to get information on grey seals haul outs.

The Meeting took note of survey data on distribution of ringed seals with ice map layer included, as presented by Markus Ahola. The Meeting supported that analysis of quality of ice will be done in order to get information on habitat choices, and considered the suggestion on complete survey of ice area however that more planes and personnel resources would be needed.

### 3.5 Agenda Item 3.2 Monitoring, data collection and reporting

3.6 The Meeting took note that presenting results on the power analysis for population trends was postponed, and invited Sweden to present the results when available.

3.7 The Meeting took note of the information by Morten Tange Olsen on genetic work currently conducted on harbour- and grey seals.

3.8 The Meeting took note of the following national telemetry tagging activities as follows:

- Denmark is using telemetry tagging to investigate how seals react to underwater noise. There are several publications being published on the subject. Seals are tagged in Limfjord, close to a river mouth. Next tagging is conducted the week following the Meeting. Seals will also be tagged in the western part of the fjord where seals may to large extent use the North Sea for foraging. Genetic samples are also taken. Denmark has also studied effects of acoustic harassment devices, with recent data from Limfjord. Even when some of the tagged seals have been exposed several times, they maintain strong reactions.
- Russia has done telemetry studies in 2017-2019 on ringed seals in the Gulf of Finland. The Ringed seals telemetry studies have been supported by company Nord Stream 2 AG. Aerial survey of ringed seals on haul outs in autumn will possibly be tested with the support from company "Rosterminalugol". The results of this work will help to understand a seal population trends in warm winters with lack of ice. Russia is planning to study seal distribution in 2020, using GSM tagging in order to gather data on foraging areas and moving of seals in time when they are not on haul outs. Telemetry study of seals will be done in international collaboration with Estonian specialists. The work with seals rehabilitation, survey of grey and ringed seals on haul outs and register of seals mortality will continue in the 2020.
- In Estonia, telemetry data is used to detect effects of ferry line on ringed seal behavior.
- In Finland, photo-ID has been used to identify and follow up on ringed seal individuals with signs of an unknown disease. Some individuals seem to have symptoms even for several years.
- Poland has been tagging released grey seal pups since 2002 and is planning to tag adult grey seals that recently inhabited the haul out on the Polish coast.

#### *Database for seals*

3.9 The Meeting considered the suggestion from STATE & CONSERVATION 9-2018 to report data on distribution and abundance of seals annually concomitantly with EG MAMA meetings and to include the reporting frequency to the guidelines for seal abundance and distribution in the HELCOM area.

3.10 The Meeting agreed that following the suggestion by State & Conservation, the data for the previous year's survey will be provided to the Secretariat in advance of the EG MAMA meetings.

3.11 The Meeting noted that Denmark, Estonia, Germany, Poland and Sweden are ready to provide data, and that Finland is working to be able to provide the data. The Meeting took note of the comment from Finland, that the task is big, and workload is high and that Finland has open data, but in different format (50km grid).

### 3.12 **Agenda Item 3.3 Management of seals and human induced pressures**

3.13 The Meeting took note of the outcome of the HELCOM seal-fisheries interactions workshop held on the 28 June 2019 in Copenhagen, Denmark, as presented by Katarzyna Kaminska (document 3-2, presentation 4).

3.14 The Meeting took note of the information on the outcome from the BaltFish symposium on seal-fish-fisheries interactions presented by Katarzyna Kaminska (presentation 4).

3.15 The Meeting took note that the intention of two symposia with related topics was to use the information from BaltFish seminar in the HELCOM workshop, and to join forces to work towards more substantial actions, and to find out ways to mitigate the seals-fisheries conflict.

3.16 The Meeting took note of comment from Germany, that not enough is yet known on how Anisakid nematodes affect fish paratenic hosts, as also other infectious diseases and pressures such as pollutant exposure to fish should be considered, a more holistic assessment of fish health is needed.

3.17 The Meeting took note of scientific studies in Germany on different methodologies and techniques for the development and testing of seal safe fishing gear and the mitigation of the bycatch of harbor porpoise.

3.18 The Meeting took note that this investigation has been financed by the Federal Agency for Nature Conservation and has been carried out by the Federal Institute of Baltic Sea Fisheries (TI). The Meeting invited Germany to present the results at EG MAMA 14-2020.

