

The North Sea Porpoise Conservation Plan

from concept to best practice

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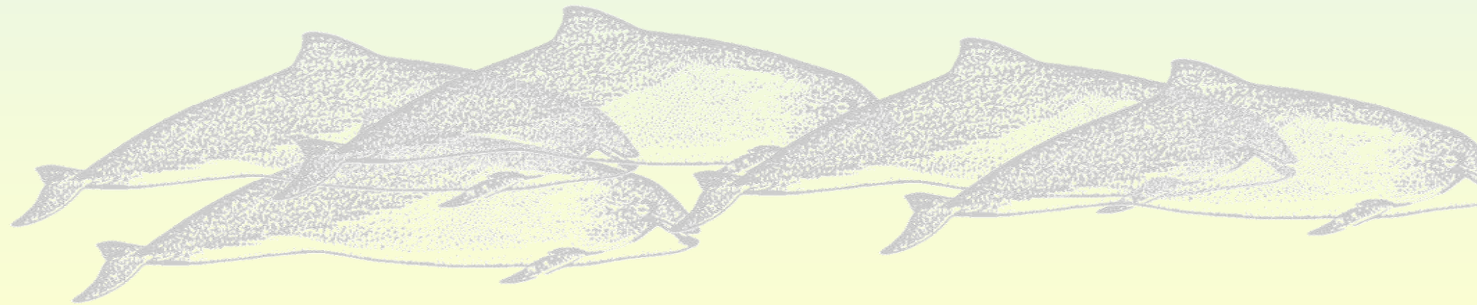
HISTORY



2002

5th International Conference on
the Protection of the North Sea
Bergen Declaration paragr. 30

The Ministers **will develop** and **adopt**,
as soon as possible and in co-operation
with all competent authorities, a Recovery
Plan for harbour porpoises in the North Sea.



2003

*Germany volunteered to draft within
ASCOBANS framework a Recovery Plan*

AIM of Recovery Plan as set by North Sea Ministers

restore and/or maintain North Sea harbour porpoises at a favourable conservation status, whereby:

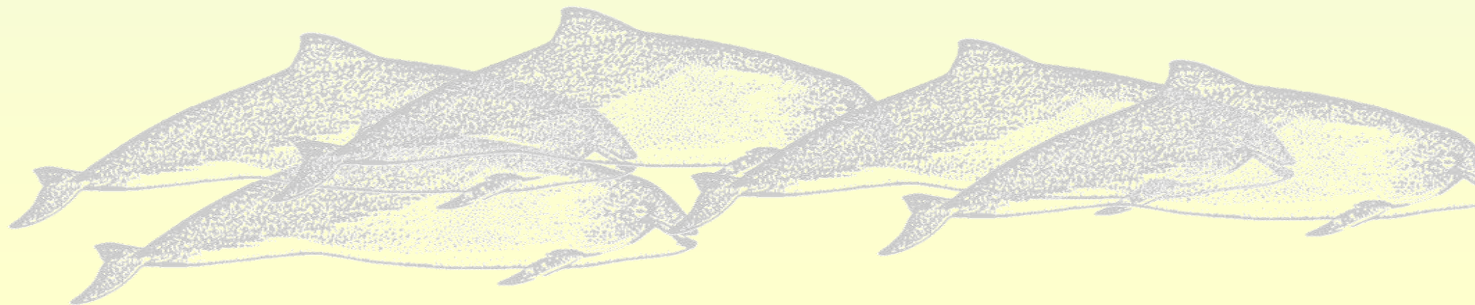
- data suggest h.p. are maintaining themselves at a level enabling their long-term survival as a viable component of the marine ecosystem
- the range of h.p. is not (likely to be) reduced in the foreseeable future
- habitat of favourable quality is available to maintain h.p. on a long term basis
- distribution and abundance of h.p. in the North Sea are returned to historic coverage and levels, wherever biologically feasible



The fundamental question is: is there a need for a Recovery Plan?

