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Ad hoc Seal Expert Group
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Background

This revision document contains amendments provided by Finland.

Introduction

At the time at which summaries of the management plans were collected, such plans were only available from Denmark (harbour seal and grey seal), Finland (grey seal and ringed seal) and Sweden (harbour seal, grey seal and ringed seal), while the Polish plan on grey seals and the Estonian plan on grey and ringed seals is in the final stages of preparation.¹ This review is based on the English summaries of the respective plans and may thus not fully reflect the contents of the plans in their entirety. This is particularly true for the Finnish plan, which is comprehensive, but only contains a short uninformative summary. The summaries of the Estonian and Polish plans are pending approval by the national ministries and are thus not available. Although the aim of this document is to only review existing summaries, information from the main text of the Finnish, Estonian and Polish plans will be included when required to achieve a more comprehensive summary report. Russia, Latvia and Germany do not have seal management plans (Document 3/1, HELCOM SEAL 7/2013), but some management measures are conducted and these will be described below when available.

All the summaries initiate with background information on the seal species, their conservation and their relations to humans. The Swedish plans are more thorough than the others; in addition to information on basic biology they cover information on fisheries conflicts, bycatch, hunting, contaminants population delineations and seal reserves (Table 1). The Danish plan only touches on fisheries conflicts and seal reserves, while the Finnish summary only covers fisheries conflicts and hunting. The Estonian plan will cover all subjects except seal reserves, and the Polish plan will possibly discuss the need for establishment of marine reserves.

Objectives of the plans

The Danish, Swedish and Estonian plans are rather similar in their objectives. Distribution and abundance targets are 'favourable protection status' (grey and harbour seals in Denmark; grey seals in Sweden) and 'natural distribution and abundance' (harbour and ringed seal in Sweden; grey and ringed seal in Estonia). The Finnish plan is more relaxed in its abundance target, aiming for 'a permanent component of the marine environment' for both species. Swedish, Estonian, Finnish and Danish plans share most of their other objectives, including production of information for management, international coordination of management, mitigation of fisheries conflicts and maintaining or improving opportunities for the public to observe seals. The Estonian, Swedish and Finnish grey seals are managed as a natural resource, while only the Danish plan and to some extent the Estonian plan has focus on animal welfare ethics, such as observation of animal rights and satisfactory living conditions for seals. These plans also explicitly describe objectives for assessing the effects of culling/hunting/regulation. Information from the Polish plan is unavailable.¹

Measures of the plans

All the plans include abundance monitoring as a fundamental tool in seal management. The Swedish, Finnish and Estonian plans furthermore stipulate monitoring of reproduction of ringed seals (SWE; FIN), the harbour seals of Kalmar Sound (SWE) and grey seals (EST), monitoring of contaminants in ringed seals (SWE; FIN), health monitoring of all species (SWE; FIN), investigations of habitat use in all species (SWE; FIN; EST), monitoring of bycatch (SWE; EST) and population viability analyses of ringed and harbour seals (SWE). All plans involve investigations of conflicts with fisheries for all species, while assessment of seal reserves are

¹ Polish data included in Tables 1-5 was submitted after the preparation of this document.

included for both Danish seal species and for harbour seals in Sweden. Only the Estonian plan includes a description of measures towards seal pup rehabilitation. Again, information from the Polish plan is unavailable.

Legislation

None of the plans are legally binding, but work as guidelines for the management. The Danish plan provides guidelines for regulation of harbour seals, while grey seals enjoy total protection (an amendment to the Danish plan which allows regulation of grey seals under certain conditions has just been passed). The Swedish plans allow protective hunting of grey and harbour seals, while only scientific takes of ringed seals are allowed. In Estonia, grey seals are listed as game animals, whereas ringed seals are protected. The Finnish summary does not mention hunting or other legislation, but both ringed and grey seal are listed as game animals and can be hunted in accordance with existing guidelines and legislation.

