

Wadden Sea Board
WSB 29

19 June 2019
Vlieland, Netherlands



Agenda Item:	5.2 Nature conservation and integrated ecosystem management
Subject:	Harbour porpoise workshop report
Document No.:	WSB 29/5.2/2
Date:	07 June 19
Submitted by:	Workshop participants/CWSS/TG-M/

Leeuwarden Declaration - Paragraph 16.:

Agree to duly take account of the fact that harbour porpoises are present in the Wadden Sea, thus addressing the conservation of the species;

The trilateral workshop on harbour porpoises in the Wadden Sea, held on 12 April 2019 in Wilhelmshaven, was organized as a follow up to the scientific symposium “Bright Future? Harbour porpoises in the Wadden Sea” the day before. The event aimed to summarize and assess the information provided during the symposium and to highlight and further explore the role of this small and common whale in the Wadden Sea ecosystem and was organized by the Common Wadden Sea Secretariat

Further background is described in the corresponding section of the attached workshop report.

Additional to the participation of a number of TG-M members at the workshop, the group evaluated the findings and recommendations from the event to formulate a proposal for WSB on how to proceed on the topic and on an answer to the initial letter from ASCOBANS.

TG-M expressed general agreement with the recommendations elaborated during the workshop and proposed that EG-Seals address the issue with a view to providing substantive guidance to TG-M by the Group’s next meeting, while, if necessary, involving the respective experts on harbor porpoises from the three countries. TG-M for its part would strive to deliver its final recommendations to WSB 30 in November 2019. TG-M further recommended that following WSB 29, CWSS drafts an answer to ASCOBANS for the next TG-M meeting before it will be submitted to WSB 30 for approval.

Proposal: **The WSB is invited to note the information and to endorse the proposed approach.**

DRAFT WORKSHOP REPORT

Trilateral Workshop on Harbour porpoises in the Wadden Sea

12 April 2019
Wilhelmshaven, Germany



Introduction

The trilateral workshop on harbour porpoises in the Wadden Sea was organized as a follow up to the scientific symposium “Bright Future? Harbour porpoises in the Wadden Sea” the day before. The event aimed to highlight and further explore the role of this small and common whale in the Wadden Sea ecosystem and was organized by the Common Wadden Sea Secretariat and the UNESCO World Heritage Visitors Center with the support of the Danish Ministry for Environment and Food, the German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety and the Dutch Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality as part of the annual ‘Harbour Porpoise Days’ in Wilhelmshaven.

Background

In a letter dated 5 October 2017, the Advisory Committee of the Agreement on the Conservation of Small Cetaceans of the Baltic, North East Atlantic, Irish and North Seas (ASCOBANS) approached the trilateral Wadden Sea Cooperation (TWSC) to encourage the TWSC to consider the formal inclusion of the harbour porpoise (*Phocoena phocoena*) in the mandate of the TWSC and to foster a stronger cooperation with ASCOBANS. The ASCOBANS Advisory Committee noted that harbour porpoises were increasingly being registered in the tidal channels and estuaries of the Wadden Sea and appeared to be an integral part of this ecosystem. Therefore, ASCOBANS stated that it would “welcome the inclusion of the harbour porpoise under the Trilateral Cooperation on the Protection of the Wadden Sea, as well as a stronger cooperation between ASCOBANS and the Trilateral Cooperation, specifically regarding the implementation of the [ASCOBANS Conservation Plan for Harbour Porpoises \(*Phocoena phocoena* L.\) in the North Sea](#).” ASCOBANS further noted that in its view “one helpful step in achieving this would be the development of the current Trilateral Seal Expert Group into a Trilateral Marine Mammal Expert Group that would include small cetaceans in its remit.”

In the Ministerial Council Declaration of the 13th Trilateral Governmental Conference held in Leeuwarden, Netherlands on 18 May 2018 (Leeuwarden Declaration, LD), the ministers of the Wadden Sea States responsible for the protection of the Danish, Dutch, German Wadden Sea acknowledged this in a specific paragraph in the Leeuwarden Declaration in May 2018:

LD Para 16. Agree to duly take account of the fact that harbour porpoises are present in the Wadden Sea, thus addressing the conservation of the species

To address this and the request by WSB 27 for further information before deciding on how to proceed, this scientific symposium and a subsequent trilateral workshop were organized in Wilhelmshaven on 11 and 12 April 2019. The overall aim was to collect and evaluate information on the specific ecological role of harbour porpoises in the Wadden Sea, also with regard to the adjacent North Sea waters. The workshop programme (ANNEX I) was intended

to provide a framework for discussions based on the issues addressed during the symposium. Major themes were Ecology, Interaction and Threats and Conservation Regimes.

Outcome

18 participants (List of participants as ANNEX II) from the science and research sector (mainly the speakers at the symposium), from the trilateral governmental authorities, a representative from ASCOBANS and the organizing CWSS discussed how to interpret the results and proposals that emerged during the symposium and translate these into a first set of recommendations to be submitted to the Wadden Sea Board (WSB) for approval.

It was noted that the Wadden Sea seemed to be a habitat of special importance for harbour porpoises, although the specific habitat use was still not fully understood, and it remained unclear if the individuals could be classified as residents or frequent visitors. The special geomorphology and ecological characteristics seemed to attract these whales to an as yet uncertain extent but was most likely linked to food availability.