3.19 The Meeting discussed the following topics lifted in BaltFish and HELCOM workshops in relation to EG MAMA work:

- 1) The need to define a concretized standard for estimating populations size of seals:
- The Meeting agreed that EG MAMA should update the population size indices yearly for the three seal species, in order to have regional, accepted population abundance indices every year. The Meeting agreed that correction factors are needed for seals. The Meeting clarified that funding and workforce is needed for the work. The Meeting noted that this was included in the proposal by Denmark to the Science Agenda.
- 2) Define hot spots of seal occurrence as soon as possible:
- The Meeting noted that there are differences in the hotspot areas between seasons, which need to be taken into account. The Meeting noted that telemetry data could be used for this and noted that Denmark had included a proposal on telemetry into the science agenda. The meeting further noted that this topic is more time consuming and more resource demanding, than the first topic. The Meeting further noted that fisheries should be invited to fund the research, it is challenging to find funding for this type of work, which is not purely scientific, under calls for ecological research. The Meeting noted that knowing hotspot seal areas, and their overlap with fishing efforts, would support identifying high bycatch risk areas. The Meeting agreed that the gaps in telemetry data can already be identified and a list for possible means to fill in the gaps could be produced. The Meeting considered the possibility to develop a research proposal, and noted that there is funding possibility under the EMFF, when the research is directly linked to fisheries needs. The Meeting considered that HELCOM and ASCOBANS could join forces in making an application.
- The Meeting took note of information from Denmark on bachelor thesis, published in summer 2018 on protective hunting of grey seals in Bornholm. In the annex of the thesis, there is information from fishermen who use illegal weapons, or use large mesh nets for intentional catches of grey seals, with even several tens of animals caught. It was assumed

that altogether at least hundred seals were killed illegally. Based on questions to fisheries agencies, intentional bycatch occurs in quite substantial figures. The Meeting discussed that fisheries are targeting seals in Germany as well, and that large mesh nets have been seen also in Finland

- The Meeting noted that fishermen have reported that ringed seals have been attacked by grey seals. The Meeting further noted that it is not easy to distinguish between seals being predated by grey seals or terrestrial predators such as foxes.
- 3) Collect and review information on the food preferences for seals, propose further research, if necessary:
- The Meeting noted that it is not specified what sort of data is needed and for what purpose, which makes it hard to propose new research. The Meeting noted that Denmark has made a review article of all available information on harbor, grey and ringed seal prey preferences in the Baltic sea area ([Scharff-Olsen et al. 2018](#)). The Meeting also noted the report by DTU Aqua on mortality of Eastern Baltic cod including information on grey seal diet, available [online \(report number 341-2019\)](#). The Meeting noted that according to the report, cod was most important prey in the Bornholm and Arkona basins and the Sound.
- The Meeting took note of a diet analysis of grey seals in Mecklenburg-Prepomerania, Germany, where contents of 40 grey seal stomachs were counted. The Meeting noted that in this investigation, 50% of the content was herring, then roach and then cod. The Meeting took note that according to literature and recent decay experiments, decay rate varied between species, and Gadidae stay longest in the stomach.
- 4. Parasites, reviewing the knowledge and look for causalities:
- The Meeting noted that more parasitological and health data is needed in parallel from seals and fish in areas of special interest, as well as comprehensive information on fish health, in order to assess if Anisakid nematodes are affecting the fish intermediate/paratenic hosts. More information on prevalence of several invertebrate and vertebrate hosts and influence of abiotic factors and contaminant exposure on their distribution is also needed. For this work, both funds and manpower are needed. The Meeting noted that this should be added to the proposal for the Science agenda. The Meeting took note that in Sweden, there is a pilot study on parasites, and that research will continue.

#### *National management plans for seals*

3.20 The Meeting took note of the document on status of management plans for marine mammals (document 3-1).

3.21 The Meeting took note that the Secretariat has received no notifications on any new national plans.

3.22 The Meeting took note of the following national work on management plans:

- Denmark is working on a new management plan for seals which is intended to be ready by the end of 2019.
- Finland is updating the management plans for ringed seal and grey seal and once finalized they will be sent to stakeholders for statements. Finland will inform the Meeting when the management plans are in place.
- Germany has started work on a grey seal conflict management under preparation for Mecklenburg-Prepomerania, of which the primary focus is fishery related issues. Simultaneously work to establish a management for newborn and sick seals on touristic beaches has started.
- Sweden is working on a new management plan for grey seal. The management plan will consider how a licensed hunt can be part of the management system. The management plan is supposed to be in place in November.

