



## Outcome of the Fourteenth meeting of HELCOM Expert Group on Marine Mammals (EG MAMA 14-2020)

### Introduction

0.1 In accordance with the decision of EG MAMA 13-2019 (5.12), the fourteenth Meeting of the HELCOM Expert Group on Marine Mammals (EG MAMA 14-2020), was held on 22–24 September 2020 online via Zoom.

0.2 The Meeting was attended by delegations from all Contracting Parties except the EU and Latvia. The Meeting was also attended by observers from Coalition Clean Baltic, WWF, Pro Mare NGO and Swedish Association for Hunting and Wildlife Management. 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 Kaikkonen, Associate Professional Secretary acted as secretaries of the Meeting.

0.4 Chair of the Meeting Mr. Anders Galatius welcomed the participants.

### **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 INF, 2-3, 2-4, 2-5

2.1 The Meeting took note of outcomes from recent HELCOM meetings of relevance for EG MAMA (**document 2-5**).

2.2 The Meeting took note of the Terms of Reference for the Meeting, adopted by STATE & CONSERVATION 11-2019 (**document 2-1**).

2.3 The Meeting took note of the input regarding additional tasks for EG MAMA as identified by STATE & CONSERVATION 11-2019, as presented in **Presentation 1**. The Meeting agreed under which agenda point each of the additional tasks would be considered.

2.4 The Meeting took note of information regarding the update of the Baltic Sea Action Plan (**Presentation 2**).

2.5 The Meeting reviewed Results of the SOM analysis for mammals presented by the Secretariat (**document 2-3, Presentation 3**). The Meeting took note of concerns over the low number of respondents in the expert survey and the consequent strong effect of individual responses on the results of the SOM analysis.

2.6 The Meeting noted that there may have been misunderstanding regarding the relationship between the SOM WS on Marine Mammals and the online survey amongst the invited respondents, which has resulted in a very low response rate for marine mammals. In addition, there may have been

some lack of clarity regarding the survey questions, which might explain the wide distribution of the responses.

2.7 The Meeting further emphasized that the effects of climate change are of high importance especially for the southern subpopulations of ringed seals (Archipelago Sea, Gulf of Finland, Gulf of Riga). The northernmost subpopulation in the Bay of Bothnia is already affected as well. Mild winters and diminishing ice cover also affect grey seals in the northern Baltic. The effects of climate change should therefore be addressed as an important pressure, although not included in the SOM analysis.

2.8 The Meeting recommended that consideration is given to whether results stemming from only one or two responses where low agreement was achieved should be removed and not presented as part of the SOM analyses, while others could be included, at the discretion of State and Conservation. The Meeting agreed that this should be presented to STATE&CONSERVATION 13-2020 for decision. The Meeting noted that participants are invited to send any additional comments to the Secretariat ([luke.dodd@helcom.fi](mailto:luke.dodd@helcom.fi)) by **1 October 2020**.

2.9 The Meeting took note of the progress of the work on the HELCOM Science Agenda and that further information regarding progress and upcoming work will be made available to STATE&CONSERVATION 13-2020.

2.10 The meeting took note of the work on the Climate change key messages for marine mammals by HELCOM-Baltic Earth Expert Network on Climate Change (EN CLIME) and that the final drafts of the key messages for all parameters will be sent for peer review during autumn, with the aim of having them approved in early spring 2021 and used as a basis for including concrete climate change information in the updated BSAP.

2.11 The meeting took note of Progress of work on the HELCOM monitoring manual update.

2.12 The meeting took note of Progress on HOLAS III (**Presentation 4**).

#### *Ongoing indicator work of relevance for both seal and harbour porpoise teams*

2.13 The Meeting took note of the Work plan for future work on HELCOM indicators on marine mammals and bycatch (**document 3-1**). The Meeting took note of input by Germany to Annex 1 of the Work plan as included in **document 3-1 rev.1**.

2.14 The Meeting took note of the ongoing work on developing the indicator Number of drowned mammals and waterbirds in fishing gears as presented by Ms. Kate Kaminska, PL. Current work is focused on testing the proposed method for setting threshold values developed in the joint OSPAR-HELCOM workshop to examine possibilities for developing indicators for incidental bycatch of birds and marine mammals held in Copenhagen, Denmark on the 3-5 September 2019.

2.15 The Meeting took note that work on developing a technical annex report based on the background material for, and work in, the workshop is also progressing and that such a report could be considered for a joint OSPAR-HELCOM publication, if agreed by the contracting parties.

#### *Registered mortality of marine mammals*

2.16 The Meeting took note of the annual registered mortality of marine mammals as reported by the Contracting Parties (**document 2-2 rev.1**). Contracting parties are invited to report any missing information to the Secretariat ([laura.kaikkonen@helcom.fi](mailto:laura.kaikkonen@helcom.fi)).

2.17 The Meeting took note of information from Germany on progress within OSPAR and ASCOBANS in developing databases for collecting strandings data of cetaceans. The work is still ongoing and has suffered some delays due to Covid-19, but the aim is to still finalize the work by the end of the year.

*Any other information of relevance*

2.18 The meeting took note of information by Germany on planning a screening study on hazardous substances in marine mammals (**document 2-4**). Six contracting parties (SE, FI, DK, DE, PL and LT) indicated their interest to participate in the screening study and proposed contact persons. The remaining contracting parties are invited to nominate contact persons for providing samples for the study to Anita Künitzer (Anita.kuenitzer@uba.de) by **20 October 2020**.

