

THE HARBOUR PORPOISE - OUR BALTIC WHALE

THREATS TO THE HARBOUR PORPOISE

The main threats to the Baltic Sea harbour porpoise today are bycatch in fishing gear, environmental contaminants and underwater noise. With very few porpoises left and decreasing gillnet fisheries, the risk of bycatch in the Baltic is very low, but has to be considered in combination with other threats. Contaminants such as PCB has proven to cause reproductive failure in North Sea harbour porpoises, and PCB levels in the Baltic Sea are many times higher than in the North Sea. That means a smaller proportion of females are able to reproduce. If a fertile female dies in a fishing net, that is a serious loss for the population, and a threat to its survival. In addition, disturbance from underwater noise can further decrease the number of successful matings and the calf survival rate.

OUR OWN WHALE

The harbour porpoise (*Phocoena phocoena*) is a small toothed whale. It is the only cetacean species living in the Baltic Sea year-round. There are three populations of harbour porpoises in the Baltic Sea region: one in the North Sea, Skagerrak and northern Kattegat, one in southern Kattegat, Belt Sea, and western Baltic Sea, and one in the Baltic Proper. The Baltic Proper population is listed by the IUCN and HELCOM as critically endangered, and today there are only approximately 500 porpoises left.

DISTRIBUTION

On and around the Northern and Southern Midsea Banks and Hoburg's Bank in Swedish waters, an area has been identified where the Baltic Sea porpoises seem to spend their summers. Since porpoises mate and give birth to their calves during summer, this is likely to be the most important breeding area for the Baltic Sea harbour porpoises. This means that Sweden has a great responsibility for the population. In December 2016, the Swedish Government designated a large Natura 2000 area here. Now effective conservation measures have to be taken within this area, to protect the porpoises here.

During the winter months, porpoises seem to utilise larger areas in the Baltic Sea, including areas just south of the Archipelago Sea in Finland and along the Polish coast. Therefore, it is important to take conservation measures also outside protected areas. For example we believe that actions are needed to minimize bycatch risk throughout the Baltic Proper.



The **BALTIC SEA HARBOUR PORPOISE** is critically endangered

It is threatened by

- UNDERWATER NOISE
- BYCATCH
- CONTAMINANTS

Today there are only about **500** harbour porpoises left in the Baltic Sea

The loss of one animal can have serious consequences for the population!

Conservation measures are needed both within and outside marine protected areas to **#SavetheBalticPorpoise!**

