



Press Release



Petra Deimer and the Society for the Protection of Marine Mammals (GSM) receive the ASCOBANS Award on the International Day of the Baltic Harbour Porpoise

Bonn/Quickborn 20th/21st May. For the past five years now, the third Sunday of May has been celebrated as the International Day of the Baltic Harbour Porpoise. But this day of honour for the barely 5 feet long whale is no joyous occasion: the Baltic Harbour Porpoise is close to extinction. Therefore, the Secretariat of the UN Agreement on the Conservation of Small Cetaceans of the Baltic and North Seas (UNEP/ASCOBANS) is using 20th May, the Harbour Porpoise Day 2007, to present the "ASCOBANS Award" to a true champion of marine mammal protection and the society she founded almost thirty years ago.

The jury considered the untiring commitment of Petra Deimer, her husband Hans-Jürgen Schütte, a retired TV journalist, and the Society for the Protection of Marine Mammals (GSM) over the years to be an outstanding achievement. By bestowing this award, ASCOBANS would like to express its thanks and recognise the educational and public awareness raising initiatives undertaken by GSM. Peter Reijnders, who has been vice-chairman of the ASOBANS Advisory Committee for many years, welcoming the decision, said: "I have known Petra Deimer for several decades now. She has successfully managed to combine her journalistic and scientific education and has done an excellent job of persuading fishermen, scientists and the general public of the merits of the cause of marine mammal protection." He did however attach a condition to giving her the prize: "She must continue this work with the same commitment and energy that she has shown over the last three decades!"

GSM, a non-profit organisation, skilfully deploys modern media techniques to make the case for protecting marine mammals. With regard to the Baltic Harbour Porpoise, particularly worthy of mention are the initiative "Sailors on the Lookout for Harbour Porpoises", various publications or the video "Small Whale in Big Trouble", which the Deimer-Schüttes jointly produced.

With fewer than 600 survivors, the Baltic's only native species of whale is under severe threat of extinction. The "big trouble" of the small and seldom-seen whale with the friendly, round face has a number of causes. Pollutants, overfishing and underwater noise certainly all play their part. The greatest danger however is bycatch in fishing nets. Because they are mammals, Harbour Porpoises must come to the surface of the water regularly to breathe. But they cannot see or detect with echolocation modern nets which are made of thin, untearable, artificial thread. Therefore, they easily get tangled up in them and drown.

Only with the support of the people living around the Baltic who use the resources of this sea or spend their holidays there, can this small porpoise be saved. Under the auspices of UNEP/ASCOBANS not only are coordinated conservation measures agreed between the adjoining countries, but also the International Day of the Baltic Harbour Porpoise has been declared. This year, for the fifth year in succession, again it will be marked with special exhibitions and programmes in numerous locations.

For more information please contact:

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