2.19 The Meeting discussed the focus of such screening studies. It was noted that the proposed sample size of two samples per country may not be enough for a comprehensive overview of all marine mammals and it would be useful to focus on one species with a pan-Baltic distribution, for example grey seal.

2.20 The Meeting agreed that Germany will prepare a more detailed document of what kind of information is needed from those providing samples and send it to those providing samples.

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

- Hel Marine Station of University of Gdansk and WWF Poland have received funding for a project dedicated to seals, birds and harbour porpoise. Project work provides a continuation of activities covered in previous projects. The work includes e.g. continuous monitoring, aerial surveys for the grey seals, and acoustic surveys of harbour porpoises. As a new addition to ongoing work, the project will address testing alternative fishing gears and targeting individual adult grey seals to find out their migration routes. The results of the project will feed to reporting obligations of e.g. HELCOM, OSPAR, ASCOBANS and ICES.
- The state monitoring program in Poland was fully established in 2018. Annual monitoring is in place for grey seals and as of next year will also cover harbour porpoise.
- Germany has received three-year continuation of funding for monitoring grey seals. Currently aerial surveys will, as of next year, be complemented with stable isotope analyses and stomach content analyses.
- Finland is now offering compensation delivering the carcasses of adult male grey seals, shot by professional fishermen while damaging fishing gear, to the authorities. Fishermen that bring the animal ashore are given a compensation for the cost of discarding the corpse. At the moment the Regional Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment in Finland have made 14 decisions and some compensation has already been paid. The carcasses of the seals have been brought ashore and have all been buried and fishermen have been compensated for these.

### **Agenda Item 3    Seals in the Baltic Sea**

Documents: 3-1, 3-2, 3-3, 3-4, 3-5, 2-6

#### **Agenda Item 3.1 Report on the intersessional activities under the EG MAMA Seal teams**

3.1 The Meeting took note of recent intersessional activities of the seal population team as presented by lead Mr. Ivar Jüssi, as follows:

Grey seal:

- Results from Baltic grey seal censuses 2019 were presented. The total count amounts to over 38 000 seals. Data from Russia is unavailable.
- Updated information about census methods used in Poland was provided for the intersessional team for seal population abundance immediately after the Meeting.

Ringed seal

- Sweden has annual numbers for Bothnian bay, and Estonia has 'unofficial data' from volunteer work (no project).
- For ringed seal in 2020 Estonia and Russia has mainly relied on boat-based censuses as the ice conditions have been very poor. A small number of camera traps have

been used in the Archipelago Sea in Finland. Russia is doing aerial surveys in spring and autumn and will provide numbers once the autumn survey results are available.

- There is a need to explore alternative census methods as mild winters are becoming increasingly common. Discovery of land haulouts and boat-based censuses on them could provide a functional alternative to aerial surveys. Alternative methods should also be considered for inclusion in the HELCOM Monitoring Guidelines.

#### Harbour seal

- For 2019, Denmark and Sweden informed the Meeting that in the Kattegat area the 2019 surveys gave a results of ca 10,000 counted seals and that the number of seals has been stable, at 9000-10000 animals since 2013. In Limfjord the population has not been growing since 2002 and ca 1000 harbour seals were counted in 2019. In the southern Baltic, the population is still growing and around 1100 animals were counted in 2019. In Kalmarsund, the population is steadily increasing, last year's count was around 1700 seals.

3.2 The Meeting took note of a proposal by Sweden regarding amending the sub-units used for presenting grey seal survey results to improve the ecological relevance of the units, rather than representing administrative borders. The Meeting discussed the proposed changes to the division of the sub-units and acknowledged that the ecological relevance of the sub-units is of higher importance when considering the distribution of the population as opposed to the abundance. The Meeting agreed that population group finds a way to present data from both an ecological and an administrative point of view (c.f. para. 3.6).

3.3 The Meeting took note of the comment that EG MAMA should strive to make census information which stems from spring surveys available to the meeting within the same year.

3.4 The Meeting took note of recent intersessional activities of the seal distribution team by Mr. Mart Jüssi as follows:

- To guide the work of the team, the team lead has intersessionally prepared a brief survey for the members, targeting four key questions, as presented here.
  1. Is survey data from existing surveys appropriate for estimating distribution and can it be used to assess changes.
    - Responses conclude that while the survey data is good for moulting distribution, they do not account for the breeding or foraging distribution as the surveys only target moulting haulouts in moulting time in most countries.
    - The current data do not sufficiently cover information on overlap of areas where more than one species forages, which can lead to inter-specific competition.
    - The Team estimates that harbour seal data on moulting distribution would be sufficient enough to describe the distribution in other times of year, too, whereas grey seal and ringed seal breeding and foraging distributions do not correspond enough with their moulting distribution.
    - The Team considered the possibility to rearrange the information in the existing abundance tables to better serve the needs of both the Abundance and Distribution Teams. In addition, abundance surveys by regions/sub-divisions would be a way to possibly improve the use of abundance data to support the work on distribution.
  2. The use and availability of telemetry data
    - The team expressed the need to get a current overview of existing telemetry data, deployments, basic relevant metadata and data holders, while not making the actual telemetry information available to the general public.
  3. The adequacy of Marine Protected Areas (MPA) for seal distribution.

