

A photograph of two porpoise dorsal fins protruding from the water. The fins are dark and pointed, set against a background of calm, rippling water. The lighting is soft, suggesting a dawn or dusk setting.

Bycatch of Baltic Proper harbour porpoises

Marine mammal and bird bycatch in the
Baltic Sea

Hel, Poland & online 13 November 2025

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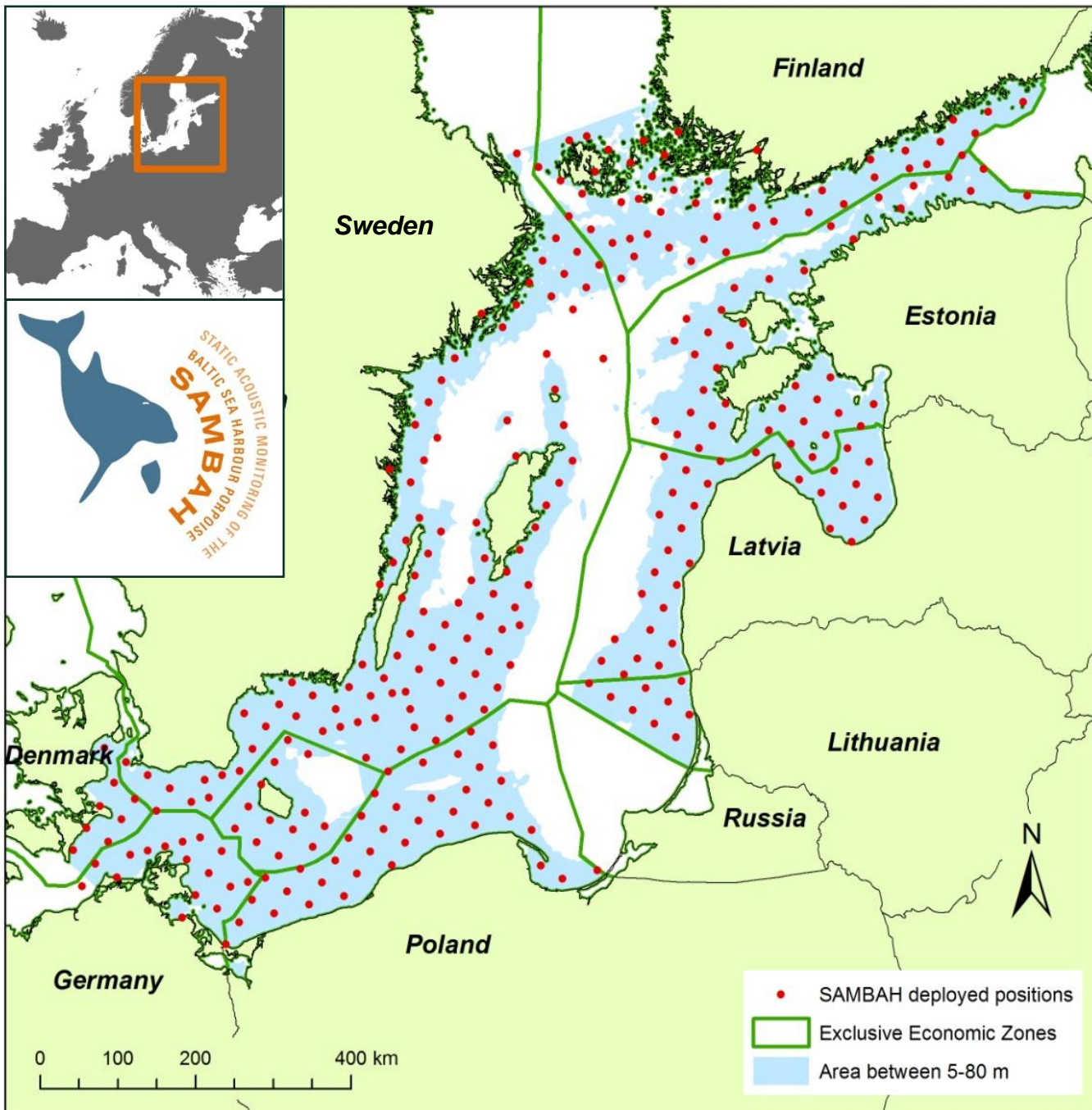


