

Status of national management plans for seals

This document was a background document for the
2013 HELCOM Ministerial Meeting



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In the Baltic Sea Action Plan, the Contracting Parties have committed themselves to, by 2012, finalise national management plans as part of the measures taken to safeguard the long-term viability of the Baltic seal populations according to HELCOM Recommendation 27-28/2.

The management plans are well underway in those countries where there are seal populations and further progress is expected in 2014 by nearly all Contracting Parties with seal populations.

This document presents the current situation with the development of national seal management plans for countries with national management plans (Table 1), countries with national management plans under development or without management plans (Table 2) and for countries with no expected national management plans.



Photo by Carlos Minguell, OCEANA.

Table 1. Countries with National Seal Management Plans.

Country	Status of the Management Plans and Species included	Adopted in for the years	Planned Updates	Summary: Most important issues of the MPs	Websites	Additional information
Denmark	MPs for grey seal and harbour seal exist	2005 for 2005-2010	Due to review (HELCOM SEAL 4/2010)			Surveys of seals and mammals are being carried out, including SCANS surveys (Minutes of HELCOM SEAL 6/2012).
Estonia	Being revised for grey and ringed seal	Grey seal 2001 for 2001-2005 Ringed seal 2006 for 2006-2010	In 2013 for the time period of 2013-2017			The government is revising the management plans on grey and ringed seals for the next five years. The quantity of individuals lost from the population through by-catch is currently not known which has made it challenging to create LRLs. Estonia will wait for HELCOM decision on the LRL. Any numbers of seals are currently rough estimates and the ministry wishes to improve and modernise the monitoring. The aim is to make the society and other sectors more aware of the seals and their environment. Adopted by the Estonian law by the end of this year 2013-2017 (Minutes of HELCOM SEAL 6/2012). The revision of MPs is in the final phase, MPs are expected to be approved by the end of 2013. The grey seal was added in the list of wild game in the Estonian Hunting Act, but it is not decided if and how the hunting permissions for grey seals will be issued.
Finland	MPs for grey and ringed seal exist and are five years old	2007 for 2007-2012	Date for the update has not been decided (by the Finnish Wildlife Agency)		ENGLISH FINNISH	The 2007 MPs available at the Webpage of the Ministry of the Agriculture and Forestry (Minutes of HELCOM SEAL 5/2011).The plans are going to be updated in 2012 but timetable yet to be settled. Due to the updating process of management plans of large land carnivores (wolf, lynx and brown bear) the management plan for Baltic Sea seals for Finland is probably not going to be updated in the near Future. It is, however, the responsibility of the Finnish Wildlife Agency to follow the progress made in the implementation of national management plans every year and report it to the Ministry of Forestry and Agriculture. Conflict with fisheries is still an issue. The by-catch has been discussed a lot and ECOSEAL gives information (Minutes of HELCOM SEAL 6/2012).
Sweden	MPs for grey seal and harbour seal in Skagerrak and Kattegatt (except for the "Kalmarsund population") are in place. MP for ringed seal is in preparation and is to be finished in 2013.	2012 for 2012-		Development of seal safe fishing gear continues. Information and cooperation as a tool to make better understanding between fishery and conservation is a challenging goal.	GREY SEAL HARBOR SEAL	Management plans for grey seals and harbour seals were adopted in 2012. Conflict with fisheries is an issue.

Table 2. Countries with National Seal Management Plans under development or without National Seal Management Plans.

Country	Status of the Management Plans and Species included	Additional information
Poland	Under development for grey seal and harbour porpoise	National management plans for grey seal and the harbour porpoise are under development with the involvement of different ministries and stakeholders, including fishermen (Minutes of HELCOM SEAL 6/2012). There is a plan to prepare management plans for grey seal and harbour porpoise by the end of the year 2012 by WWF Poland. There is a need to establish marine reserves in areas where grey seals have been regularly observed, therefore a change in national legislation is necessary. WWF Poland has hired a specialist to ensure all stakeholder participation and consultation in the development of management plans, including national authorities, but it is not sure if the Polish government will adopt it as part of national legislation (Minutes of HELCOM SEAL 5/2011).
Russia	No Management Plans	There is no official management plan for the marine mammals but other activities are being carried out. Ringed seals' situation in the GOF is under scrutiny and it is in a perilous state with only about 100 individuals and dependent on input from other areas of the Baltic Sea. The seals on the haul outs are in the focus, and there are good haul outs in the southern GOF, in Gurgalsky Kurgalsky peninsula, problems are due to by-catch in fishing nets in Gurgalsky Kurgalsky where half of the population is located. Grey seal survey has also been carried out and grey seal numbers are increasing and this year winter and ice conditions were good, which was not the case during the recent years. In the GOF there is an increasing quantity of anthropogenic influence such as shipping. Plan to investigate seal distribution using GSM tagging to pick up data about foraging region and moving of seals in time when they are not on haul outs. Investigation of seals in the gulf should be done in international collaboration with Finland and Estonia. The red data book of Russia is under a revision and will be published next year. For the ringed seal the case is clear but for the grey seal it is more of a question whether to include the species (Minutes of HELCOM SEAL 6/2012).

Table 3. Countries with no expected National Seal Management Plans.

Country	Status of the Management Plans and Species included	Additional information
Germany	No MPs foreseen to be produced	In the German Baltic Sea there are presently no haul out sites, neither for breeding nor for moulting, whereas resting seals can be observed along the coast, particularly for grey seals in the Greifswald Lagoon and for harbour seals in Wismar Bay (Minutes of HELCOM SEAL 4/2010). All hunting of seals is forbidden in Germany. Some management measures are conducted: All stranding are reported and the cause of death is determined. Reported sightings are also recorded (Minutes of HELCOM SEAL 5/2011). Plans for habitat restoration measures to re-install one important haul-out site that was destroyed by gravel extraction in the early 20th century are not implemented so far due to several reasons. Numbers of seals in this site are monitored twice a month by federal and state authorities and the numbers are gradually increasing (Minutes of HELCOM SEAL 4/2010).
Latvia	No MPs foreseen to be produced	According to the Latvian Ministry of Environment, no seal management plans are foreseen to be produced because of the lack of breeding stock and haul outs which would have need to be protected. Expert's view: both national management plan and monitoring program for seals is needed in Latvia, too. It is motivated by the fact that seals, particularly grey seals, are performing feeding migrations to territorial waters of Latvia and are coming in interactions with fishery. Therefore both national management plan and monitoring of seals should be focused on seal bycatch. Besides, monitoring of seals should include such items as health of seals and stranded animals (Minutes of HELCOM SEAL 1/2006).
Lithuania	-	-