- The Team highlighted that while accounting for overlap between MPAs and moulting haulouts should be a fairly straightforward exercise. the extent to which MPAs overlaps with at sea and breeding distribution is currently not known as at sea data are still largely lacking.

4. Including monitoring on breeding distribution in the HELCOM monitoring programme.

- The Team expressed that in order to monitor the realization of the General Management Principles in the Recommendation 27-28/2r breeding distribution of grey seals needs to be monitored
- The Team is looking into the indicators for distribution and particularly raised a concern that the resolution of current data is not sufficient to allow for a proper indicator evaluation, especially with regards to breeding and foraging distributions.

3.5 The Meeting discussed the option of using citizen science for spotting e.g. seal pups and targeted some surveys to sites that are suspected or known for grey seal breeding. The Meeting took note that while citizen observations may be feasible for some countries, for countries like e.g. Finland and Sweden the breeding areas are often remote, and it is not feasible to rely on citizen science and mapping breeding areas would require proper aerial surveys.

3.6 The Meeting invited the population and distribution teams to intersessionally discuss and prepare a suggestion of updated borders for reporting and present suggestion(s) for further discussion at EG MAMA 15-2021.

3.7 The Meeting invited the distribution team to continue working on the details of developing telemetry data sharing, including drafting a possible table for reporting and/or looking into database option and present the results at EG MAMA 15-2021.

3.8 The Meeting invited the distribution team to draft a suggestion on the monitoring of breeding distribution of seals, including justifications and an overview of the current available information on pupping distribution from each country, to be submitted to and further discussed at EG MAMA 15-2021, with the intention of submitting a proposal to State and Conservation WG. Contracting Parties are invited to submit information to Group Chair (agj@bios.au.dk) by 1. November 2020 for compilation.

3.9 The Meeting took note of recent activities of intersessional team for Marine Mammal Health as follows:

- The team had a workshop planned for March 2020, which had to be cancelled due to covid-19 restrictions. The workshop would have included practical sessions with necropsies of different marine mammal species to make further adjustments and harmonize monitoring practices between countries, as well as considering GES thresholds. The Team has agreed to continue the planned work as soon as possible, taking into account the Covid-19 situation. The Team has also planned internationally unified databases and has worked intersessionally on updating the guidelines for monitoring blubber thickness in seals, reproductive status, as well as additional health indicators. The Health team report is being continuously updated (**document 2-6**).

3.10 The Meeting took note of the information that Bonus BaltHealth project, investigating the effects of anthropogenic substances on key species, has now been finalized. The project has produced many scientific outputs of interest to the Health Team's work. The outcomes of the project can be found online ([link](#)).

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

#### *Monitoring guidelines*

3.11 The Meeting took note of the ongoing development of monitoring guidelines for blubber thickness (**document 3-3**) and reproductive status of marine mammals (**document 3-4**). The Meeting

noted that participants are invited to provide input to the monitoring guidelines to Sara Persson ([Sara.Persson@nrm.se](mailto:Sara.Persson@nrm.se)), by **30 November 2020**.

3.12 The Meeting took note of ongoing work by the health Team on developing guidelines for monitoring additional health indicators of marine mammals in the HELCOM area (**document 3-5**). Participants are invited to provide comments on the guidelines to the health team leader via email ([ursula.siebert@tiho-hannover.de](mailto:ursula.siebert@tiho-hannover.de)).

3.13 The Meeting took note of the general comment by the Secretariat that monitoring guidelines should outline the agreed recommended methods and approaches for the region, and that information on methods currently used in national monitoring can be included in an Annex to the guideline.

#### *Database for seals*

3.14 The meeting took note of the HELCOM DataFlow project as presented by the Secretariat.

3.15 The Meeting took note that the first task of the HELCOM DataFlow project has been to identify gaps dataflows which will function as a basis for an early data call for HOLAS III, as well as for further work in 2021 to address the gaps and ensure improved dataflows for HOLAS III. The Meeting noted that the data call will be addressed at the upcoming State and Conservation meeting (STATE&CONSERVATION 13-2020).

3.16 The Meeting took note of the information from the Secretariat that the previously expressed need by EG MAMA to be able to include count data in the HELCOM databases will be considered in the development, as well as other parameters relevant to marine mammals, thus enabling the inclusion of marine mammal data in the database.

3.17 The Meeting took note of the progress on database for seals. The Meeting took note that to the extent possible the data from 2017 data call is available on HELCOM biodiversity database.

#### Agenda Item 3.3 Core indicators

3.18 The Meeting took note of the presentation on progress on the development of the indicators for blubber thickness and reproductive rate (**Presentation 5**).

3.19 The Meeting noted that the proposals will be further discussed at a Health team meeting planned for autumn 2020 and that comments to the approach and proposed threshold values can be submitted to ([Sara.Persson@nrm.se](mailto:Sara.Persson@nrm.se)) by **30 October 2020**.

3.20 The Meeting took note of the clarification by the Secretariat regarding timelines for the work, recommending that the approach and the draft threshold values be submitted to the spring meeting of State & Conservation WG in 2021 for endorsement, thus ensuring that there is enough time to implement any proposed changes prior to submitting it to HOD for approval.

