



2023

Letter of concern for the Baltic Proper harbour porpoise population

The Baltic Proper harbour porpoise population has been listed as Critically endangered by IUCN since 2008, and by HELCOM since 2013, although there are clear evidence of a severe decline starting already in the 1960's. Despite this knowledge, conservation action has been severely lacking for this population. While contaminants such as PCBs have certainly had an impact on overall health and reproduction, bycatch is one of the most serious threats to the survival of the population. Additionally, impulsive and continuous underwater noise can have serious implications for individual animals and, especially in a population as small as this, also at the population level.

The European Cetacean Society would like to raise serious concern about the lack of conservation measures for this critically endangered population, including mitigation of both bycatch and underwater noise, and encourage countries to take urgent action to improve population survival.

Bycatch should be mitigated in the entire population range, using available methods such as closures of static net closures, alternative gear, as well as acoustic deterrent devices, keeping in mind that deterrents should not be used in important areas for the population.

Impulsive underwater noise from for example construction of offshore windfarms or underwater explosions should as far as possible be entirely avoided in important areas for the Baltic Proper harbour porpoise population and carefully mitigated according to the best available practice in the rest of the population range. Consideration should also be given to decreasing continuous underwater noise in important areas for the population.