

Draft proposals for amendments of the HELCOM Recommendation 17/2 on protection of harbor porpoise

HELCOM RECOMMENDATION 17/2

Adopted 12 March 1996 and revised 6 March 2013, having regard to Article 13, Paragraph b) of the Helsinki Convention

PROTECTION OF HARBOUR PORPOISE IN THE BALTIC SEA AREA

THE COMMISSION,

RECALLING Article 15 of the 1992 Helsinki Convention requiring the Contracting Parties to take all appropriate measures to conserve and protect biodiversity of marine and coastal areas,

RECALLING FURTHER the decision of the 2013 HELCOM Copenhagen Declaration to take decisive action to work towards a favourable conservation status of the harbour porpoise based on implementation of the CMS ASCOBANS Jastarnia Plan for the harbour porpoise in the Baltic Sea, in particular by addressing the pressing problem of by-catch,

RECALLING ALSO the commitments of the 2007 HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan to improve the conservation status of threatened and/or declining species of the Baltic Sea area by 2015, to minimize by-catch of harbour porpoises by 2008, and the goal to achieve a favourable conservation status of all species,

BEING AWARE that those Contracting Parties being also EU Member States, have to coordinate their activities regarding the harbour porpoise with the implementation of relevant EU Directives, such as the Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC), the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (2008/56/EC) and the Common Fisheries Policy as relevant,

DEEPLY CONCERNED about the critical status of harbor porpoise population in the Baltic Proper and AWARE that individual numbers drastically decreased during the 20th century, with no signs of recovery,

AWARE that the harbour porpoise population in the Western Baltic is in a better state, but due to a high human pressure it still requires application of efficient conservation measures,

RECOGNIZING the relevance of the Agreement on the Conservation of Small Cetaceans of the Baltic, North East Atlantic, Irish and North Seas (ASCOBANS), including the Recovery Plan for Baltic Harbour Porpoises (Jastarnia Plan) and the Conservation Plan for the Harbour Porpoise Population in the Western Baltic, the Belt Sea and the Kattegat, as well as the action list and relevant recommendations by the International Council for the Exploration of the Seas (ICES) and the resolutions of International Whaling Commission (IWC) and European Cetacean Society (ECS),

RECOGNIZING that harbour porpoise is and must remain an integral part of the marine ecosystems,

RECOGNIZING FURTHER that by-catches, habitat deterioration and disturbance adversely affect this species,

CONVINCED that the progressive, critical threat of extinction of the harbour porpoise in the Baltic proper (ICES areas 24-32) requires emergency action, and human pressures affecting harbour

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porpoises in other parts of the Baltic Sea region (ICES area 21-23) require immediate mitigation action, to ensure their favorable conservation status under Directive 92/43/EEC in both regions.

RECOMMENDS that the Governments of the Contracting Parties to the Helsinki Convention:

a) give highest priority to avoiding by-catches of harbour porpoises, particularly following the recommendations of ASCOBANS and the ASCOBANS Jastarnia Plan, in order to achieve the ecological objective of the Baltic Sea Action Plan: "By 2015 by-catch of harbour porpoise, seals, water birds and non-target fish species has been significantly reduced with the aim to reach by-catch rates close to zero";

b) take action in close co-operation with ASCOBANS and ICES, for collection and analysis of additional data on population distribution and abundance, stock identities, behavior and threats such as by-catch mortality, underwater noise, pollutant levels, ship strikes, changes in food base, epizooties, climate changes, marine installations and construction;

c) consider the establishment of marine protected areas for harbour porpoises within the framework of the Baltic Sea Protected Areas (HELCOM MPAs), when documented information is available that an area hosts harbour porpoises;

d) report to the Commission every four years, beginning in 2018, on their progress in implementing the above recommendations.

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