#### **Agenda Item 3.4 Recommendation 27/28-2**

3.21 The Meeting acknowledged that that effectiveness of the recommendation 27/28-2 is strongly related to the interpretation and definition of Precautionary Approach Level and the other reference levels included in the recommendation and that the effectiveness of the recommendation should be evaluated once an agreement on these has been achieved.

3.22 The Meeting agreed that the recommendation would benefit from clarifying that for both the carrying capacity of the environment and the temporal development in the populations are dynamic in nature and depend on anthropogenic pressures on the ecosystem and the condition of the marine ecosystem, including fish stocks etc. The variable nature of the carrying capacity and the Precautionary Approach Level need to be considered.

3.23 The Meeting agreed that the reference to SEAL EG in the Recommendation should be updated to EG MAMA.

### **Agenda Item 3.5 Management of seals and human induced pressures**

#### *Precautionary Approach to management of seals*

3.24 The Meeting discussed options for estimating a Precautionary Approach Level (PAL) for individual seal populations with current data and methods.

3.25 The Meeting discussed challenges in setting recommended levels for seal abundance, especially as the levels are dependent on the carrying capacity of the environment, which in turn is dynamic and influenced by both natural and anthropogenic factors.

3.26 The Meeting considered that the recommended population levels should not focus only on a fixed number of animals and growth rate, but also account for trends in population size.

3.27 The Meeting considered that while it would be possible to make an estimate of the historical carrying capacity with existing past records of seal abundance, the carrying capacity would differ from the current conditions and would thus have limited use for identifying current PAL.

3.28 The Meeting took note that past carrying capacity would be interesting to look at from other perspectives and that such an exercise may still be of interest for other work of EG MAMA.

3.29 The Meeting further agreed that currently it is not possible to produce robust estimates for PAL from modeling as most methods are very sensitive to variations in the data.

3.30 The Meeting agreed that it is important for the EG MAMA group to indicate to STATE & CONSERVATION WG that the PAL and target levels cannot be determined nor modelled with the current level of information. PAL can only be set retrospectively.

3.31 The Meeting agreed that while producing estimates for the Precautionary Approach Level may not be possible, it is important to provide explanation as to why this is the case, to highlight the current knowledge gaps hindering these estimates, uncertainties related to them, and if and how these barriers might be overcome in the future.

3.32 The Meeting invited the Chair to draft a response to State and Conservation WG, including the above points, as well as description of methods and their caveats for the Population Team's consideration. The draft is to be submitted to EG MAMA Population Team for consideration and once approved to be submitted to State and Conservation WG.

#### *Adequacy of HELCOM and Natura 2000 MPAs in protecting seals*

3.33 The Meeting took note of the following information from the Contracting Parties:

- Denmark: All significant haulouts are covered by existing MPAs; however, the level and effectiveness of protection differs as area restrictions are not always enforced. MPAs can carry benefits to the resident seal populations as the presence of MPAs significantly affect the outcomes of e.g. EIAs.
- Estonia: Regarding grey seals, all major haulouts are protected by the special protection areas and there are quite strict restrictions of access to these. Same is true for ringed seals, with less than 10% of the seals is outside protected areas.
- Sweden: Seals are well protected in practice. There are many areas protected for breeding etc., but not enough appointed Natura 2000 areas, which needs to be addressed. Further work on this is expected in the coming years.
- Germany: In the German EEZ both harbour and grey seals are specified as conservation features in those MPAs where they occur. Although no management plans exist for the sites so far, all are nationally protected. The respective decrees include the protection, and where necessary, the restoration of seal populations. In coastal areas all haulouts are located within N2000 MPAs. Static

fishing gear located close to haulouts presents a challenge and many carcasses are found with fishing gear especially in June and July. Seal-human interaction is an issue on beaches. While management inside the MPAs is quite good (rangers, temporary shutoff areas), no measures are in place outside protected areas. Solutions are being looked into in the Mecklenburg-Vorpommern area to solve this.

- Finland: From 2001 there are 7 seal sanctuaries where the main haulouts are located, although there are also haulout outside these areas, some of these situated in Natura 2000 sites They are, with one exception, strictly protected (1 is test areas for seal watching and has a light house). Regarding Natura 2000 areas, grey and ringed seals are covered in many areas. Quite well covered by current protection, but improvements could still be made. In Åland Island there is one protected area and work is ongoing to identify more suitable Natura 2000 sites for seals, although this is still under discussion.
- Poland: The only haulout is located in a Natura 2000 site, however no special measures for grey seals in the area. The site overlaps with a bird protection area, and some of the measures taken for that area also carry benefits for the seals. There are no other haulouts along the Polish coastal zone – however in PLH220023 and PLH220044 grey seal is listed (Species referred to in Article 4 of Directive 2009/147/EC and listed in Annex II of Directive 92/43/EEC and site evaluation for them). Seals are protected under the law.
- Lithuania: No breeding colonies nor known haulouts, so no management plans. Seals are strictly protected by Lithuanian law, listed as nearly extinct, so no hunting is allowed. The main risk is likely bycatch.
- Russia: Hunting of seals is strictly forbidden since 1975, yet there is no official management plan for the marine mammals in the Russian part of the Baltic sea. The main haulouts are under strictly protected areas. 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”. A recent challenge is that grey seal populations are moving towards east, and e.g. near St Petersburg the areas now inhabited by seals are not protected. Seal-fisheries interaction remains a challenge, as fishermen illegally shoot seals, making this in addition to bycatch the main risk. Plans for the 2021 are the study of seal abundance and distribution in the Gulf of Finland.

