

HELCOM RECOMMENDATION 9/1

(supersedes HELCOM Recommendation 3/3)

Adopted 15 February 1988, having regard to Article 13, Paragraph b) of the Helsinki Convention

RECOMMENDATION CONCERNING PROTECTION OF SEALS IN THE BALTIC SEA AREA

THE COMMISSION,

DEEPLY CONCERNED by the critical situation of the seals in the Baltic which has grown alarming, as pointed out by many expert meetings and organizations, e.g. the Seal Expert Symposium in Warsaw, 1980, the Nordic Council of Ministers, 1981, the Committee for the Gulf of Bothnia, Working Group on Baltic Seals (ICES), 1985 and 1986, IOC/ICES Review of Contaminants in Marine Mammals, 1987, Advisory Committee on Marine Pollution (ICES), 1986, 1987,

RECOGNIZING that according to the document "Assessment of the Effects of Pollution on the Natural Resources of the Baltic Sea, 1980" there are strong indications that organochlorine substances and among them especially PCB are primarily responsible for the serious decrease in the reproductive rate of ringed seals (*Pusa hispida*), harbour seals (*Phoca vitulina*) and grey seals (*Halichoerus grypus*) of the Baltic Sea Area,

RECOGNIZING FURTHER the importance and urgency of implementing the Recommendation on the Limitation of the use of PCBs (HELCOM Recommendation 3/1),

CONVINCED that marine mammals play an important role in indicating the effects of certain types of marine pollutants, particularly organohalogen compounds, and thus warn of their possible implications for human health,

RECOGNIZING that the three seal species move freely within the Baltic Sea, without regard to national borders or jurisdictions, and thus are the responsibility of all Baltic nations,

AND SIMULTANEOUSLY RECOGNIZING that, owing particularly to the small size of the populations of seals remaining in the Baltic Sea and the fact that weather conditions may result in breeding areas being restricted to territories under the jurisdiction of only one or two countries, the protection of a seal population may fall on only one or two countries in any year,

CONVINCED, therefore, that the survival of these species can only be promoted by urgent measures taken by all Contracting Parties to the Helsinki Convention,

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

- a) through their national instruments ban all hunting of grey seals, ringed seals and harbour seals in the Baltic area. In order to safeguard the survival of these species, the ban shall be maintained until a natural health condition and a normal reproductive rate can scientifically be shown;
- b) make efforts to establish seal sanctuaries and, when appropriate, organize seal breeding in order to save the genetic individuality of the declining Baltic seal stocks,

INVITES the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea continuously to assess the condition of the seal populations of the Baltic Sea, on the basis of new evidence presented by the Contracting parties and other relevant information.