Outline

- Abundance and distribution
- Mortality limit
- ICES Special Request Advice
- EU regulation on bycatch mitigation measures
- Further needs

SAMBAH

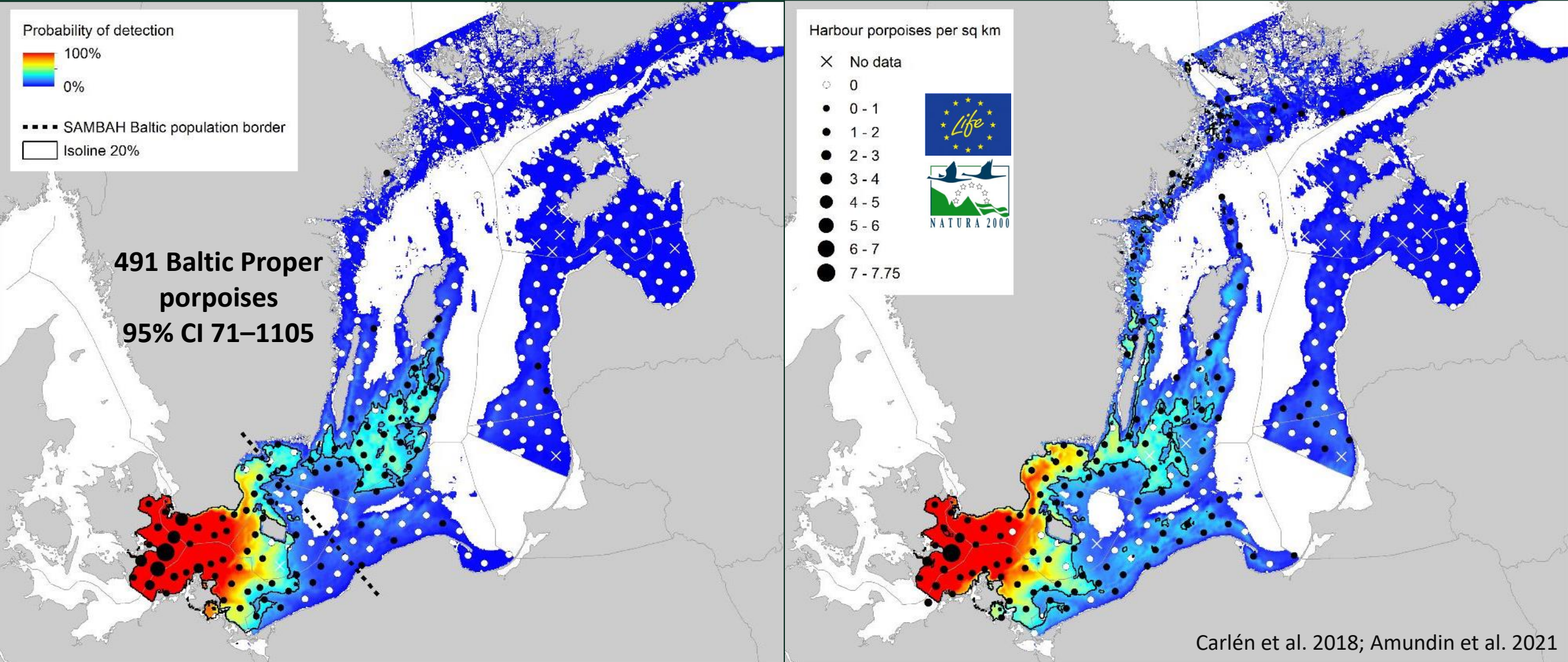
- All EU countries around the Baltic Sea
- Waters 5 – 80 m depth
- Data collection May 2011 – April 2013
- EU Life+ and national funding