### *National management plans for seals*

3.34 The Meeting reviewed overview of the national management plans for seals (**document 3-2**). The Meeting agreed to submit updated information regarding national management plans to the Secretariat (laura.kaikkonen@helcom.fi) prior to the EG MAMA 15-2021 meeting.

### *Marine mammal – fisheries interaction*

3.35 The Meeting took note of information from the Secretariat on the work of the Fish Working Group. The Meeting took note of the importance of joint work with the Fish Group work on alternative fishing gear, but also the issue of parasites.

3.36 The Meeting discussed current knowledge gaps and challenges with regard to cod parasites and possible links to the increasing number of grey seals. The Meeting took note that State& Conservation WG had previously indicated that there should be improvements to investigate how the increasing seals numbers may be affecting fish stocks.

3.37 The Meeting acknowledged that there is still a gap in understanding the link between the seal population growth and fish health.

3.38 The Meeting considered that in order to provide a more complete assessment of the seal-fish interactions with regards to parasites, more comprehensive fish health surveys are needed as well as a better understanding of drivers. It is also important to account for abiotic factors that may affect the lifecycles of these parasites in the Baltic Sea, as well as the several intermediate hosts of the parasites.

3.39 The Meeting took note of information regarding several initiatives to improve the knowledge on, and strengthen the scientific basis of, seal-parasite-fish interactions, both using historical records and current monitoring and sampling data.

3.40 The Meeting took note of information that Denmark is working on using DNA analysis for scat samples to determine the presence of parasites, welcomed the information that other CPs are welcome to provide samples for analysis by contacting Morten Tang Olsen (morten.olsen@snm.ku.dk) for more information.

3.41 The Meeting invited the Marine Mammal Health Team to work further 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 and agreed to exchange information on progress of ongoing initiatives regarding seal-fish interactions at the EG MAMA 15-2021.

3.42 The Meeting invited Contracting Parties to make available documents and information on this topic by submitting them to the EG MAMA 15-2021 as meeting document.

#### **Agenda Item 4 Baltic Sea Harbour Porpoise**

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

##### **Agenda Item 4.1 Report of intersessional activities by the Harbour Porpoise Abundance and Distribution team**

4.1 The Meeting took note of the tasks taken by the Harbour Porpoise Team as follows:

The Team has worked on two key tasks stemming from EG MAMA 13-2019 meeting:

- Collating information on how national Favourable Conservation Status has been agreed, with the aim of using this information to develop a proposal for a regional value for the harbour porpoise. The Team evaluates that scientific basis for such assessments is missing and more data would be needed. The Team has further communicated with OSPAR Marine Mammals Expert Group, who have done parallel work on the same topic for harbour porpoise. The Teams have shared information on their ongoing work and the collated results will be forwarded to State and Conservation Working Group.

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

4.2 The Meeting took note of the information that no progress has been made intersessionally on the development of monitoring guidelines for harbour porpoise abundance and distribution, but the team aims to continue the work and present progress at EG MAMA 15-2021. The Meeting supported the proposal to develop two separate guidelines, one for visual monitoring and one for acoustic monitoring.

4.3 The Meeting took note of the status of the HELCOM-ASCOBANS harbour porpoise database as presented by the Secretariat. 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.kaikkonen@helcom.fi](mailto:laura.kaikkonen@helcom.fi)).

4.4 The Meeting agreed that for future reporting purposes mortality data for harbour porpoise will in the future be included in the HELCOM ASCOBANS database, as opposed to in the mortality spread sheet, and that the information will be reported in the form of individual datapoint, as is already the standard for the HELCOM-ASCOBANS harbour porpoise database, with the location information included, in order to secure data quality in the future with varying management borders.

4.5 The Meeting discussed the need and possibilities for making acoustic monitoring data for harbour porpoise available for both external and internal purposes and how to develop dataflows and processing of acoustic data to enable it to be shared in the HELCOM databases.

4.6 The Meeting recalled that the reporting template has been updated for the metadata for acoustic monitoring. While the updated reporting template has been available upon request from the Secretariat, the Meeting took note that it would benefit from being made available more widely.

4.7 The Meeting noted that the data on harbour porpoise in, in addition to distribution and abundance, is also used for many other purposes within HELCOM assessments, such as risk maps for bycatch and underwater noise.

4.8 The Meeting took note that the HELCOM dataflow project, focused on assisting in establishing functional long-term data flows, is already in place and will be able to support the work of the EG MAMA experts in this respect. The Secretariat will consult the relevant EG MAMA teams in terms of interpretation of data.

4.9 The Meeting discussed the need for intersessional work on a way forward for dataflows and converting acoustic raw data into relevant products in the HELCOM database and agreed that the relevant harbour porpoise experts will have a meeting in autumn 2020, together with the HELCOM DataFlow team, to scope how to progress the data reporting of acoustic monitoring data.