- Latvia has a management plan for grey seal and ringed seal in preparation, to be finalized by the end of 2019. The main focus of the plan is related to fisheries issues.
- Russia has no official management plan for the marine mammals in the Russian part of the Baltic Sea. Ringed and grey seals of the Baltic sea are protected as a species of “Red data book of Russian Federation”, “Red data book of Leningrad region”. The seal studies are based on the personal activities of scientists and sponsor support.
- Estonia has separate management plans in place for grey and ringed seal. The plans will be updated in 2020.
- Poland has developed a management plan for grey seal in 2012, but the plan is still awaiting approval.

### Agenda Item 3.4 Core indicators

3.23 The Meeting took note of the status of the general work on updating the HELCOM core indicators, as presented by the Secretariat. The Meeting took note that the first HELCOM indicator workshop focused on reviewing the policy relevance of the existing indicators and preliminary prioritization of further indicator work from a policy perspective. The prioritization and future consolidation and development work will be discussed from a technical perspective in the second indicator workshop, which will take place 16-18 October in Copenhagen. Regarding marine mammals, the first indicator workshop identified e.g. developing indicators on bycatch and harbour porpoise distribution and abundance as of high priority for inclusion in the next holistic assessment, and that the topic of habitat quality of marine mammals should be better covered by the next assessment.

3.24 The Meeting noted that an invitation for background information on the possible future development of indicators has been shared with the relevant indicator leads and expert groups and the experts are invited to send any relevant background information on these topics to used to support the discussion at the second indicator workshop.

3.25 The Meeting took note of the following information by the Health Team on progress with developing new indicators and further development of existing indicators for the health status of seals and harbor porpoises:

- Blubber thickness monitoring guidelines are under development.
- Reproduction indicators need to be considered also regarding other seal species than grey seal and also for harbour porpoise. Grey seal data gathering according to the guidelines will be possible in 2020.
- Compiling available data on blubber thickness into one database is being considered in order to evaluate the data.

3.26 The Meeting took note of the work in ACTION project WP 1 on bycatch as presented by the Secretariat (document 2-8). The Meeting took note that Denmark and Sweden are leading the work package. The Meeting further took note that the WP mainly considers harbour porpoise and a select number of bird species, to identifying high risk areas for bycatch. The Meeting took note that the work in the WP is focused on harbor porpoise in southern Baltic Sea. Other areas are included to the extent that the data allows.

3.27 The Meeting took note that the work of the WP 1 supports the bycatch indicator development, and that the WP notably contributed to the HELCOM-OSPAR workshop on incidental bycatch.

### Agenda Item 4 Baltic Sea Harbour Porpoise

Documents: 4-1, 4-2, 4-2 rev.1, 4-3, 4-4

#### Agenda Item 4.1 Report of intersessional activities by the Harbour Porpoise team

4.1 The Meeting noted that Finn Larsen, Katarzyna Kaminska and Penina Blankett will join the Harbour Porpoise Abundance and Distribution Team.

4.2 The Meeting agreed to nominate Julia Carlström and Anita Gilles as joint Team Leads for the Harbour Porpoise Abundance and Distribution Team.

#### 4.3 **Agenda Item 4.5 Core indicators**

4.4 The Meeting took note of the work done in developing and splitting the indicator on harbor porpoise distribution and abundance into separate indicators, as presented by indicator co-lead Julia Carlström (presentation 5, document 4-2, 4-2 rev.1). The Meeting agreed that the information needs to be discussed in State and Conservation.

4.5 The Meeting considered if the sections on Absolute abundance, Trends in abundance and Distribution should be considered parts of the same indicator or three separate indicators.

4.6 The Meeting took note that the Secretariat will present a proposal for new visualization and restructuring of the indicators in the second indicator workshop and agreed that the question on how to organize the harbour porpoise abundance and distribution indicator(s) should be postponed to ensure that the indicator(s) follow the outline supported in the workshop and agreed on in consequent meetings.

