

HELCOM RECOMMENDATION 17/2

Adopted 12 March 1996 and revised 6 March 2013, having regard to Article 13, Paragraph b) of the Helsinki Convention

PROTECTION OF HARBOUR PORPOISE IN THE BALTIC SEA AREA

THE COMMISSION,

DEEPLY CONCERNED about the population status of harbour porpoise in the Baltic Sea and **AWARE** that individual numbers have drastically decreased,

RECOGNIZING the relevance of the Agreement on the Conservation of Small Cetaceans of the Baltic, North East Atlantic, Irish and North Seas (ASCOBANS), including the Recovery Plan for Baltic Harbour Porpoises (Jastarnia Plan), 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 should remain an integral part of the marine ecosystems,

RECOGNIZING FURTHER that by-catches, habitat deterioration and disturbance adversely affect this species,

CONVINCED that the critical status of harbour porpoises in the Baltic Sea calls for immediate actions in order to safeguard their survival. The progressive, critical threat of extinction of the harbour porpoise in the Baltic proper (ICES areas 24-32) and apparent decline in numbers in other parts of the Baltic Sea region (such as ICES area 21-23) requires immediate action and, in the case of ICES area 24-32 emergency action, to ensure their survival.

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 ASCOBANS Jastarnia Plan, in order to achieve the ecological objective of the Baltic Sea Action Plan: "By 2015 by-catch of harbour porpoise, seals, water birds and non-target fish species has been significantly reduced with the aim to reach by-catch rates close to zero";
- b) take action in close co-operation with ASCOBANS and ICES, for collection and analysis of additional data on population distribution and abundance, stock identities, behavior and threats such as by-catch mortality, underwater noise, pollutant levels, ship strikes, changes in food base, epizooties, climate changes, marine installations and construction;
- c) consider the establishment of marine protected areas for harbour porpoises within the framework of the Baltic Sea Protected Areas (BSPAs), when documented information is available that an area hosts harbour porpoises;
- d) report to the Commission every three years, beginning from 1998 on their progress in implementing the above recommendations.