4.10 The Meeting took note of the status of the SAMBAH II project proposal as presented by Michael Dähne, Germany, on behalf of the German Federal Agency for Nature Conservation as application coordinator (**presentation 6**). The Meeting took note that the concept note of the proposal has been submitted on 16 July 2020, and in case the proposal receives support, a full proposal will be submitted in February 2021. The meeting thanked Germany for taking the coordinator role. Germany invited CPs to support the SAMBAH II application and project partners to realize the necessary co-funding.

4.11 The Meeting took note of information from ASCOBANS AC co-chair Penina Blankett on harbour porpoise related activities under ASCOBANS Advisory Committee. The Meeting took note that the 9<sup>th</sup> Meeting of Parties to ASCOBANS took place on 7-11 September online. The ASCOBANS meeting of parties had adopted 9 resolutions, 3 of which were new, and science related. The resolution related to the Baltic Proper harbour porpoise was one the main resolutions (resolution 9.2). Other resolutions include a resolution related to food availability and resource depletion (resolution 9.4), and one on marine debris. Additional previously adopted resolutions were also amended, including resolution on common dolphin conservation plan, small cetacean stranding response resolution, and the updated resolution regarding national reports.

4.12 The Meeting took note of the activities related to Baltic Sea harbour porpoises under the ASCOBANS Jastarnia Group as presented by the Chair of the Group, Ida Carlén (**presentation 7**).

4.13 The Meeting discussed the importance of cooperation between countries with regard to the presented planning of wind farms in the direct vicinity of MPAs, and how to ensure that the needs of harbour porpoise are accounted for in planning.

4.14 The Meeting supported the suggestion to take up the issues in spatial conservation of harbour porpoises and the planning of windfarms with the HELCOM VASAB working group.

4.15 The Meeting took note of information on the recent work on of ASCOBANS Working Group on Resource Depletion as presented by the HELCOM representative in the in the Group Katarzyna Kaminska (**presentation 8**).

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

4.16 The Meeting took note of the information on developing new indicators for the health status of harbour porpoises (**document 3-5**). Particular attention has been given to harmonizing parameters between countries and interpretation of pathological lesions.

4.17 The Meeting took note of information regarding the development of the indicators on abundance and distribution of harbour porpoises (**presentation 9**). The Meeting took note that the indicator has been split into 2: "Distribution of harbour porpoises (**document 4-3**) and Abundance and population trends of harbour porpoises (**document 4-2**) and that the main development work is now

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planned to be conducted under the SAMBAH II project, with the aim to have fully functional indicators for HOLAS IV.

#### Agenda Item 4.4 Recommendation 17/2

4.18 The Meeting took note of the information by the Secretariat that the recommendation 17/2 has been revised and HELCOM 41-2020 has adopted the revised recommendation.

#### Agenda Item 4.5 Management of harbour porpoise and human induced pressures

4.19 The Meeting took note of the ICES special request advice on emergency measures to prevent bycatch of common dolphin and Baltic Proper harbour porpoise.

4.20 The Meeting took note of an overview of the process and the proposed measures (**presentation 10**).

4.21 The Meeting took note of the Baltfish draft joint recommendation on fisheries measures to prevent bycatch of the Baltic Proper harbour porpoise, based on the ICES advice (**presentation 11**).

4.22 The Meeting took note of that in order for the measures to be effective the full set of measures need to be implemented.

4.23 The Meeting took note of the information that some of the limitations of the ICES Special Request Advice stems from the what is stated in the original advice request provided to ICES.

4.24 The Meeting discussed the ICES advice and agreed on statement drafted jointly by the Group (Annex 2).

4.25 The Meeting took note of concerns over the suggestion of using pingers within Natura 2000 sites and other MPAs of high importance for harbour porpoise as well as outside Natura 2000s sites, as pingers can have the side effect of deterring porpoise from high quality habitat. The Meeting took note that as pingers should be considered as an interim measure which should only be used in certain areas and for a limited time, and their use in protected areas should be avoided. As an emergency measure they can be used throughout the Baltic outside N2000 areas/MPAs as long as they are not used long-term.

4.26 The Meeting took note of concerns over that ICES scientific advice is being compared to BaltFISH short-term socio-economic concerns, without consideration of the long-term costs to the governments involved, and likely higher costs to fisheries in the long-term.

4.27 The Meeting took note of a comment by Sweden that the recent conservation and rescue efforts of the vaquita in Mexico is an example of failed consideration of long-term costs, as approximately 100 million USD have been spent since 2015 in a failed effort to save the vaquita, due to action being taken too late.

4.28 The Meeting further took note of the concern that scientific advice on adequate protection for a species within Natura 2000 sites that are set up for species protection can be a question of socio-economics, even when an issue is raised as an “emergency measure” aimed at preventing imminent extinction.

4.29 The Meeting took note of the National management plans for harbour porpoises (**document 3-2**). Contracting Parties are requested to take note of outdated information and to send any updates to the Secretariat (laura.kaikkonen@helcom.fi) prior to EG MAMA 15-2021.

#### Agenda Item 5 Future Work

5.1 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 13-2020.

5.2 The Meeting invited the newly appointed members of the teams to contact their respective team leaders.

5.3 The Meeting welcomed the information that Denmark has offered to host the EG MAMA 15-2021 meeting in Odense, Denmark. The Meeting agreed to hold the meeting on 14-16 September 2021. The Meeting took note that the meeting site is well-equipped to provide facilities for participants to join the meeting remotely.