4.7 The Meeting supports that funding should be acquired to support the planned simulation study. The Meeting took note that the simulation study is not currently part of the SAMBAH II project proposal.

4.8 the Meeting discussed the assessment units used for the HELCOM core indicators and noted that the borders of HELCOM assessment units, available in four nested levels, need to be used in order for the results to be included in the integrated assessment. The Meeting took note that several units can be combined when purposeful for the assessment.

#### **Agenda Item 4.2 Monitoring, data collection and reporting**

4.9 The Meeting took note of the status of the HELCOM-ASCOBANS harbour porpoise database as presented by the Secretariat (presentation 6, document 4-3). The Meeting took note that since SEAL 12-2018, no new data has been received. The Meeting recalled that the Contracting Parties are invited to report updates to the database by filling in the reporting form and sending it to the Secretariat (laura.hoikkala@helcom.fi).

4.10 The Meeting noted that Contracting parties have not regularly submitted updated data into database for harbour porpoises and considered if a formal data call should be issued to enhance the reporting. The Meeting took note of the information by the Secretariat that a proposal for a three part preparatory phase for HOLAS III is currently being developed. One of these is aimed at improving dataflows and -infrastructure and establish regular data reporting where it has been identified that current dataflows are not fully functional. The Meeting agreed to postpone the question on a datacall until the data flow project proposal has been considered by working groups in fall 2019 and, if endorsed, submitted for approval to HOD 57-2019.

4.11 The Meeting recalled that the group has agreed that due to the high frequency of incidental sightings these will not be reported for the western harbour porpoise population.

4.12 The Meeting noted that a new acoustic metadata format replacing the old acoustic detection data format has been agreed on in SEAL 11-2017, but that the change to metadata format has not been implemented in the excel sheet, and invited the Secretariat to amend the sheet accordingly.

4.13 The Meeting took note of the following information on harbor porpoise observations:

- The University of Southern Denmark are conducting a pilot study including a citizen science smart phone application for monitoring of harbor porpoises, which will likely increase the amount of information received for the Baltic Proper porpoises. they are working to extend this project.

- In Germany, a project to update the existing database on incidental sighting is currently carried out. The project will have influence on reporting the sightings. Germany has reported data until 2012, but the latest data is missing from the HELCOM ASCOBANS database. Germany will resubmit the data. Data will be submitted for both Belt Sea and Baltic Proper.
- Russia commented that Russian observations from the Gulf of Finland and the Kaliningrad area should be presented separately.
- Sweden has experienced challenges with their national database. The database has now been improved, is currently tested and will be finalized by the end of 2019. Sweden will report the data to HELCOM, when all data has been collected in one dataset. Sweden might also need to correct part of the data reported earlier to the HELCOM-ASCOBANS database.
- Finland will update the database with information from 2017, 2018 and 2019 as soon as the data has been collated.

4.14 The Meeting took note that Germany reports on incidental sightings through local governmental organization, and that there is a risk of double reporting as the same data might be submitted by the local government organization and through the work of EG MAMA. The Meeting invited the Secretariat to confirm the current data flows with the HELCOM data coordinator and report back to EG MAMA 14-2020.

4.15 The Meeting took note of information on the progress of the SAMBAH II project proposal under the LIFE call, as presented by Julia Carlström (presentation 7). The Meeting took note that the planned project is to be coordinated by HELCOM, should it get funded.

4.16 The Meeting considered the issue of national funding for SAMBAH II, and its division between the partner countries. The Meeting took note of information from the Secretariat that an evening session to discuss the funding issue can be organized at STATE & CONSERVATION 11-2019 for those partners that are present. The Meeting considered that following the evening session, an online meeting with all relevant parties should be organized by the project consortium.

#### **Agenda Item 4.3 Management of harbour porpoise and human induced pressures**

4.17 The Meeting took note that STATE & CONSERVATION 9-2018 and STATE & CONSERVATION 10-2019 meetings reviewed the existing actions from the Baltic Sea Action Plan and Ministerial Declarations 2010 and 2013 that have not been implemented yet.

