



Assessment of by-catch and health of harbour porpoises

Project data

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Project term:	June 2017-May 2020
Sponsorship:	Ministry of Energy, Agriculture, the Environment, Nature and Digitalisation (MELUND)

Project description

The number of dead harbour porpoises in the Schleswig-Holstein North and Baltic Seas increased enormously in 2016. In contrast, there is no evidence for a likewise increase of the harbour porpoise population. Anthropogenic impacts on the harbour porpoises' habitats in the North and Baltic Seas still rise. Therefore, all animals shall be registered in this project and the biological basic data (age, sex, weight, location and date of finding as well as special features) recorded in order to obtain an accurate overview of the number of dead harbour porpoises. These data are important, because they will be passed on to ASCOBANS, ICES, HELCOM and IWC. Thus, the data sets shall be produced consistently and be verified.

Mortality rates of North Sea and Baltic harbour porpoises shall be generated. For this purpose, a spatial intersection of the numbers of the dead found animals with model results of flight survey counts from 2002-2016 is to be conducted. Furthermore, freshly dead North Sea and Baltic harbour porpoises shall be necropsied in order to assess their health status and histological, immunocytochemical, virological and microbiological investigations will be performed. From these data, health parameters shall be developed for the North Sea, which can be used for the marine environmental agreement OSPAR and the Marine Strategy Framework Directive. Fishermen shall be required to hand over bycaught harbour porpoises directly in order to investigate the animals' health status, age and sex distribution.

Beside the stranding network, a close cooperation with the fishermen, the OIC and other research facilities like the Thünen Institute of Baltic Sea Fisheries in Rostock is aimed at for the bycaught harbour porpoises.

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Letzte Aktualisierung dieses Dokumentes: 9. July 2019

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