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Agenda Item 32.2

**REPORT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE  
CONCERTED ACTION FOR THE HARBOUR PORPOISE (*Phocoena phocoena*)  
IN THE BALTIC SEA AND THE IBERIAN PENINSULA\***

Summary:

The following non-governmental organisations has submitted the attached report on the implementation of the Concerted Action for the populations of Harbour Porpoises (*Phocoena phocoena*) in the Baltic Sea and Iberian Peninsula, in accordance with the process elaborated in Resolution 12.28; Concerted Action 13.7.

- Coalition Clean Baltic
- Whale and Dolphin Conservation
- Humane Society International
- ORCA

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**REPORT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE  
CONCERTED ACTION FOR THE HARBOUR PORPOISE (*Phocoena phocoena*)  
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UNEP/CMS/CONCERTED ACTION 13.7

## **1. CONCERTED ACTION**

Title: Concerted Action for the Harbour Porpoise (*phocoena phocoena*) in the Baltic Sea and the Iberian Peninsula

Document number: [Concerted Action 13.7](#)

## **2. REPORTING ORGANISATION**

The following non-governmental organisations have contributed to this report

- Coalition Clean Baltic
- Whale and Dolphin Conservation
- Humane Society International
- ORCA

All organisations have considerable experience in cetacean biology and conservation and in the development of marine conservation policy. Additionally, all four organisations contribute to the work of ASCOBANS, the regional agreement covering these populations. Hereafter they are referred to collectively as ‘the groups’.

### **Coalition Clean Baltic**

Coalition Clean Baltic (CCB) has been active in the conservation of the Baltic Sea harbour porpoises for well over a decade. CCB has until recently coordinated two of the three ASCOBANS harbour porpoise conservation plans, and also works in other projects to improve the awareness and conservation status for the Baltic Sea harbour porpoise.

### **Whale and Dolphin Conservation**

Whale and Dolphin Conservation (WDC) has been working for over thirty years protecting whales and dolphins around the globe from the challenges they face every day. With extensive experience funding vital conservation, education and research projects, WDC is a global authority on whale and dolphin issues.

### **Humane Society International**

Humane Society International (HSI) is one of the largest and most effective animal protection organisations in the world, with offices in a number of European countries and elsewhere. It has a long history of working on marine wildlife issues including within the context of CMS, ASCOBANS and ACCOBAMS.

### **ORCA**

ORCA is a UK-based whale and dolphin conservation charity, dedicated to the long-term protection of whales, dolphins and porpoises throughout UK, European and global waters. ORCA has been collecting scientific data on the density, distribution and range of cetacean species within European waters since 1995, specialising in dedicated distance sampling survey effort, utilising citizen science and platforms of opportunity.

### 3. TARGET SPECIES/POPULATION

Class: Mammalia  
 Family: Phocoenidae  
 Order: Artiodactyla  
 Species: *Phocoena phocoena*  
 Population: Baltic and Iberian populations.

### 4. PROGRESS IN ACTIVITIES

The involved organisations, hereafter collectively referred here as “the group”, contributed to the following actions for the benefit of the Baltic Sea and Iberian harbour porpoise populations (originally proposed activities are highlighted in grey, followed by reported activities):

Support the ASCOBANS Recovery Plan for the Baltic Sea harbour porpoise (the Jastarnia Plan). **Timeline: Ongoing. Progress reported annually to Jastarnia and ASCOBANS**

The group has been deeply involved in the ASCOBANS work on the Baltic Proper harbour porpoise. CCB has held the position of chair of the ASCOBANS Jastarnia group (2017-2022), and, has been contracted (2019-2022) as the coordinator of the Jastarnia Plan and the Conservation Plan for the Harbour Porpoise Population in the Western Baltic, the Belt Sea and the Kattegat (WBBK Plan).

The group has been regular attendees at the ASCOBANS, Advisory Committee and the North Sea and Jastarnia Expert Groups meetings.

Assist governments in the collection of relevant data on fishing effort within the range of both populations, including *inter alia*. **Timeline: Open-ended**

The group contributed to various stakeholder processes in the UK and have been actively engaging with relevant stakeholders, including fishers, NGOs and statutory bodies, and various trials/research in the following forums: Clean Catch UK and Bycatch Mitigation Initiative). CCB has engaged in evaluating the use of pingers to minimise bycatch of the Baltic harbour porpoise, which has resulted in a recently published paper ([Carlén & Cosentino, 2023](#)).

Encourage and, where appropriate, assist in large-scale surveys and national monitoring of the populations.

Assist governments in developing management and mitigation measures within the designated MPA and wider population range of the Baltic Sea population.  
**Timeline: As proves appropriate**

The group has worked within the IWC Scientific Committee, HELCOM and other international bodies to receive support for the activities around the emergency measures/Delegated Act.

WDC was involved in a special report to propose additional measures (time/area closures) after Navies of FI, SE and DE claimed that large-scale use of pingers would interfere with their uw acoustic activities (to be published in April/May 2023). WDC has regular dialogue with the German Government to deliver expertise to support gillnet ban in MPAs and demand stronger bycatch mitigation measures.

Contribute to the development of conservation goals relevant to EU regulations - Favourable Conservation Values (Habitats Directive) and threshold values for GES (MSFD indicators D1C2 and D1C4), for both populations. **Timeline: As per reporting cycles**

CCB has participated actively in HELCOM, where MSFD indicators for the Baltic Sea Region are developed, and has been actively involved in setting indicators for harbour porpoise abundance and distribution under D1.