4.18 The Meeting considered the identified actions related to harbour porpoises that were evaluated as not accomplished and needing further efforts as follows:

- Definition for “favourable conservation status” (e.g. threshold value) for harbour porpoise:

The Meeting noted that the information on harbor porpoise submitted under the EU Habitats Directive article 17 reporting should be available and can be used as a basis for suggesting a definition of favourable conservation status on the population level. The Meeting agreed that the article 17 reporting information will be collated and that the Harbour Porpoise Abundance and Distribution Team will then use the information to propose a definition for the term and provide it to State and Conservation 11-2019.

- Available technical measures to minimize by-catch of harbor porpoises:

The Meeting noted that the FISH WG has collated a table on alternative fishing gears, including gears used in mitigation of bycatch and that the ACTION WP1 has collated a broad overview of available technical measures. The Meeting agreed that the Harbour Porpoise Abundance and Distribution Team will review the table collated by FISH WG, use the table as a basis when preparing a list of available technical measures and provide the list to State and Conservation 11-2019.

4.19 The Meeting took note of comment by Germany, that in Schleswig-Holstein waters, porpoise alerting devices (PALs) have been distributed to fishermen since 2017, but there has been no monitoring or further investigation on the effects of the devices. The Meeting also took note of

concerns by scientific experts and the Jastarnia group that these measures may not lead to bycatch reduction.

4.20 The Meeting supported that in order to be able to assert the effectiveness such technical measures for bycatch reduction a monitoring of the bycatch rates and accompanying research program to analyse effectiveness, habituation and signal characteristics must be in place. The Meeting noted that Poland would be interested in the views of fishermen on using the devices.

4.21 The Meeting took note that in order for the information to feed into the Baltic Sea Action Plan update process, the requested information on actions need to be provided to State and Conservation within autumn 2019.

#### *National management plans for harbor porpoises*

4.22 The Meeting took note that the Secretariat has not received any information on harbour porpoise management plans.

4.23 The Meeting took note of the following information regarding management plans for harbour porpoises:

- According to current information the management plan for harbour porpoise in Sweden will be finalised by summer 2020.
- Germany will prepare a management plan for harbour porpoise, but the work is delayed due to work on site management plans.

4.24 The Meeting took note of the invitation by ASCOBANS to nominate representation to the newly established Working Group on resource Depletion. The Meeting agreed to nominate Katarzyna Kaminska as the HELCOM representative to the group.

4.25 The Meeting took note of information from ASCOBANS AC vice chair Penina Blankett on harbour porpoise related activities under ASCOBANS Advisory Committee. The Meeting took note that 25th meeting of the Advisory Committee took place 17-19 September 2019, addressing e.g. hazardous substances, marine protected areas and bycatch issue, including the OSPAR-HELCOM indicator bycatch workshop. The Committee meeting noted that Contracting Parties had failed to submit the proposal to include the Baltic Sea harbour porpoise in CMS appendix I in time for the EU coordination process in preparation for CMS COP13 which will take place in February 2020, but encouraged parties to submit the proposal in time for the next CMS COP which will be held in 2023.

4.26 The Meeting took note of the activities related to Baltic Sea harbour porpoises under Jastarnia Group as presented by the Chair of Jastarnia, Ida Carlén (presentation 8). The Meeting took note of the 14<sup>th</sup> Jastarnia Meeting, which took place in March 2019.

4.27 The Meeting took note that Germany has not yet carried out the ship shock trials with the "Karlsruhe" in the Baltic Sea which were planned for October 2018, because further expert opinions must be obtained and evaluated, and agreement with the ministry of environment of Schleswig-Holstein should be reached (document 4-4). The Meeting took note of the comment from Germany that the ship shock trials are not only an issue in Germany, but are a normal naval practice.

4.28 The Meeting took note of the following national activities on harbor porpoises:

- Finland has ongoing acoustic monitoring as well as collecting sightings.
- Sweden has extended the acoustic monitoring program, now also including 14 new stations in N2000 sites in the Kattegat sea and 18 stations in the Baltic Proper.
- Germany has conducted areal surveys over summer, and Germany, Denmark and Sweden are conducting a MiniSCANS survey in 2020.

#### **Agenda Item 4.4 Recommendation 17/2**

4.29 The Meeting took note that HOD 55-2019 agreed to initiate a process to revise the Recommendation, whereby STATE & CONSERVATION 10-2019 provides initial revisions to the document, to be submitted to EG MAMA 13-2019 meeting for further revision and to STATE &

CONSERVATION 11-2019 for endorsement and submission to HOD 57-2019 for approval, aiming at adoption by HELCOM 41-2020.