Comments with regard to regional harmonization

As only the Danish and Swedish plans are available with detailed English summaries, it is difficult to make general comments with regard to the need for harmonization. The first recommendation would thus be that more detailed English summaries be made available from other countries than Sweden and Denmark, or that future reviews are based on the full management plans rather than just the summary. The Estonian plan looks promising and appears to follow the Swedish plans closely, calling for a wider range of monitoring activities to support the management than the Danish plan. In the Swedish, Estonian and Finnish plans, grey seals are viewed as a natural resource that may be harvested, while seals enjoy year-round protection in Denmark apart from regulation in connection with set gear fisheries. A fundamental part of the plans are the distribution and abundance targets, which are different among the plans. The Finnish plans aim at seals being 'permanent components of the marine environment' while Estonian, Danish and Swedish plans aim at 'favourable protection status' or 'natural distribution and abundance'. Although all these definitions leave room for interpretation, the Finnish target may be viewed as less ambitious. The discrepancies in monitoring efforts and targets could be considered when the plans are due to be updated, as almost all management units are shared among two or more countries and monitoring and management targets would more meaningfully concern management units than national borders.

Evaluation of whether the BSAP target for seals has been reached

The HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan (BSAP) target for seals is to *"safeguard the long-term viability of the Baltic seal populations according to HELCOM Recommendation 27-28/2, by following its general management principles, and by 2012, to finalize national management plans and by implementation of non-lethal mitigation measures for seals-fisheries interactions"*. In the following, we evaluate whether these targets in HELCOM Recommendation 27-28/2 have been reached.

Re Item 1:

The BSAP target has not been reached in terms of development of national management plans, as these were only available from Sweden, Denmark and Finland, and the latter two are slightly outdated. Estonian and Polish plans are in their final stages, and a revised Danish plan is scheduled for year 2017.

The available summaries do not explicitly state if permits for deliberate killing are issued for management units below Limit Reference Level (LRL) as BSAP calls for. However, at HELCOM SEAL 7/2013, the recommended LRL was agreed to be 10,000 animals. As the management units are currently defined, southern Baltic ringed seals and Kalmar Sound and western Baltic harbour seals are below this level, implying that any permit for deliberate taking from these units would violate this principle.

Re Item 2:

The summaries do not offer sufficient detail to assess whether "*effective measures for all populations in order to prevent illegal killing, and to reduce incidental bycatches to a minimum level and if possible to a level close to zero*" are taken.

Re Items 3 and 4:

In the summaries, only the Swedish plan offers enough detail on monitoring efforts to ensure that all the monitoring efforts mentioned under Items 3 and 4 of Recommendation 27-28/2 are performed. Finland, Denmark and Estonia have monitoring programs addressing most of the points listed in the Recommendation.

Re Item 5:

Seal reserves are mentioned in the Danish and Swedish summaries and the Finnish plan, but details allowing comparison of regulations and monitoring of these are not offered.

Re Item 6:

The management plans do not state to which extent non-lethal mitigation measures have been implemented, but they have not entirely replaced lethal mitigation measures in Sweden, Denmark and Finland as regulation and protective hunting in association with fishing gear are permitted in each country. The Swedish, Finnish and Danish plans call for investigations of fisheries conflicts and introduction of modified fishing gear, however.

Concluding remarks

- This review does not provide a complete picture of the state of the national management plans, as the summaries are not sufficient to make a thorough assessment. A review based on the plans in their entirety would require a considerable effort. Alternatively, summaries of the plans, with emphasis on items related to Recommendation 27/28-2 could be prepared.
- A future revision/evaluation should be based on more comprehensive summaries or the full management plans, and should await the publication of management plans currently in progress (Poland and Estonia).

Tables allowing an overview of the features of the seal management plans of the HELCOM Contracting Parties are found below. The tables are based on the English summaries of the management plans, and may thus not reflect what the plans contain in their entirety. The summary in the Finnish plan is particularly short, and more details may be missing from this plan in the tables. Estonian data is based on draft plans, and therefore some minor changes can be made before final approval procedure.

