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Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission (HELCOM)  
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PRESS RELEASE:

HELCOM launches a harbour porpoise map service

For immediate release

**Helsinki, 29 September (HELCOM Information Service)** – The Helsinki Commission working for the protection of the Baltic marine environment announced today the launch of an online harbour porpoise map service as part of HELCOM’s new integrated map and data service which allows users to access and visualize a wide range of data on activities and pollution loads affecting the Baltic marine environment.

“This harbour porpoise map service displays the Baltic Sea harbour porpoise opportunistic sightings, strandings and bycatches covering the HELCOM marine area,” says Ms. Anne Christine Brusendorff, HELCOM’s Executive Secretary. “Its main objective is to make information on the harbour porpoise accessible for interested users and the general public.” Besides viewing and producing maps, this new map service allows also downloading the data.

The harbour porpoise map service was developed in co-operation with the 1991 Agreement on the Conservation of Small Cetaceans of the Baltic and North Seas (ASCOBANS). Institutions from all the Baltic Sea countries have contributed data to the database, which will be updated as new information becomes available.

The HELCOM/ASCOBANS harbour porpoise map service displays the updated data collected originally in 2004 in the Baltic Sea Porpoise Project and the Jastarnia Project. The original database was funded by the German Federal Agency for Nature Conservation and the data was updated in HELCOM Secretariat in 2010 with financial support from UNEP/ASCOBANS.

The harbour porpoise (*Phocoena phocoena*) is the only cetacean species inhabiting the Baltic Sea. As a top predator, the harbour porpoise is an indicator species for past and present environmental conditions in the Baltic Sea. The population living in the Baltic Sea is genetically distinct from the North Sea population.

The harbour porpoise population inhabiting the Baltic Proper has been classified as ‘critically endangered’ by IUCN, justified by the consideration that the current population size is fewer than 250 mature individuals and continues to decline. Although neither the original population size nor the carrying capacity of the Baltic Proper has been quantified, it appears likely that the population size decreased considerably in the 20th century owing to anthropogenic impacts.

Most of the current harbour porpoise population in the Baltic marine area occurs in the northern part of the Kattegat, the Belt Sea basin and the Arkona Sea. Estimates of the total population are uncertain. Annually around 3000 sightings of harbour porpoise were reported in the area covering the Kattegat, the Belt Sea and the Southwestern Baltic Proper in 2006-2008.

Several types of human activities negatively influence the status of the harbour porpoise. In recent decades, the most important anthropogenic threats to harbour porpoises are incidental bycatch, prey depletion, noise pollution and chemical toxins. Harbour porpoises have previously been severely hunted in the Baltic region.

**Follow-up:**

Additional info on the new HELCOM/ASCOBANS harbour porpoise database and map service:

[http://www.helcom.fi/GIS/en\\_GB/porpoise](http://www.helcom.fi/GIS/en_GB/porpoise)

HELCOM/ASCOBANS harbour porpoise map service:

<http://maps.helcom.fi/website/HarbourPorpoise/index.html>

For any feedback, questions or assistance, please contact Ms. Hanna Paulomäki

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**Note to Editors:**

The Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission, usually referred to as the Helsinki Commission, or HELCOM, is an intergovernmental organization of all the nine Baltic Sea countries and the EU which works to protect the marine environment of the Baltic Sea from all sources of pollution.

HELCOM is the governing body of the "Convention on the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Baltic Sea Area," known as the Helsinki Convention.

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