4.30 The Meeting took note of the draft revised recommendation, as edited by STATE & CONSERVATION 10-2019 (document 4-1).

4.31 The Meeting provided further input to the recommendation as contained in document 4-1 rev.1 and agreed to submit the revised document to STATE & CONSERVATION 11-2019 for endorsement, with the intention of submitting the revised Recommendation to HOD 57-2019 for approval and HELCOM 41-2020 for adoption.

4.32 The Meeting agreed to postpone the consideration on the reporting form for Recommendation 17/2 until after the revised Recommendation has been approved.

#### **Agenda Item 5 Any other business**

Document: 5-1, 5-2, 5-3

5.1 The Meeting took note and was impressed by an art project on noise effects on harbour porpoises produced by a student project at Anhalt University of Applied Sciences under supervision of Rochus Hartman in cooperation with Fabian Ritter, as presented by Michael Dähne.

5.2 The Meeting took note of the results of a project screening seals for nematode infections as presented by Sara Persson (presentation 9) and discussed the information on seal parasites in the Baltic Sea area.

5.3 The Meeting took note of information on examples of aggressive behaviour of grey seal towards other seal species, including first reported case of cannibalism on young grey sea near Bornholm in August 2019, as presented by Ursula Siebert and Anders Galatius. The Meeting discussed the evidence on grey seal predation on harbour seals, harbour porpoises and grey seals.

5.4 The Meeting took note of the policy position paper by CPMR Baltic Sea Commission on legalizing trade in seal products from controlled hunting (document 5-2).

5.5 The Meeting took note of the concerns by CCB with regards to NATO mine clearance exercise in Fehmarn Belt, as presented by Ida Carlén (document 5-3, presentation 10).

5.6 The Meeting took note that an unmitigated mine sweeping activity of the NATO took place in the German marine nature conservation and N2000 area, Fehmarnbelt, potentially affecting an area of high harbour porpoise density in August-September of 2019. This is a sensitive time period for porpoises when calves are newborn and nursed. The Meeting expressed deep concerns about potential effects on individuals, as also expressed by ASCOBANS AC 25, especially taking into account that these activities could have been planned for a different time period and also mitigated. The Meeting invited the Contracting Parties to keep EG MAMA informed about further development.

5.7 The Meeting recommended that these activities must be openly communicated and analysed together with other noise effects to form a basis for reevaluating existing or establishing new guidelines for planning and mitigation to prevent population level effects on all marine mammals, but especially porpoises. The Meeting strongly recommended NATO and the navies of Contracting Parties to utilise the expertise of the group for planning of similar exercises in the future.

5.8 The Meeting underlined that for the critically endangered harbour porpoise population, all use of explosives having an effect on the individual level are very likely to have effects also on the population level.

5.9 The Meeting amended and agreed on the Terms of Reference (ToRs) for the next meeting, including an Annex outlining the main tasks and membership of the Teams, and agreed on submitting the draft ToRs for endorsement by STATE & CONSERVATION 11-2019.

5.10 The Meeting welcomed the introduction by the new HELCOM Executive Secretary, Mr. Rüdiger Stempel.

5.11 The Meeting took note of the list of recent Marine Mammal Expert Group meeting hosts (**document 5-1**).

5.12 The Meeting welcomed the information that Denmark has offered to host the EG MAMA 14-2020 meeting in Odense. The Meeting agreed to hold the meeting on 22-24 September 2020.

5.13 The Meeting thanked the attendees for constructive participation and the secretariat for professional support.

#### **Agenda Item 6 Outcome of the Meeting**

6.1 The Meeting adopted the draft outcome of the Meeting. The Outcome of the Meeting, together with the documents and presentations considered by the Meeting are available in the [HELCOM Meeting Portal](#)

## Annex 1 List of Participants

name	email	organisation
Chair		
Anders Galatius	agj@bios.au.dk	Aarhus University
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Dieter Boedeker	dieter.boedeker@bfn.de	BfN
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## Annex 2 Draft Terms of Reference for EG MAMA 14-2020

The HELCOM Expert Group on Marine Mammals (EG MAMA) will during its 14<sup>th</sup> meeting, and in the intersessional period leading up to the meeting, do the following:

1. Indicators:
  - a. The Marine Mammal Health team will further develop existing and new indicators for the health status of seals and porpoises including considering expanding the reproduction indicator to include ringed seal, harbor seal and harbor porpoise, and report to **EG MAMA 14-2020**.
  - b. The co-Leads for the Harbour Porpoise Abundance and Distribution indicators, together with the Harbour Porpoise Abundance and Distribution Team, will continue the work on developing the indicators on 'Harbour porpoise distribution and abundance', including further defining key monitoring sites and reference levels and report to **EG MAMA 14-2020**.
  - c. Mr. Sven Koschinski, Germany, in collaboration with Poland and Sweden and supported by CG FishData, will continue the work on the development of the indicator 'Number of drowned mammals and waterbirds in fishing gears' and report to **EG MAMA 14-2020**.
2. Management plans of marine mammals:
  - a. The national representative to EG MAMA are requested to review the new and updated national management- and action plans from their respective countries against the guidelines developed by SEAL 8-2014, and present the results for discussion at **EG MAMA 14-2020**.
3. Dataflows for data on seals and harbor porpoise:
  - Data on seal abundance and distribution
    - a. Countries to present the results of the 2019 seal surveys.
    - b. The Secretariat to report back on how seal survey data can be included in the HELCOM Biodiversity Database.
    - c. Countries to report on any ongoing telemetry data initiatives to EG MAMA 14-2020 and consider presenting the results in the HELCOM Map and Data Services.
  - HELCOM/ASCOBANS Database on Harbour Porpoise
    - d. Information to the HELCOM/ASCOBANS database is to be updated by filling in the reporting form and sending it to the Secretariat ([jannica.haldin@helcom.fi](mailto:jannica.haldin@helcom.fi)) in advance of EG MAMA 13-2019.
    - e. Nomination of national contacts for updating the HELCOM/ASCOBANS harbour porpoise database to be submitted to the Secretariat ([jannica.haldin@helcom.fi](mailto:jannica.haldin@helcom.fi)).
  - Mortality of Marine Mammals
    - f. Denmark to report mortality data from previous years from Kattegat in advance of EG MAMA 13-2019.
    - g. All Contracting Parties to provide data on the mortality of marine mammals for year 2018 in advance of EG MAMA 13-2019.

- h. Germany, to inform EG MAMA 13-2019 on the progress within OSPAR and ASCOBANS to develop databases for collecting detailed data (including geographical information) of mortality, necropsies and dead bodies, and to propose how to harmonize the HELCOM data collection with these other initiatives.
4. Monitoring guidelines:
- a. The guidelines for monitoring blubber thickness-, guidelines for monitoring of reproductive status-, guidelines for monitoring for the draft health indicators for marine mammals will be further improved by the health team intersessionally and presented at **EG MAMA 14-2020**.
  - b. The Harbour Porpoise Distribution and Abundance team will commence the work on drafting monitoring guidelines for distribution and abundance intersessionally and present at **EG MAMA 14-2020**.
5. Work on Baltic Sea harbour porpoise:
- a. Follow up on issues related to the update of Recommendation 17/2.
  - b. Ms. Penina Blankett, Vice-chair of the ASCOBANS AC to report on activities of ASCOBANS and Ms. Ida Carlén, Chair of Jastarnia Group, to report on activities of the Jastarnia Group at **EG MAMA 14-2020**.
9. Marine mammals - fisheries interaction:
- a. Continue discussion on the interactions between mammals and fisheries in cooperation with the HELCOM Fish group.
  - b. Present progress from the ASCOBANS&ACCOBAMS working group on bycatch.
10. Intersessional activities of the teams
- a. The marine mammal health team is requested to inform on their intersessional activities **at EG MAMA 14-2020**.
    - i. The Team will strive to further work on the Anisakid nematode species in marine mammals resident in the Baltic Sea and strive to expand the work to include fish health and intermediate hosts.
    - ii. The Team will hold its second workshop in Poland in January.
  - b. The Seal Distribution team is requested to inform on their intersessional activities **at EG MAMA 14-2020**.
  - c. The Seal Abundance team is requested to inform on their intersessional activities **at EG MAMA 14-2020**.
  - d. The Harbour Porpoise Abundance and Distribution Team is requested to inform on their intersessional activities **at EG MAMA 14-2020**.
    - i. The Team is to collate national information on how Favourable Conservation Status has been decided, and develop a suggestion for a regional definition for the term, to support the revision of existing actions to be included in the updated Baltic Sea Action Plan, and provide the information to State and Conservation WG.
    - ii. The Team is to reviewing the list of by-catch mitigation measures prepared by FISH WG and submit a list of available measures to State and Conservation WG.