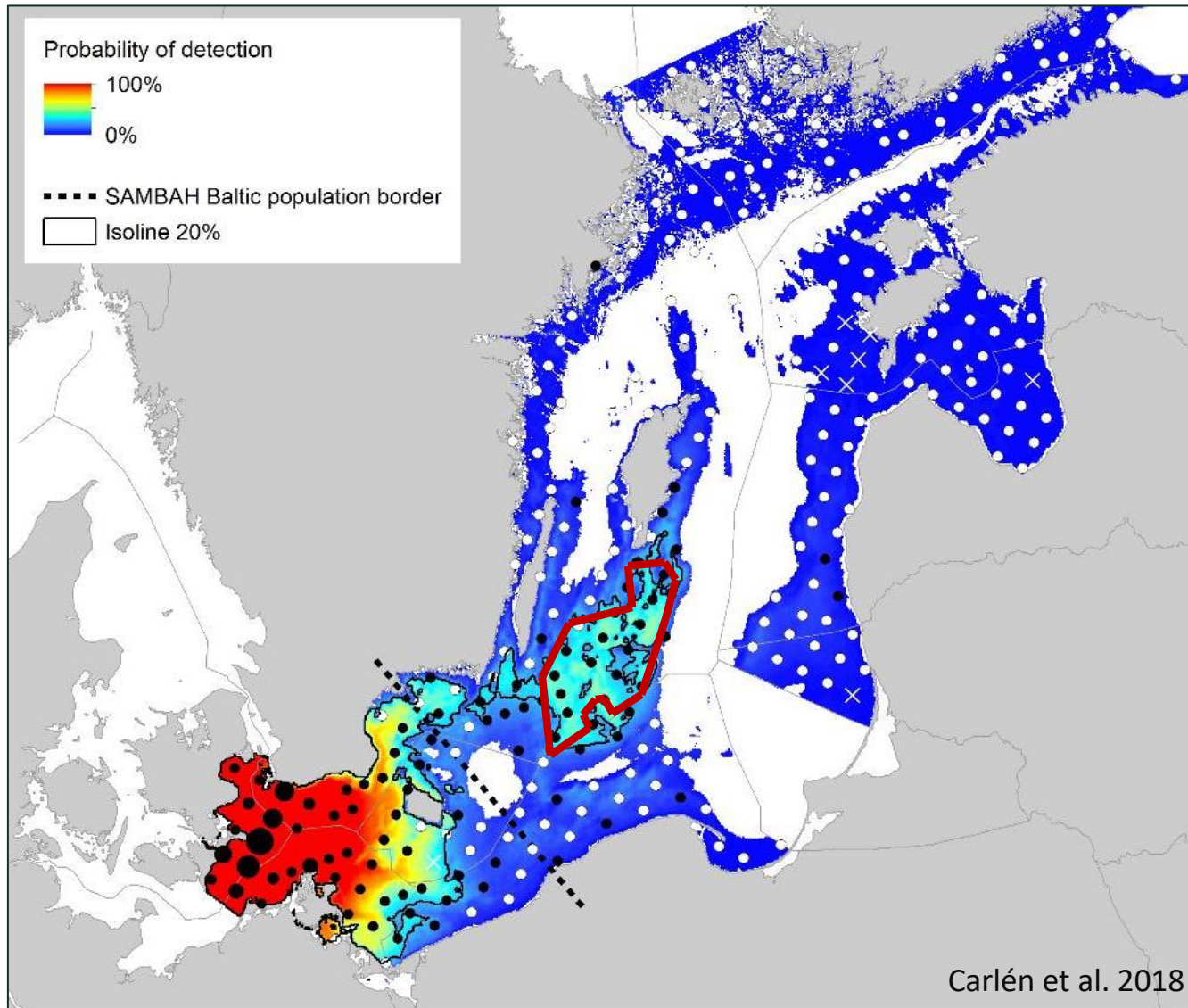
SAMBAH main results

May – October

November - April



SAMBAH impacts



- Natura 2000 sites designated and updated
- National monitoring programmes started in DK, FI, PL and SE (DE already ongoing)
- HELCOM indicators on distribution and abundance developed
- ASCOBANS Conservation Plan (Jastarnia Plan) revised
- Increased international cooperation and raised knowledge