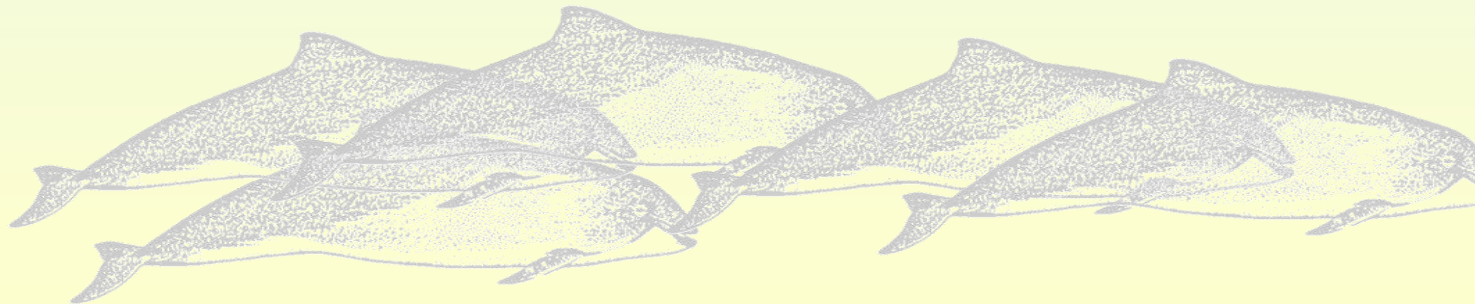
Answer may be found by assessing

- Status of the (sub)population(s) - trends in numbers, distribution and health
- Threats - identification and risk assessment



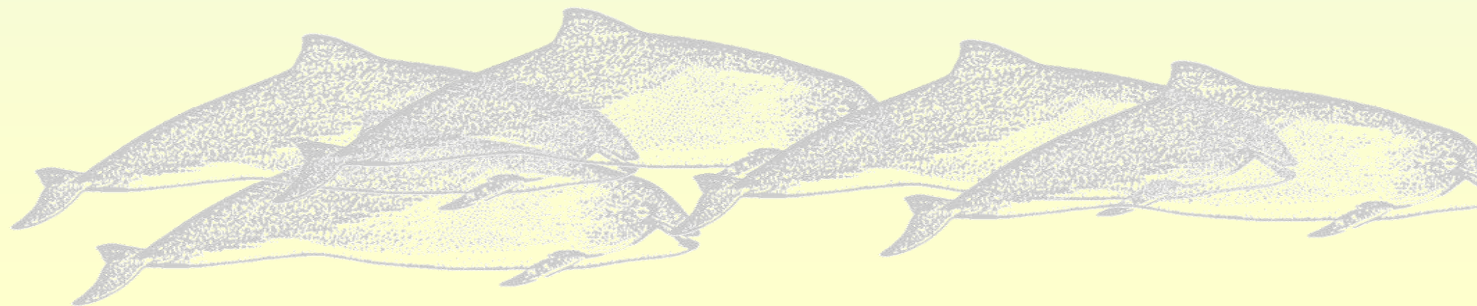
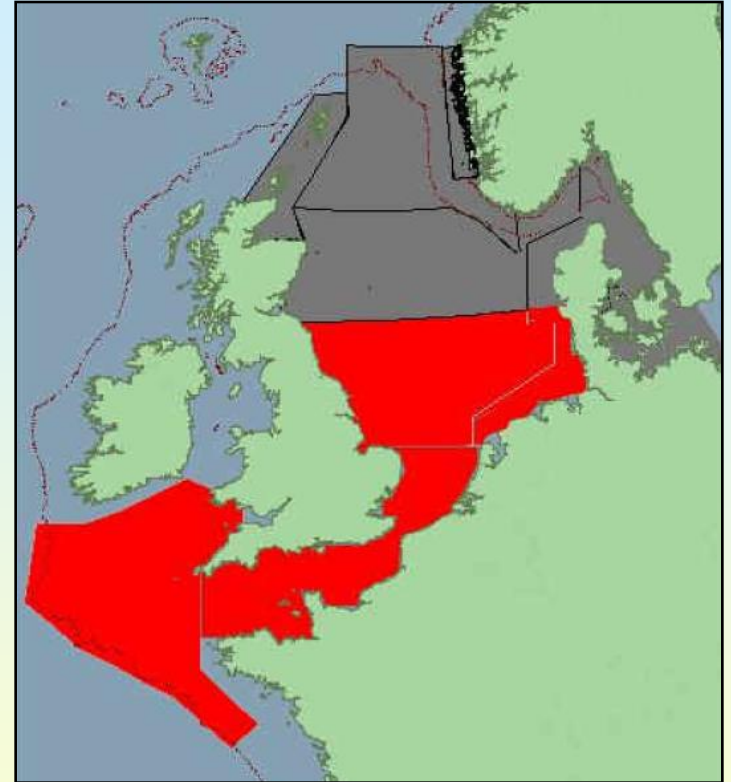
Status