**Draft Terms of Reference for EG MAMA 14-2020****ANNEX 1: Role and membership of the EG MAMA Teams****Marine Mammal Health Team**

Role of team:

To review marine mammal health data. This team will identify need for research relevant to assess marine mammal health status and collect information and evaluate results.

Team Membership:

Germany	Ursula Siebert (Team Lead)
Denmark	Morten Tange Olsen
Denmark	Heidi Huus Petersen
Denmark	Line Kyhn
Denmark	Rune Dietz
Denmark	Anders Galatius
Estonia	Ivar Jussi
Estonia	Mart Jussi
Finland	Marja Isomursu
Finland	Kaarina Kauhala
Germany	Kristina Lehnert
Germany	Michael Dähne
Latvia	Valdis Pilats
Lithuania	Ignas Kazlauskas
Lithuania	Vaida Surviliene
Poland	Iwona Pawliczka
Russia	Mikhail Verevkin
Sweden	Sara Persson
Sweden	Karin Hårding
Sweden	Britt-Marie Bäcklin

**Harbour Porpoise Abundance and Distribution Team**

## Role of the Team:

To function as a cooperation and coordination platform in order to harmonize national harbor porpoise work, including monitoring, on a regional scale to achieve sufficient data quality for the harbor porpoise indicators. To support the indicator leads in their work to maintain and develop indicators for harbor porpoise.

## Team Membership:

Country	Name
Germany	Michael Dähne
Germany	Anita Gilles (Team lead)
Germany	Dominik Nachtsheim
Sweden	Julia Carlström (Team lead)
Denmark	Signe Sveegaard
Poland	Iwona Pawliczka
Finland	Olli Loisa
ASCOBANS	Ida Carlén
Denmark	Finn Larsen
Poland	Katarzyna Kaminska
Finland	Penina Blankett
WWF	Antti Halkka

**Seal Population Team**

Role of Team:

To develop and coordinate abundance and trend monitoring and undertake abundance and trend estimations

Team Membership

Country	Name
Estonia	Ivar Jussi (Team Lead)
Denmark	Finn Larsen
Denmark	Morten Olsen
Denmark	Anders Galatius
Finland	Penina Blankett
Finland	Mervi Kunnasranta
Finland	Mikko Toivola
Germany	Alexander Liebschner
Germany	Linda Westphal
Poland	Iwona Pawliczka
Russia	Mikhail Verevkin
Sweden	Markus Ahola
Sweden	Susanne Viker

## Seal Distribution Team

Role of Team:

1. Review of seal distribution data
2. Gather information on, and evaluate research on seal movements, e.g. from satellite tagging programmes;
3. Identification of suitable habitats for breeding, moulting, and at sea distribution for harbour seals and moulting and at sea distribution for grey seals and ringed seals.
4. Identification of protected areas for seals in the Baltic either on a national, HELCOM or EU level and evaluate the protection regime;
5. Identification of those habitats already used by seals with a view to a potential establishment of those habitats identified under 2. and 3. as potential protected areas for seals; and
6. Work on the suggestion to use the degree of geographical coverage (expansion) of suitable habitats in the Baltic Sea as reference levels for the distribution reference levels. Development/Specification of this objective as an indicator for the Baltic Sea Action Plan.

Team Membership:

Estonia	Mart Jussi (Team Lead)
Estonia	Märt Kesküla
Denmark	Finn Larsen
Denmark	Morten Olsen
Denmark	Anders Galatius
Finland	Mervi Kunnasranta
Finland	Penina Blankett
Germany	Alexander Liebschner
Germany	Michael Dähne
Poland	Iwona Pawliczka
Russia	Mikhail Verevkin
Sweden	Markus Ahola
Sweden	Susanne Viker
WWF	Antti Halkka