Compared to harbour porpoises from other regions the “faithfulness” of porpoises in the Wadden Sea to their habitat was higher with longer residence times. Against the background of current threats, the workshop participants agreed to at least highlight the need for the TWSC to devote a higher level of attention to harbour porpoises in the Wadden Sea.

Recommendations

The intense and fruitful discussions led to the following seven recommendations from the workshop to the WSB on how to address the conservation of harbour porpoises within the trilateral cooperation:

- 1. Enhance trilateral information exchange on harbour porpoises in the Wadden Sea.*
- 2. Request the current EG-Seals to come forward with guidance on how to address harbour porpoises in the TWSC.¹*
- 3. Work towards a coordinated trilateral monitoring of harbour porpoises in the Wadden Sea by making use of existing monitoring programmes.*
- 4. Utilize the opportunities offered by citizen science and the work of relevant NGOs.*
- 5. Explore ways to leverage synergies with relevant ecosystem related activities within the TWSC and further international bodies.*
- 6. Work to improve on understanding of and take into account potential threats to harbour porpoises and their habitats specifically in the Wadden Sea.*
- 7. Establish an inventory of existing management measures and identify gaps.*

¹ DK: The guidance shall be based i. a. on recommendations 3–7 and will serve as aid to TG-M’s final recommendation to WSB regarding a specific response to the proposal from ASCOBANS.

In addition to these recommendations, which are planned to be submitted to the 29th or 30th meeting of the WSB, and at the initiative by Ms Scheidat (Wageningen Marine Research), the meeting started the development of a table providing an overview on recent monitoring activities in the region. This table was also intended to be a basis for initial discussions in the EG-Seals, in accordance with the recommendation No 2.

Harbour porpoises in the Wadden Sea



Common Wadden Sea Secretariat [Wilhelmshaven, Virchowstraße 1](#)

12 April 2019

Organised by the Common Wadden Sea Secretariat

> 08:30	Introduction
> 08:45	<p>1. ECOLOGY</p> <p>- Relevance and role of the Wadden Sea as a habitat -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seasonal habitat / Monitoring • Feeding ground • Reproduction area • Species interaction (e.g. with seals)
> 09:45	<i>Drafting of trilateral recommendations</i>
> 10:15	<p>2. INTERACTION AND THREATS</p> <p>- Status / Basis of assessment / Avoidance strategies -</p> <p>a) Noise</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marine traffic (incl. islands traffic / wind farm maintenance / recreational boating) • Waterway maintenance • Cable laying and maintenance • (Side scan) sonar activities <p>b) Chemical pollution / Hazardous substances</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heavy metals / PCBs / “New” substances e.g. Teflon, pharmaceuticals • Litter: Micro and macro plastics <p>c) Fisheries</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bycatch
> 11:15	<i>Drafting of trilateral recommendations</i>
> 11:45	<p>3. CONSERVATION REGIMES</p> <p>- Status and outlook -</p> <p>Short presentation by Nicole Frisch: <i>„Analysis of harbour porpoise protection measures and regimes in the German North Sea and the Baltic”</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Status of national, European and international protection regimes • Trilateral options
> 12:45	<i>Drafting of trilateral recommendations</i>
> 13:15	<i>Wrap-up</i>
> 13:30	Closing & Lunch

ANNEX II – LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

HARBOUR PORPOISE WORKSHOP, 12 April 2019, Wilhelmshaven List of Participants

Denmark	
Mr Henrik G. Pind Jørgensen Ministry of Environment and Food Environmental Protection Agency	Mr Jonas Teilmann Aarhus University
Germany (Federal, Hamburg, Lower Saxony, Schleswig-Holstein)	
Mr Thomas Borchers Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety, Germany	Ms Britta Diederichs The Schleswig-Holstein Agency for Coastal Defence, National Park and Marine Conservation National Park Authority
Ms Franziska Junge Ministry of Energy, Agriculture, the Environment, Nature and Digitalization Schleswig-Holstein	Mr Richard Czeck National Park Authority Wadden Sea of Lower Saxony
Ms Ursula Siebert Institute for Terrestrial and Aquatic Wildlife Research, University of Veterinary Medicine Hannover	Mr Joseph Schnitzler Institute for Terrestrial and Aquatic Wildlife Research, University of Veterinary Medicine Hannover
Mr Holger Haslob Thünen Institute of Sea Fisheries	Ms Anne Sell Thünen Institute of Sea Fisheries
Mr Jan Herrmann On behalf of the UNESCO Wadden Sea World Heritage Visitor Centre	Ms Nicole Frisch Student
Netherlands	
Mr Bernard Baerends Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality Directorate general for Nature, Fisheries and Rural Area	Ms Meike Scheidat Wageningen Marine Research
International Guests	
Ms Jenny Renell ASCOBANS Coordinator	
Common Wadden Sea Secretariat	
Mr Rüdiger Stempel Common Wadden Sea Secretariat	Ms Annika Bostelmann Common Wadden Sea Secretariat
Mr Sascha Klöpffer Common Wadden Sea Secretariat	