**Agenda Item 6    Any other business**

6.1 The Meeting thanked the attendees for constructive participation and the Secretariat for professional support.

**Agenda Item 7    Outcome of the Meeting**

7.1 The Meeting adopted the Memo from the meeting via correspondence.

## Annex 1 List of Participants

name	email	organisation
Chair		
Anders Galatius	agj@dmu.dk	Aarhus University
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Kristina Lehnert	kristina.lehnert@tiho-hannover.de	Institute of Terrestrial and Aquatic Wildlife Research, University of Veterinary Medicine Hannover
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## Annex 2: EG MAMA Statement on ICES advice

EG MAMA AGREES that emergency measures to protect the genetically distinct, morphologically divergent and ecologically separated management unit of harbour porpoises in the Baltic Sea are urgently needed. To achieve a Good Environmental Status of porpoises according to HELCOM regulation in the Baltic Proper adequate conservation measures have been recently outlined in the ICES Special Request Advice on emergency measures to prevent bycatch of Common Dolphin (*Delphinus delphis*) and Baltic Proper Harbour Porpoise (*Phocoena phocoena*) in the Northeast Atlantic issued on 26 May 2020 and endorsed by the 9<sup>th</sup> Meeting of Parties to ASCOBANS on 11 Sep 2020.

EG MAMA agrees with and emphasizes the following resolutions made by ASCOBANS:

ASCOBANS URGES the Parties to implement swiftly the recommendations on measures for bycatch mitigation made by ICES in areas of more than occasional Harbour Porpoise occurrence.

ASCOBANS URGES Parties to put in place long-term bycatch mitigation measures in line with the ICES advice both within and outside marine protected areas in areas of more than occasional Harbour Porpoise occurrence.

ASCOBANS ENCOURAGES Parties not to carry out activities shown to cause negative impact on Harbour Porpoises within Baltic Proper Natura-2000 sites.

ASCOBANS URGES Parties to implement monitoring of fishing effort and bycatch in line with ICES advice and to take into account the HELCOM Roadmap on fisheries data in order to assess incidental bycatch and fisheries impact on benthic biotopes in the Baltic Sea.

EG MAMA undertakes work to further develop the HELCOM core indicator on distribution of harbour porpoises. The results of the indicator and other relevant scientific work should be taken into account when defining the term "more than occasional harbour porpoise occurrence".

ASCOBANS has agreed and underlined that pingers are only an interim solution and EG MAMA emphasizes the need for implementation and, when needed, development of fishing gear proven to minimize or avoid bycatch of protected, endangered and threatened species to replace static nets, using the best available technology.

## Annex 3 Draft Terms of Reference for EG MAMA 15-2021

The HELCOM Expert Group on Marine Mammals (EG MAMA) will during its 15<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 and nutritional status of seals and porpoises including considering expanding the reproduction indicator to include ringed seal, harbour seal and harbour porpoise, and report to **EG MAMA 15-2021**.
  - 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 Abundance and population trends of harbour porpoise and Distribution of harbour porpoise, and report to **EG MAMA 15-2021**.
  - c. Mr. Sven Koschinski, and Volker Dierschke, 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 15-2021**.
2. Management plans of marine mammals:
  - a. The national representatives 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 15-2021**
  - b. The national representatives to EG MAMA are requested to review and update the document on status of management plans of marine mammals by submitting the information to the Secretariat ([laura.kaikkonen@helcom.fi](mailto:laura.kaikkonen@helcom.fi)) prior to **EG MAMA 15-2021**.
3. Dataflows for data on seals and harbour porpoise:
  - Data for seals  
*Data on abundance and distribution of marine mammals*
    - a. The Secretariat to report back on how development of the HELCOM Biodiversity Database has been modified to accommodate abundance survey data for seals and harbour porpoise.
  - Mortality of Seals
    - a. Denmark to report mortality data from previous years from Kattegat in advance of **EG MAMA 15-2021**.
    - b. All Contracting Parties to provide data on the mortality, including information on bycatch and illegal killing, of seals for year 2018- 2020 in advance of **EG MAMA 15-2021**.
  - Data for harbour porpoise
    - a. The Contracting Parties are invited to report to the HELCOM/ASCOBANS Database on Harbour Porpoise prior to **EG MAMA 15-2021** by providing the data to the HELCOM Secretariat ([laura.kaikkonen@helcom.fi](mailto:laura.kaikkonen@helcom.fi)).
    - b. Nomination of national contacts for updating the HELCOM/ASCOBANS harbour porpoise database to be submitted to the Secretariat ([laura.kaikkonen@helcom.fi](mailto:laura.kaikkonen@helcom.fi)).
    - c. **EG MAMA 15-2021** will be invited to take note of progress regarding the reporting of acoustic monitoring data and provide input.

- d. Germany, to inform **EG MAMA 15-2021** on the progress within OSPAR and ASCOBANS to develop databases for strandings of cetaceans, including geographic information, and to propose how to harmonize the HELCOM data collection with this initiative.

*Data on abundance and distribution of marine mammals*

- a. The Secretariat to report back on how development of the HELCOM Biodiversity Database has been modified to accommodate abundance survey data for seals and harbour porpoise.

