

## European Parliament event briefing

# Fisheries Emergency Measures for the Baltic Sea harbour porpoise



The Baltic Sea harbour porpoise is listed by IUCN and HELCOM as critically endangered. Today its geographical range is significantly smaller than what can be induced from historical records, and there are only a few hundred animals left. While pollution and disturbance through underwater noise may be contributing to the population failing to recover, bycatch is the one acute threat causing direct mortalities in significant numbers. Given the small size of the population, the sex ratio and age distribution and the proportion of females potentially infertile due to high contaminant load, there may be less than 100 fertile females in the Baltic Proper. Losing even one of those females could have a devastating effect on the ability of the population to recover or even stay stable at the low numbers of today.

Hence, to allow this critically endangered population to recover, bycatch must be reduced to an absolute

minimum, ideally to zero. However, to date initiatives from Member States to minimise bycatch are very limited and there are currently no effective measures in place to protect the Baltic Sea harbour porpoise. While Sweden designated the main part of the porpoise breeding area in the central Baltic Proper as a Natura 2000 SAC in December 2017, the long and slow process for Member States to agree joint measures for nature conservation purposes under the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) is risking the survival of this population.

Emergency measures within existing Natura 2000 areas have been proposed based on Article 11(4) of the Common Fisheries Policy, and with reference to Article 6 of the Habitats Directive. Measures outside Natura 2000 sites have been proposed with reference to Article 12 of the Common Fisheries Policy and Article 12 of the Habitats Directive.

# Proposed measures

To minimize the impact of bycatch on the Baltic Sea harbour porpoise, we urge the Commission to implement two levels of emergency measures: 1) Measures within Natura 2000 areas with reference to Article 11(4) of the CFP and Article 6 of the Habitats directive, and 2) Measures outside Natura 2000 sites, with reference to Article 12 of the Habitats directive, as well as Article 12 of the CFP.

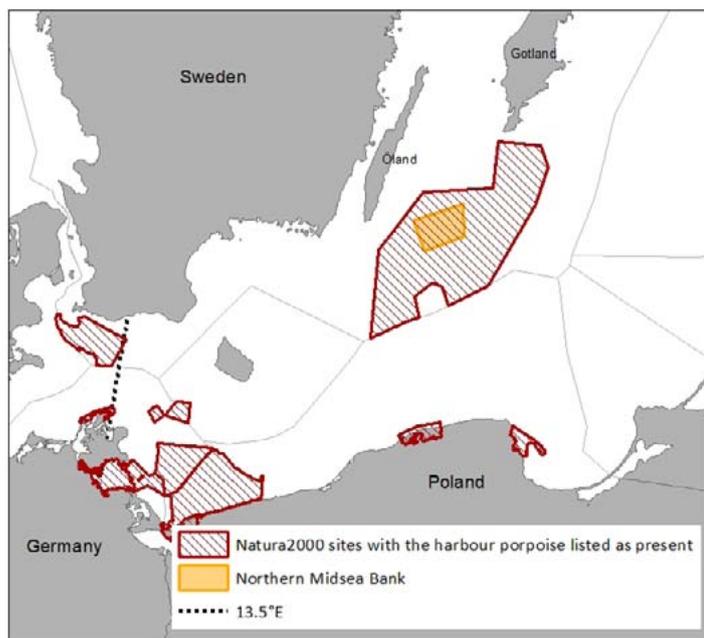
## 1) Measures within Natura 2000 areas

### a. Closure of the Northern Midsea Bank for all fisheries.

The Northern Midsea bank is situated in the large Natura 2000 area designated for the important breeding area for the Baltic Proper harbour porpoise population.

### b. Closing of gillnet fisheries in the rest of the Natura 2000 area Hoburgs bank och Midsjöbankarna (SE0330308) as well as in all other Natura 2000 areas east of 13.5°E until site-specific assessments has been made of the impact of use of mitigation measures such as ADDs.

Natura 2000 areas where the harbour porpoise is listed as present should be closed for gillnet fisheries, until assessment has proven beyond scientific doubt that the integrity of the respective site is not adversely affected or reduced by the use of ADDs in gillnet fisheries. If assessments show that some gillnet fishing using ADDs could be allowed, this needs to be subject to a strict permitting procedure, and with mandatory use of ADDs and AIS/high res VMS as well as camera monitoring.



## 2) Measures outside Natura 2000 areas

### a. Mandatory use of ADDs in all commercial gillnet fisheries outside Natura 2000 areas in the entire range of the Baltic Proper harbour porpoise population, i.e east of 13.5°E

Mandatory use of ADDs, alternative gear or other effective mitigation measures east of 13.5°E and north to the Finnish Archipelago Sea at 60.0°N.

### b. Accurate recording of fishing effort and gear type for vessels of all sizes

### c. Dedicated bycatch monitoring on all gillnet vessels in the region

Monitoring of bycatch, for example using cameras on board, should be mandatory for all gillnet vessels. Detailed positioning of all vessels at all times should be mandatory.

### d. Monitoring and adaptive management/mitigation measures of gillnet fisheries

Mandatory bycatch monitoring on all gillnet vessels. If bycatch is observed, an assessment should be made and adaptive management such as alternative gear or time-area closures implemented.

Figure 1. The areas where use of ADDs is mandatory according to Regulation 812/2004, in relation to the Natura 2000 areas with the harbour porpoise listed as present within the range of the Baltic Proper population (east of 13.5°E), as well as the Northern Midsea bank which is proposed for total fisheries closure.