- “anecdotal” info that porpoises were more abundant in Southern North Sea
- sightings + strandings have increased since the mid-90s in the S-North Sea
- SCANS I estimated 250,000 porpoises in the North Sea and Channel
- different stocks in the North Sea



PORPOISE ABUNDANCE NORTH vs SOUTH

	1994	2005
NORTH	239,000	120,000
SOUTH	102,000	215,000



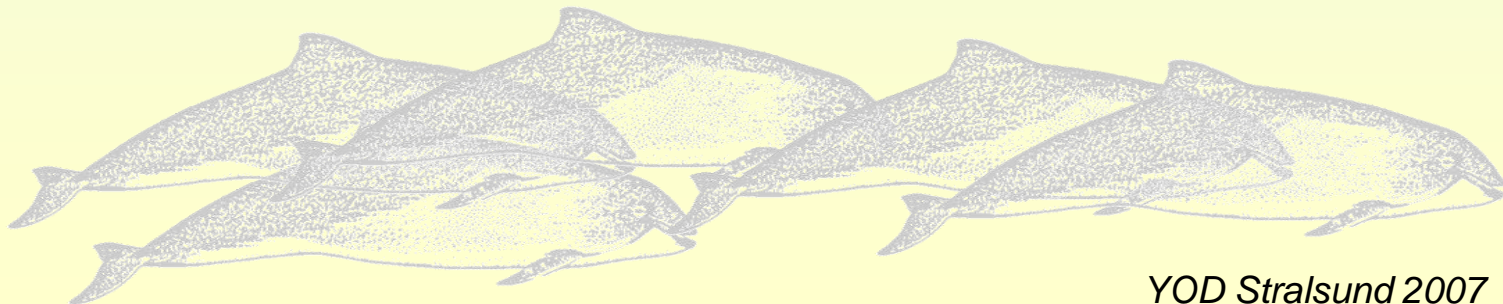
Threats

Bycatch:

- high impact in some areas ($\geq 1.7\%$)
- reduced fishing effort led to lower bycatch, but southerly “shift” counteracts to an unknown extent

Pollution, Shipping, Noise, Oil/gas exploration, Sewage/Debris, Constructions, Competition for prey:

lack of info on causal relationship



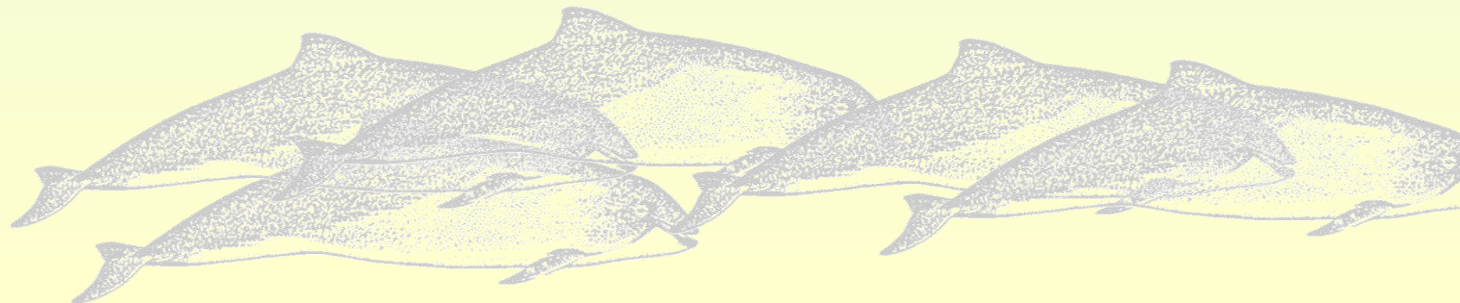
Conclusion

**there is no unequivocal YES for a
North Sea Harbour porpoise Recovery Plan,**

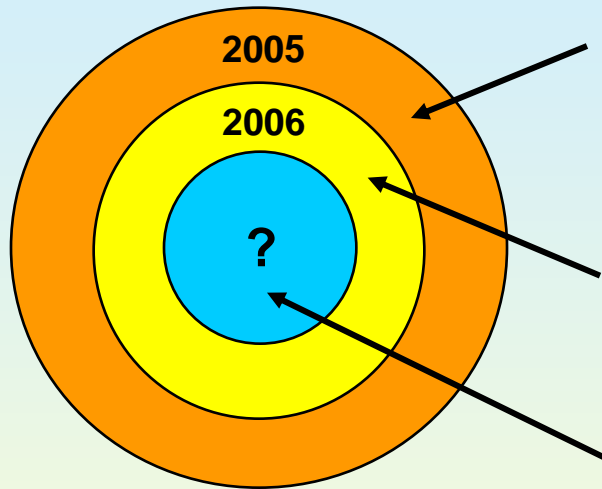
however,

focused management is needed, in essence

a tailor-made Conservation Plan



Development towards a Conservation Plan

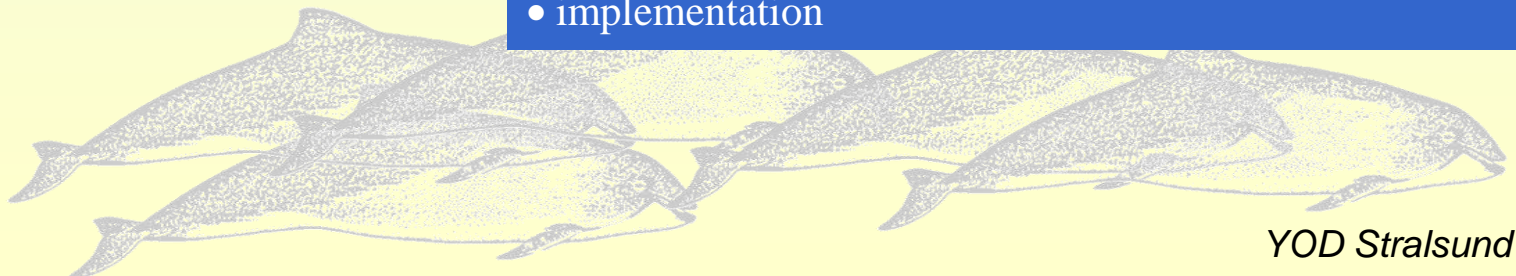


Expert paper: general information on populations, threats, mitigation measures, from global to regional level

Towards Draft Conservation Plan: still too generic

Conservation Plan: should contain brief, focused and tailor-made sections on

- population structure, abundance and distribution
- risks
- possible measures improving conservation status
- recommendations
- implementation



