



**Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species
Agreement on the Conservation of Small Cetaceans
of the Baltic, North East Atlantic, Irish and North Seas**
Joint Secretariat provided by the United Nations Environment Programme



UN Conference in Bonn agrees Action Plans for Harbour Porpoises in the North and Baltic Sea

Bonn, 18 September 2009 - Representatives from 11 countries met in Bonn, Germany, from 16-18 September under the auspices of the Agreement on the Conservation of Small Cetaceans of the Baltic, North East Atlantic, Irish and North Seas (ASCOBANS). Supported in its deliberations by several international and non-governmental organizations dealing with marine conservation, the meeting agreed a number of measures to protect and enhance populations of small whales and dolphins in these European waters. A new strategy for the future prioritises activities focusing on the key threats to small cetaceans, namely bycatch (the incidental capture of animals by fishing activities) and disturbance by noise.

Two cornerstones for the future work of ASCOBANS were adopted.

A new version of the Recovery Plan for Baltic Harbour Porpoises (Jastarnia Plan) establishes conservation measures for the remaining ca. 600 individuals of individuals of the harbour porpoise in the central Baltic Sea. Through this plan it is hoped that the population will be restored to healthy levels by reducing bycatch, supporting research and public awareness and establishing a network of marine protected areas.

A new Conservation Plan for the Harbour Porpoise in the North Sea addresses many of the threats to this species through the intense use of the North Sea area for activities such as fishing, shipping, hydrocarbon extraction, discharges, construction or military activities. Actions related to management, monitoring, mitigation and research are designed to reduce these threats.

The meeting also agreed on guidelines to address the adverse effects of underwater noise on marine mammals during offshore construction activities for renewable energy production. For example, offshore construction of wind farms throughout the North Sea, Baltic Sea and North East Atlantic region is expected to increase exponentially in the coming years. The pile driving necessary for constructing most types of wind farms creates sound pressure levels so high that it can even cause physical injury to individuals present at relatively close range. Noting the difficulty of proving long-term detrimental effects of acoustic disturbance on cetaceans, governments agreed that a precautionary approach is necessary in dealing with activities associated with renewable energy.

Elizabeth Mrema, Acting Executive Secretary to ASCOBANS, said: "It is a sad truth that with tackling one problem, we humans have often created others. How reassuring to see that governments are taking the signs seriously – we need renewable energy sources such as offshore wind farms to combat climate change, but we cannot do that at the expense of biodiversity."

The meeting also identified issues which ASCOBANS can address jointly with other organizations and bodies, such as the European Commission, industry, non-governmental organizations or other global and regional environmental agreements. One of these is the important focus on activities to raise public awareness of the existence of small whales, dolphins and porpoises in North Sea, Baltic Sea and North East Atlantic region, as well as the threats they face. Thus engaging the public and marine users is one of the keys to ensuring their conservation. The meeting therefore agreed to elaborate an education and public awareness plan.

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Note to Editors:

ASCOBANS, the **Agreement on the Conservation of Small Cetaceans of the Baltic, North East Atlantic, Irish and North Seas**, is a UN treaty concluded to promote close cooperation amongst member governments with a view to achieving and maintaining a favourable conservation status for small cetaceans in the ASCOBANS Area. A Conservation and Management Plan, which forms part of the Agreement, obliges Parties to engage in habitat conservation and management, surveys and research, pollution mitigation and public information. To achieve its aim, ASCOBANS cooperates with all states in the Agreement area, relevant intergovernmental organizations and non-governmental organizations.

The term “**small cetaceans**” refers to small whales, dolphins and porpoises, which occur in nearly all of the world’s seas and in some rivers. The Agreement covers all small cetaceans found in the ASCOBANS Area. Examples are the well-known bottlenose dolphin, the killer whale, deep-diving species such as beaked whales and the Agreement’s flagship species, the harbour porpoise.

More information:

www.ascobans.org