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 15-2021**.
- b. The Harbour Porpoise Distribution and Abundance indicator team will commence the work on drafting monitoring guidelines for distribution and abundance intersessionally and present at **EG MAMA 15-2021**.

5. Work on Baltic Sea harbour porpoise:

- a. Ms. Penina Blankett, co-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 15-2021**.
- b. Update the **EG MAMA 15-2021** on the progress of the SAMBAH II and the HELCOM BLUES projects.

6. Precautionary Approach Level (PAL)

- a. At **EG MAMA 15-2021** follow up on the response by EG MAMA 14-2020 to State and Conservation WG regarding identifying the PAL.

10. Marine mammals - fisheries interaction:

- a. Present progress from the data collection, assessment and mitigation measures related to bycatch.
- b. Follow up on the progress regarding the ICES Special Request Advice on Emergency Measures for Harbour Porpoise.
- c. Exchange information on progress of ongoing initiatives regarding seal-fish interactions, specifically with regards to Anisakid parasites in the Baltic Sea ecosystem.

11. Intersessional activities of the teams

- a. The marine mammal health team is requested to inform on their intersessional activities **at EG MAMA 15-2021**.
  - 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 strive to hold a second workshop, taking Covid-19 restrictions into account.

- iii. The Team will hold online meetings as needed, including a planned virtual meeting in Autumn 2020 to discuss e.g. indicator development.
- b. The Seal Distribution team is requested to inform on their intersessional activities at **EG MAMA 15-2021**.
  - i. To intersessionally discuss and prepare a suggestion of updated borders with the seal population team to amend the sub-units used for presenting grey seal survey results to improve the ecological relevance of the units, rather than representing administrative borders and present suggestion(s) for further discussion at **EG MAMA 15-2020**.
  - ii. The Seal Distribution team is requested to continue working on the details of developing telemetry data sharing, to get a current overview of existing telemetry data, deployments, basic relevant metadata and data holders, including drafting a possible table for reporting and/or looking into database option and present the results at **EG MAMA 15-2021**.
  - iii. Draft a suggestion on how to monitoring breeding distribution, including justifications and an overview of the currently available information on pupping distribution from each country, to be submitted to and further discussed at **EG MAMA 15-2021**, with the intention of submitting a proposal to State and Conservation WG.
- c. The Seal Abundance team is requested to inform on their intersessional activities at **EG MAMA 15-2021**.
  - i. Countries to present the results of the 2020 seal survey results for harbour seal and the 2020 and, to the extent possible, 2021 survey results for grey seal and ringed seal. The Lead of the team is invited to present the results at the **EG MAMA 15-2021**.
  - ii. Consider alternative monitoring methods for ringed seal for possible inclusion in the HELCOM Monitoring Guidelines, as mild winters are becoming increasingly more common. Present a proposal for what alternative methods to include, with the relevant associate information, at **EG MAMA 15-2021**.
  - iii. Review the management unit status of the harbour seals in Kattegat and the western Baltic and present a proposal for alternative division of management units to **EG MAMA 15-2021**.
- d. The Harbour Porpoise Abundance and Distribution Team is requested to inform on their intersessional activities at **EG MAMA 15-2021**.
  - i. The Team is to review the list of by-catch mitigation measures prepared by FISH WG should the list be updated in the interim between meetings.
  - ii. The Team will have a meeting in autumn 2020, together with the HELCOM DataFlow team, to scope how to progress the data reporting of acoustic monitoring data.

**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 harbour porpoise work, including monitoring, on a regional scale to achieve sufficient data quality for the harbour porpoise indicators. To support the indicator leads in their work to maintain and develop indicators for harbour porpoise.

## Team Membership:

Country	Name
Germany	Michael Dähne
Germany	Anita Gilles (Team lead)
Sweden	Julia Carlström (Team lead)
Sweden	Kylie Owen
Denmark	Signe Sveegaard
Poland	Iwona Pawliczka
Finland	Olli Loisa
ASCOBANS	Ida Carlén
Denmark	Finn Larsen
Poland	Katarzyna Kaminska
Finland	Penina Blankett
Finland/Åland	Maija Häggblom
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 Jüssi (Team Lead)
Estonia	Mart Jüssi
Denmark	Finn Larsen
Denmark	Morten Olsen
Denmark	Anders Galatius
Finland	Penina Blankett
Finland	Mervi Kunnasranta
Finland	Mikko Toivola
Finland/Åland	Maija Häggblom
Germany	Alexander Liebschner
Germany	Linda Westphal
Poland	Iwona Pawliczka
Poland	Michal Malinga
Russia	Mikhail Verevkin
Sweden	Markus Ahola
Sweden	Susanne Viker
Sweden	Anja Carlsson

**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 Jüssi (Team Lead)
Estonia	Ivar Jüssi
Estonia	Märt Kesküla
Denmark	Finn Larsen
Denmark	Morten Olsen
Denmark	Anders Galatius
Finland	Mervi Kunnasranta
Finland	Penina Blankett
Finland/Åland	Maija Häggblom
Germany	Alexander Liebschner
Germany	Michael Dähne
Poland	Iwona Pawliczka
Poland	Michal Malinga
Russia	Mikhail Verevkin
Sweden	Markus Ahola
Sweden	Susanne Viker
Sweden	Anja Carlsson
WWF	Antti Halkka