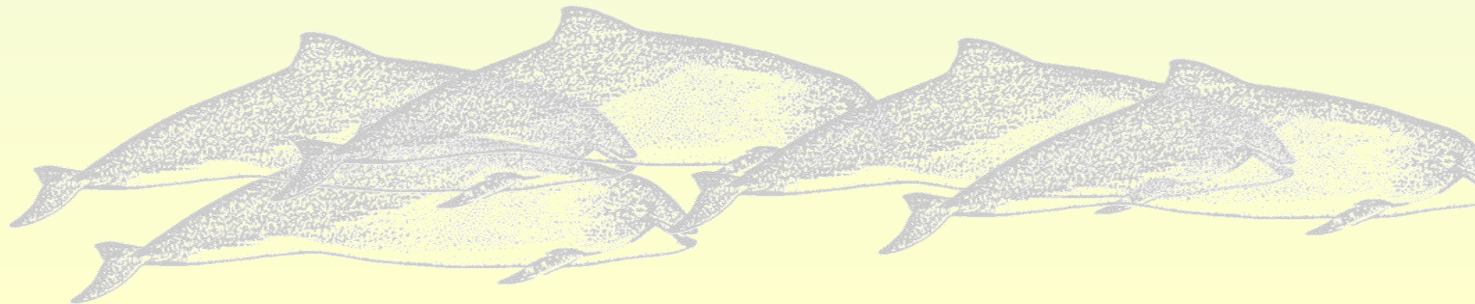


Suggested Way forward

**Identify threats on an activity and area specific basis
(including numbers affected)**

and

Recommend tailor-made measures



Priority Actions by All Range States

Bycatch

general

- identify, assess and address gaps in provisions of EU-Regulation

specific

- establish observation programs on small vessels and recreational fisheries
- enable open access to data on fishing effort (gear, net length/soak time, location)
- prioritise bycatch reduction measures (fishing effort) in high risk fisheries (bottom-set gill nets)
- introduce replacement gear in bottom-set gill net and tangle net fisheries



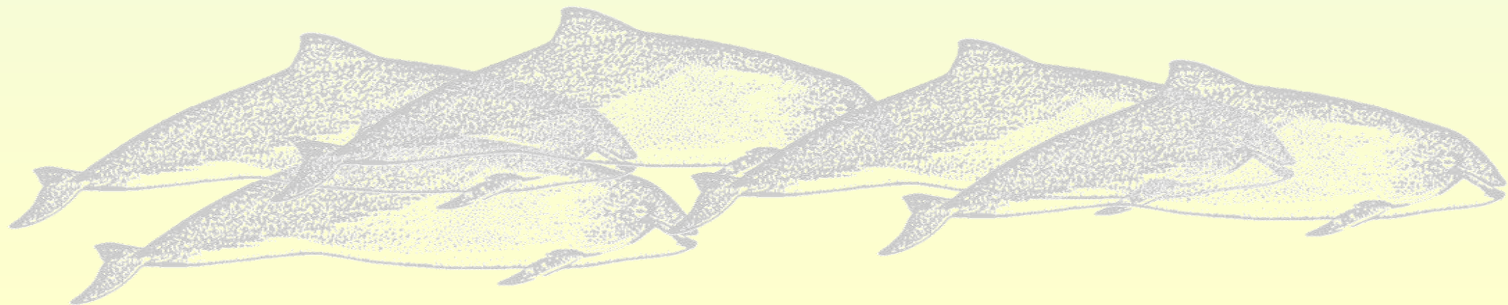
Priority Actions by All Range States

Other anthropogenic activities

Since most activities tend to affect habitat rather than individuals,

Effective mitigation may be achieved through the use of EIA and/or SEA

(EC Directive on SEA (2001/42/EC) requiring considerations of alternatives and mitigation measures)



ASCOBANS' ROLE

ASCOBANS' role could be to

- **facilitate international collaboration in surveillance and monitoring**
- **develop a “best practice” manual to arrive at a consistent approach to surveillance and monitoring, incl. small scale surveys**



- **involve in other areas of research**
 - **seasonal variation in abundance and distribution, movements,**
 - **possible subpopulation structures and respective boundaries**
 - **foraging ecology in relation to prey availability**
 - **health status assessment**

IMPLEMENTATION

Observations of obstacles

- measures to reduce impact are of a sectoral nature leading to a patchwork of policies, legislation, programmes
- there is a tendency to only meet the minimum requirements under EU-obligations



Remedies

- harmonising of national and sectoral efforts to ensure C-Plan implementation
- solicit commitments of governmental and non-governmental organisations for implementing Conservation Plan schedule
- monitoring and co-ordination of collective effort to pursue C-Plan in timely fashion

IMPLEMENTATION STRUCTURE

ASCOBANS should

set up a Steering Group (in collaboration with North Sea RAC), with duties to

- promote and co-ordinate the implementation of the plan
- gather information on its implementation, results obtained objectives reached, and difficulties encountered
- communicate this information to the general public through regular reporting in an accessible format
- appoint a group of experts to evaluate the effectiveness of the plan every three years, update it and make the conclusions public.

A North Sea Harbour porpoise Conservation Plan
is desirable

However

it should not become a surrogate for
real Conservation Actions

Photo Klaas Kreuijer