



## Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission

Working Group on the State of the Environment and Nature  
Conservation

STATE & CONSERVATION  
13-2020

Online, 5-9 October 2020

---

<b>Document title</b>	Screening study on hazardous substances in marine mammals
<b>Code</b>	3N-14
<b>Category</b>	INF
<b>Agenda Item</b>	3N – Development and implementation of Recommendations
<b>Submission date</b>	28.9.2020
<b>Submitted by</b>	Germany

---

### Background

Germany presented its [priorities of HELCOM chairmanship](#) from July 2020 until June 2022 at HOD 58 under the following headlines:

- strengthening ocean governance
- updating and implementing the Baltic Sea Action Plan (BSAP) – making progress on specific requirements (eutrophication, marine litter)
- tackling new solutions for well-known, pressing challenges (ammunition, underwater noise)
- strengthening marine biodiversity
- climate change and the Baltic Sea – understanding and responding

This document introduces the topic of marine mammals health on which Germany seeks cooperation with Contracting Parties under its chairmanship priority “strengthening marine biodiversity”.

Marine biodiversity in the Baltic Sea has been subject to anthropogenic impairments. Regarding marine mammals, contaminant pollution is of concern for the Baltic Sea especially as they are top predators in the food webs of the Baltic Sea. For example, reduced fertility of seals and population decline of seal species has been attributed to high levels of organochlorines such as DDT and PCBs. To date research projects develop assessment tools which provide a means to link health indicators with concentrations of contaminants in marine mammals.

It is planned to screen marine mammals’ tissue for concentration of pollutants, develop threshold values for the most important pollutants, and link the assessments to the state of marine mammals’ health. This work could provide a basis for developing an indicator on marine mammals which links exemplified pressures with marine mammal protection and therewith marine biodiversity. There is an opportunity to open up and share the national studies for regional cooperation and use them, as appropriate, in the HELCOM indicator work.

### Screening study on hazardous substances in marine mammals

Besides the compilation of existing data on new emerging pollutants from ongoing research projects, such as [BalthHealth](#), Germany plans to conduct a non-target and target screening study on hazardous substances in samples of marine mammals’ tissue starting in early 2021. The screening would be comparable to the [LIFE APEX project](#), of which Sweden and Germany are members. Results of this study and existing data will be used as basis for further work regarding assessment of contaminant pollution of marine mammals in the Baltic Sea and health status of marine mammals.

To ensure a sound, comparable, and up to date data basis on contaminants in marine mammals with a good spatial coverage of the Baltic Sea area, cooperation with HELCOM contracting parties is striven for.

Germany presented its planned screening study on hazardous substances in marine mammals to the HELCOM EG MAMA 14-2020 meeting on 22. September as 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 were invited to nominate contact persons for providing samples for the study to Anita Künitzer (anita.kuenitzer@uba.de) by 20 October 2020. 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. 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.

### Action requested

The Meeting is invited to:

- take note of the information about the planned screening project on hazardous substances in marine mammals by Germany.