



## HELCOM Recommendation 17/2

Adopted 12 March 1996 and  
amended 4 March 2020,  
having regard to Article 13, Paragraph b)  
of the 1974 Helsinki Convention

### **PROTECTION OF HARBOUR PORPOISE IN THE BALTIC SEA AREA**

#### **THE COMMISSION,**

**RECALLING** Article 15 of the 1992 Helsinki Convention requiring the Contracting Parties to take all appropriate measures to conserve and protect biodiversity of marine and coastal areas,

**RECALLING** the decision of the 2013 HELCOM Copenhagen Declaration to take decisive action to work towards a favorable conservation status of the harbour porpoise based on implementation of the CMS ASCOBANS Recovery Plan for Baltic Harbour Porpoises (Jastarnia Plan), in particular by addressing the pressing problem of by-catch,

**RECALLING FURTHER** the HELCOM 2013 Red List that classifies the Baltic Proper harbour porpoise population (approximately ICES areas 24-32) as Critically Endangered, and the Western Baltic, the Belt Sea and the Kattegat population (WBBK) of harbour porpoise (approximately ICES area 21-24) as Vulnerable,

**DEEPLY CONCERNED** about the critical status of harbor porpoise population in the Baltic Proper and **AWARE** that the number of individuals drastically decreased during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with no signs of recovery,

**AWARE** that the WBBK harbour porpoise population is in a better state, but due to high pressure from human activities it still requires application of efficient conservation measures,

**RECALLING ALSO** the commitments of the HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan to improve the conservation status of threatened and/or declining species of the Baltic Sea area, to minimize by-catch of harbour porpoises, and the goal to achieve a favorable conservation status of all species,

**BEING AWARE** that those Contracting Parties being also EU Member States have to coordinate their activities regarding the harbour porpoise with the implementation of relevant EU Directives, such as the Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC), the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (2008/56/EC) and the Common Fisheries Policy (Regulation (EU) No 1380/2013) as relevant,

**RECOGNIZING** the relevance of e.g. the Agreement on the Conservation of Small Cetaceans of the Baltic, North East Atlantic, Irish and North Seas (ASCOBANS), including the Jastarnia Plan and the Conservation Plan for the Harbour Porpoise Population in the WBBK , as well as the action list and relevant recommendations by the International Council for the Exploration of the Seas (ICES) and the resolutions of International Whaling Commission (IWC) and European Cetacean Society (ECS),

**RECOGNIZING** that harbour porpoise is and must remain an integral part of the marine ecosystems,

**RECOGNIZING FURTHER** that pressures stemming from human activities, such as by-catches, pollutants, habitat deterioration and disturbance adversely affect this species,

**CONVINCED** that the progressive, critical threat of extinction of the harbour porpoise in the Baltic proper requires emergency action, and human pressures affecting harbour porpoises in other parts of the Baltic Sea region require adequate and timely mitigation action, to ensure their favorable conservation status under Directive 92/43/EEC in both regions.

**RECOMMENDS** that the Governments of the Contracting Parties to the Helsinki Convention:

- a) give highest priority to avoiding by-catches of harbour porpoises, particularly following the recommendations of ASCOBANS and the Jastarnia Plan, in order to achieve the ecological objective of the Baltic Sea Action Plan. By-catch of harbour porpoise, shall be significantly reduced with the aim to reach by-catch rates close to zero, recognizing that the Baltic Proper population of harbour porpoise is more threatened than the WBBK population;
- b) take action for collection and analysis of data on pressures such as by-catch, disturbance, including underwater noise, pollutants, changes in food base and prey quality, habitat deterioration, climate change, and human activities associated with the listed pressures;
- c) Continue to carry out regular large-scale regional surveys, such as SAMBAH, SCANS and MiniSCANS, of abundance, density and distribution, as well as coordinated national monitoring programmes of harbour porpoise distribution, abundance and density where appropriate,
- d) take necessary action for collection and analysis of data on behavior, life history and health from by caught and stranded animals and sightings;
- e) seek close co-operation inter alia with OSPAR, ASCOBANS and ICES;
- f) d) consider the establishment of marine protected areas for harbour porpoises within the framework of the Baltic Sea Protected Areas (HELCOM MPAs) when documented information is available that an area is important to harbour porpoises
- g) implementing effective and adequate protection measures for the species both inside and outside HELCOM MPAs;
- h) report to the Commission every four years, in line with reporting to ASCOBANS Meetings of Parties, on their progress in implementing the above recommendations.