Table 1. The review part has emphasis on

	Grey Seal DK	Harbour Seal DK	Grey Seal FIN	Ringed Seal FIN	Grey Seal SWE	Ringed Seal SWE	Harbour Seal SWE	Grey Seal POL ⁱ	Grey seal EST	Ringed seal EST
Fisheries conflicts	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Bycatch			X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Hunting			X	X	X	X	X		X	
Contaminants			X	X	X	X	X	X		
Population delineation			x	x		X	X		X	X
Seal reserves	X	X	X	(X)	X		X	X		

Table 2. Objectives

	Grey Seal DK	Harbour Seal DK	Grey Seal FIN	Ringed Seal FIN	Grey Seal SWE	Ringed Seal SWE	Harbour Seal SWE	Grey Seal POL ⁱ	Grey seals EST	Ringed seals EST
Produce information for management	X	X	x	x	X	X	X	X	X	X
International coordination of management	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Distribution and abundance targets	Favourable protection status	Favourable protection status	Permanent component of marine environment	Permanent component of marine environment	Favourable protection status	Natural distribution & abundance	Natural distribution & abundance	Natural distribution & abundance /habitat availability	Natural distribution & abundance	Natural distribution & abundance

Accounting for requests of fisheries in management decisions			x	x		X	X	X		
Seals managed as a natural resource			X	x	X				X	
Satisfactory living conditions for seals	X	X	<u>X</u>	x				X	X	X
Introduction of modified fishing gear	X	X	<u>X</u>	(x)	X		X	X	X	X
Mitigate fisheries conflicts	X	X	x	x	X		X	X	X	X
Documentation of damage to fisheries	X	X	<u>X</u>	<u>X</u>	X		X	X		
Maintain/improve possibility of public to observe seals	X	X	x	x	X		X	X		X
Observe animal rights ethics	X	X						X		
Assessment of effects of culling/hunting/regulation	X	X							(X)	

Table 3. Measures

	Grey Seal DK	Harbour Seal DK	Grey Seal FIN	Ringed Seal FIN	Grey Seal SWE	Ringed Seal SWE	Harbour Seal SWE	Grey Seal POL ¹	Grey seal EST	Ringed seal EST
Abundance monitoring	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Reproduction monitoring			x	x		X	In Kalmarsund	X	X	
Contaminant monitoring			x	x		X		X		
Health monitoring			x	x	X	X	X	X		
Diet research			<u>X</u>	<u>X</u>	X	X	X	X		
Habitat use investigations			x	x	X	X	X	X	X	X
Dispersal investigations			x	x	X	X	X	X	X	X
Bycatch monitoring			<u>X</u>	<u>X</u>		X	X	X	X	X
Investigations of conflicts with fisheries	X	X	x	x	X	X	X	X	X	X
Population viability analyses			<u>X</u>	<u>X</u>		X	X			
Assessment of seal reserves	X	X	<u>X</u>				X	X		
Seal pup rehabilitation								X		X
Compensating the fisheries			x	x				X		

Table 4. Legislation

	Grey Seal DK	Harbour Seal DK	Grey Seal FIN	Ringed Seal FIN	Grey Seal SWE	Ringed Seal SWE	Harbour Seal SWE	Grey Seal POL ⁱ	Grey seals EST	Ringed seals EST
Legally binding?	Yes?	Yes?	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
Hunting legislation	No hunting or regulation*	Guidelines for regulation	Listed as game <u>species</u> <u>animal?</u>	Listed as game <u>animal?</u> <u>species</u>	Protective hunting is allowed	Only scientific takes	Protective hunting is allowed	No hunting, protected species	Listed as game animal	No

Table 5. Details

	Grey Seal DK	Harbour Seal DK	Grey Seal FIN	Ringed Seal FIN	Grey Seal SWE	Ringed Seal SWE	Harbour Seal SWE	Grey Seal POL ⁱ	Grey seals EST	Ringed seals EST
Year of issue	2005	2005	<u>2007</u>	<u>2007</u>	2012	2013	2013	draft 2012	draft 2012	draft 2012
Planned revision	2010 [sic] or as required	2010 [sic] or as required	As required/every 5th year	As required/every 5th year	As required	As required/every 5th year	As required/every 5th year	First revision 2020/later as required	2018	2018

* An amendment to the Danish plan, which allows regulation of grey seals under certain conditions, has just been passed

ⁱ Data submitted by a Polish representative of the HELCOM ad hoc Seal Group.