

Roadmap for the implementation of collective actions within the Recommendations for the protection and conservation of OSPAR listed Species and Habitats

2017-2025

Action sheet 29

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| **Action 29** | Develop guidelines on how to minimise the disturbing and/or harmful acoustic effects to harbour porpoises especially from seismic surveys, pile driving, shipping traffic, military activities and underwater explosions. |
| Prepared by | The Netherlands |
| Role | Lead |
| Participants | Lead by the Netherlands (Jeroen Vis).  Supported by Belgium, Denmark, France, United Kingdom*.* |
| Problem description | Acoustic disturbance is considered as one of the threats to the harbour porpoise (see OSPAR, 2014). Like all odontocetes porpoises use sound for navigation, finding food, avoiding predators and communication and are therefore sensitive to acoustic pollution. The harbour porpoise occurs in all OSPAR regions but it is scarce in OSPAR region V (Case reports: OSPAR, 2008) and recommendations have been made for its protection (OSPAR, 2013).  The 2009 JAMP Assessment on the environmental impact of underwater noise recommended amongst others that OSPAR Contracting Parties in a next step should develop guidance on measures to mitigate noise emissions and the environmental impacts of underwater noise on the marine environment (OSPAR 2009). The Quality Status Report 2010 recommended that OSPAR should increase its efforts to develop, review and apply mitigation measures to reduce the impacts of underwater noise and develop Guidelines on best environmental practices (BEP) and best available techniques (BAT) for mitigating noise emissions and their environmental impacts (OSPAR 2010). |
| Plan: | This plan applies to:   * The harbour porpoise (*Phocoena phocoena*); * OSPAR Region II (Greater North Sea) and III (Celtic Seas), where the species is under threat and/or in decline (according to the OSPAR Case report). In regions II and III is decline is questionable, and the species is under more pressure in region IV   Guidelines need to be developed on how underwater noise generated by human activities and its effects (listed below) on harbour porpoises can be minimised.  Several specific activities were considered (OSPAR, 2009): Seismic surveys; Pile driving; Shipping traffic; Military activities; Underwater explosions.  In 2014, OSPAR published an inventory of the feasibility and effectiveness of mitigation options to avoid or reduce emissions and impacts of underwater noise, including an annex on pile driving. Also an annex on seismic noise has been developed (ICG-Noise, 2016), that needed some technical corrections. It had now been circulated to EIHA HDs to be signed off and would be published soon (ICG-NOISE 17/7/1, SR item 5).  Other annexes have been identified to be completed and added in due course. These should focus on the use or destruction at sea of explosives; high frequency impulsive sources (e.g. echosounders); dredging; shipping noise, and sonar (noting that for managing military activities, OSPAR action may have limited impact).  So far, none of these (additional) annexes have been prepared.  OSPAR ICG-Noise was requested to take action to seek suggestions from Contracting Parties to rank the remaining annexes of the noise mitigation inventory in terms of importance, as addressed by OSPAR EIHA, summary record 2017 par. 5.60, ANNEX 3 (Ref. 1.1).  ICG-NOISE 2017 reports that there is on-going work on mitigation of noise from underwater explosion and perhaps this should be the next chapter to be completed. Also work by IMO (led by Canada) on noise from shipping in on-going and should also be prioritised.  Actions to be taken by ICG-Noise:   * Follow the development of mitigating measures for noise from underwater explosions (unclear by whom), and for shipping (being prepared by IMO) * Ranking the priority of remaining annexes of the noise mitigation inventory to be developed in terms of importance, by seeking suggestions from CP’s and ICG-Noise; * Finding CPs to develop the annexes for mitigation following a time order as determined by this ranking (in the last meeting cycle none of the CPs had had the capacity to do so); * Set a timeline for the development of the annexes; * Development of annexes; * Translating the annexes into clear guidelines.   Other fora could be contacted, e.g. HELCOM, ASCOBANS, CMS, NATO, IMO, … to figure out if any parallel actions are being undertaken. Nationally developed guidelines might provide for a basis. |
| Timeline | Not indicated yet. |
| Events | OSPAR Meeting cycle 2017-2018:   * OSPAR ICG-POSH --> BDC * OSPAR ICG-Noise --> EIHA |
| Links to other actions | This action is defined for ICG-Noise, so the implementation depends on the progress in this ICG. |
| Added value of action by OSPAR | The action should be undertaken by OSPAR, in particular by ICG-Noise.  Other relevant actions may have been defined by other fora, such as TG-Noise (in relation to MSFD). HELCOM, and ASCOBANS are mainly making use of products prepared by OSPAR. |
| Resources |  |
| Barriers to Progress | None of the CPs within ICG-Noise had had the capacity during the last meeting cycle (2016-2017) to make further progress on the development of the guidelines.  Ways should be sought to overcome this. |
| Stakeholders to engage | Any guidelines developed through OSPAR should undergo consultations with industry and NGOs, as is already taking place on national level. |
| Other Competent Authorities: | EU TG-Noise (in relation to MSFD), ASCOBANS, CMS, HELCOM, IMO, NATO, … .  The CMS (Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals), ASCOBANS and ACCOBAMS have a joint noise working group. |
| Product(s): | Guidelines for effectiveness and feasibility of mitigation options to avoid or reduce emissions and impacts of underwater noise from (in random order):   * Use or destruction at sea of explosives (being prepared by other party/parties); * high frequency impulsive sources (e.g. echosounders); * dredging; * shipping noise (on-going work by IMO); * sonar. |
| References | OSPAR Commission (2008). Case Reports for the OSPAR List of Threatened and/or Declining Species and Habitats. Publication Number: 358/2008.  OSPAR (2009a). Assessment of the environmental impact of underwater noise. ‐ Biodiversity Series, OSPAR report 436. ISBN : 978‐1‐906840‐76‐1.  OSPAR (2013). OSPAR recommendation 2013/11. OSPAR(2) 13/4/1, Annex 11.  OSPAR Commission (2010). Quality Status Report. ‐ ISBN 978‐1‐907390‐38‐8.  OSPAR (2014). OSPAR inventory of measures to mitigate the emission and environmental impact of underwater noise. Biodiversity Series, OSPAR Commission. Publication Number: 626/2014.  OSPAR ICG-Noise (2016). Summary Record ICG-Noise(2) 16/05/02.  OSPAR EIHA (2017). Summary Record EIHA 17/09/01-E.  OSPAR ICG-Noise (2017) Summary record ICG-Noise 17/7/1. |