

supporting, namely the [Recovery Plan for the Baltic Harbour Porpoises](#) (Jastarnia Plan) and the [Conservation Plan for the Harbour Porpoise Population in the Western Baltic, the Belt Sea and Kattegat](#) (WBBK Plan). The 15th Meeting of the Jastarnia Group is taking place next year (18-20 March 2019, location TBC).

ASCOBANS closely monitors implementation in its Parties, such as an ongoing programme to reduce harbour porpoise bycatch along the German Baltic coast of its most northerly country, Schleswig-Holstein. Since April 2017 about 1,700 Porpoise Alerting Devices (PALs) have been handed out to fishermen and fishermen using PALs are starting to market their fish as “harbour porpoise friendly” This was done in the context of a voluntary agreement for the conservation of harbour porpoises and diving sea ducks, which 234 fishermen have signed to date. In April 2018 the Jastarnia group recommended to the German authorities to put an appropriate long-term monitoring programme in place to assess the effectiveness of PALs to mitigate bycatch and the potential habituation of harbour porpoises to the device.

North Sea Group

This group was formed to facilitate the implementation of the ASCOBANS Conservation Plan for Harbour Porpoises in the North Sea and started operating in late 2010. Reports of the annual meetings can be accessed at <http://www.ascobans.org/en/workinggroup/north-sea-group>. The most recent meeting (NSG5) was held back-to-back with the 13th Meeting of the Jastarnia Group in June 2017 in Wilhelmshaven, Germany. The 7th Meeting of the North Sea Group is taking place imminently (24 September 2018, Vilnius, Lithuania) and will focus on reviewing the status of implementation, see <http://www.ascobans.org/en/meeting/NSG7>.

Bycatch Working Group

Created in 2010, this group is providing expert advice to the AC regarding tackling the number one threat to the species covered by ASCOBANS. The group recommends background studies, reviews proposals, provides ad hoc advice and more generally assists in all aspects of developing strengthened bycatch policy, in close cooperation with all stakeholders involved. Shortly the group will be merged into a Joint Working Group together with ACCOBAMS (Agreement on the Conservation of Cetaceans in the Black Sea, Mediterranean and Contiguous Atlantic Area) to expand the horizon and impact of this important working group. The groups' progress reports are all accessible through <http://www.ascobans.org/en/workinggroup/bycatch-working-group>.

Noise Working Group

This working group jointly serves the needs of the two cetacean Agreements, ACCOBAMS and ASCOBANS, as well as of the Scientific Council of the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS). Established in 2009 with the terms of reference updated several times, the annual progress reports of the group can be accessed at <http://www.ascobans.org/en/workinggroup/underwater-noise-working-group>.

Extension Area Working Group & Informal Working Group on Large Cetaceans

First established in 2011, the experts supporting this activity produce joint reports, mainly related to the western extension of the Agreement Area, which came into force in 2008. This working group also considers the issue of ship strikes. Since ASCOBANS only covers small cetaceans, the work relating to large cetaceans aims to identify major issues likely to be having a negative effect upon large cetacean populations in the Agreement Area, assessing the extent to which they can be addressed alongside small cetaceans, and making informal recommendations of appropriate mitigation measures. Reports can be accessed at <http://www.ascobans.org/en/workinggroup/extension-area-working-group> and <http://www.ascobans.org/en/workinggroup/informal-working-group-large-cetaceans>.

Pollution Working Group

This working group is formed ad-hoc at each Advisory Committee Meeting, producing