WDC was on the Cetambicion stakeholder committee (2019-2022), with the aim of improving monitoring, especially for bycatch mortality, and investigating mitigation measures effectiveness in the Bay of Biscay and the Iberian coast, contributing to achieving GES. WDC and CCB engaged with the European Commission (EC) on the protection of both populations and worked together with Seas at Risk to encourage action through the EU Joint Recommendation process, particularly on bycatch.

In 2019, the group made emergency measures requests to the EC regarding the unsustainable bycatch of harbour porpoises in the Baltic Sea and common dolphins in the Bay of Biscay, and also made a formal complaint regarding unsustainable levels of cetacean bycatch in EU fishing fleets. This resulted in the EC asking ICES for scientific advice, and eventually opening infringement procedures against France, Spain and Sweden for not complying with the EU habitats directive in relation to bycatch of common dolphins (Spain and France) and harbour porpoises (Sweden).

Raise awareness of the Baltic Sea and Iberian population of harbour porpoise. **Timeline: Open-ended and ongoing**

In 2020/21, WDC engaged in an awareness raising campaign for the Baltic Proper harbour porpoise, including a petition with more than 100.000 signatures, being handed over to the German Government in September 2021. Public education efforts continue until to date. WDC also initiated a letter of more than 100 cetacean experts world-wide to the German Government asking for strong long-term measures to protect the Baltic Sea population.

CCB's awareness raising activities for the Baltic Proper harbour porpoise increased during these years, through a number of publications, press releases, events and educational activities (Section 6). A CCB [#SavetheBalticPorpoise](#) petition was delivered to the EU Commissioner for Environment, Ocean and Fisheries, in Helsinki, in November 2022 [with over 120,000 signatures](#). Awareness raising and policy advocacy for this population remain as some of the main activities at CCB, with support of the Swedish Society for Nature Conservation, with future plans for continuation.

Encourage and support the listing of both populations in the Appendices of CMS COP 14 in 2023. **Timeline: Before COP 14**

CCB and WDC have worked within the ASCOBANS Jastarnia group to support the submission of a proposal to include the Baltic harbour porpoise on CMS Appendix I. In 2022, Finland submitted this proposal to the EU process in preparation for the CMS COP14. We are hopeful that the EU will put this proposal to COP14.

## 5. CHANGES TO THE CONCERTED ACTION (IF ANY)

Participate in developing an action plan for the Iberian harbour porpoise population. **Timeline: Before COP 14**

Despite requests to the ASCOBANS Advisory Committee, the work on an action plan for the Iberian harbour porpoise has not yet started. The proponents are ready to participate in developing such a plan if the decision is made to start.

Support governments in the creation of an appropriate network of marine protected areas for the Iberian harbour porpoise population, and assist with the development of management and mitigation measures within this area and the populations' entire range. **Timeline: Development of a proposal before COP 14**

No opportunity has availed itself allowing the group to pursue this activity.

## 6. REFERENCES (if any)

Some relevant material of the group for the implementation of the Concerted Action and awareness raising activities, include:

2020

- [NGOs welcome scientists' advice to halt bycatch of endangered Baltic Proper harbour porpoise](#) [PRESS RELEASE]
- [EU Round Table meeting on common dolphin in the Bay of Biscay and Baltic Sea harbour porpoise](#) [EVENT]
- [European nations under pressure to save the critically endangered Baltic harbour porpoise](#) [PRESS RELEASE]
- [Extinction risks to whales, dolphins and porpoises – over 350 scientists warn in an open letter](#) [LETTER]
- [Joint NGO letter to EU Commission on Baltic proper harbour porpoise](#) [LETTER]

2021

- [Out of Sight, Out of Mind: How Conservation Is Failing European Porpoises](#) [SCIENTIFIC PAPER]
- [EU Scientific body confirms stronger bycatch measures are needed to protect Bay of Biscay common dolphins and Baltic Proper harbour porpoises](#) [LETTER]
- [Bycatch of critically endangered Baltic Sea harbour porpoise must stop](#) [PRESS RELEASE]
- [Row over the Atlantic: a new collaboration to save the Baltic harbour porpoise](#) [PRESS RELEASE]

2022

- Baltic talks - recorded discussions related to [underwater noise](#) and [the Baltic Proper harbour porpoise](#)
- [One step in the right direction to protect the only whale in the Baltic Sea](#) [PRESS RELEASE]
- [CCB's briefing on the EU delegated act](#) - to reduce incidental catches of the Baltic Proper harbour porpoise in the Baltic Sea.
- [PCBs and their likely effects on the Baltic Proper harbour porpoise](#) [SUMMARY - from relevant scientific papers]

Continuation of work in 2023

- [Bycatch Mitigation for the Baltic Proper Harbour Porpoise. What to do if pingers are not an option?](#) [PAPER - on alternative measures]
- [International Day of the Baltic harbour porpoise](#) [EVENT]

## 7. ACTION

The groups that have committed to this particular concerted action recommend that this Action is closed/completed in the event that the Baltic Proper harbour porpoise is added to Appendix I of the convention, noting that further attention still needs to be paid to the situation of the species in the Iberian region. We look forward to discussing this further at the COP.

Regarding future actions, the groups remain committed to engaging with the Jastarnia Group and will continue with outreach and awareness raising for the Baltic proper. They will also continue to work towards achieving better protection for the Iberian population.