Estimation of mortality limit

- Workshop on status of porpoise populations in Tromsø, NO, 2018
- PBR method (US MMPA)
- Goal: Remain at or recover to 50% K within 100 years with 95% probability

$$\text{Limit} = N_{\min} \times 0.5R_{\max} \times F_r = 0.7$$

SAMBAH abundance General value for porpoises 0.1 for threatened population



Estimation of mortality limit

- Workshop on status of porpoise populations in Tromsø, NO, 2018
- PBR method (US MMPA)
- Goal: Remain at or recover to 50% K within 100 years with 95% probability
- Limit = $N_{\min} \times 0.5R_{\max} \times F_r = 0.7$ animals/year
- Bycatch estimate:

$$\text{bycatch rate}_{\text{BES}} \times \text{fishing effort}_{\text{BAP}} \times \text{porpoise density} \frac{\text{BAP}}{\text{BES}} = 7$$

A letter from 27 NGOs to the EC

9 July 2019

“(We) request the application of emergency measures under Articles 11(4) and 12 of the Common Fisheries Policy Basic Regulation to (...) eliminate the risk of bycatch of the critically endangered Baltic Sea harbour porpoise population”

Mr Aguiar Machado
Director-General
Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs & Fisheries
European Commission

Mr Calleja Crespo
Director-General
Directorate-General for Environment
European Commission

CC: Elisa Røller, Head of Unit, CFP and Structural Support, DG Fisheries and Maritime Affairs
Nicola Notaro, Head of Unit, Nature Protection, DG Environment
Matjaž Malgaj, Head of Unit, Marine and Water Industry, DG Environment

Subject: Urgent European Commission action needed to stop cetacean bycatch in Europe under Articles 11(4) and 12 of the Common Fisheries Policy Basic Regulation
Brussels, 9 July 2019

Dear Mr Aguiar Machado,
Dear Mr Calleja Crespo

Seas At Risk, Whale and Dolphin Conservation, ClientEarth, Coalition Clean Baltic, Birdwatch Ireland, Coastwatch Europe, Danish Society for Nature Conservation, Ecologistas en Accion, Fundació ENT, France Nature Environment, Humane Society International/Europe, International Fund for Animal Welfare, Irish Wildlife Trust, Irish Whale and Dolphin Group, Ligue pour la Protection des Oiseaux, Marine Conservation Society, Natuurpunt, Oceana, OceanCare, Our Fish, Sciaena, Sea Shepherd France, Swedish Society for Nature Conservation, Sustainable Water Network SWAN, The Fisheries Secretariat, WWF Baltic Ecoregion Programme and WWF European Policy Office hereby request the application of emergency measures under Articles 11(4) and 12 of the Common Fisheries Policy Basic Regulation to stop the unacceptable levels of bycatch of the common dolphin population in the Bay of Biscay and eliminate the risk of bycatch of the critically endangered Baltic Sea harbour porpoise population that are not in line with European legal requirements.

Bycatch is the greatest threat to the conservation of cetaceans, globally and in European waters. Commercial fishing is the last human activity targeting wildlife on a grand scale where the killing of other large sapient wildlife occurs on such a regular basis.

Article 12 of the Habitats Directive mandates that Member States establish a system of strict protection for cetaceans prohibiting all forms of deliberate capture or killing of specimens of these species in the wild and that conservation measures are taken to ensure that bycatch does not have a significant negative impact on these species. The Habitats Directive also mandates that Member States take appropriate steps to avoid the disturbance of the cetacean species for which Natura 2000 areas have been designated.

To date, however, Member States have failed both to implement and enforce a general system of measures to reduce bycatch and to manage cetaceans' Natura 2000 sites to make them safe spaces contributing to restoring these populations to favourable conservation status. As a result, cetacean populations in Europe are under great stress.

Two cetacean populations are in particularly imminent danger from bycatch. There has been strong scientific concern from the ICES Bycatch Working Group and International Whaling Commission Scientific Committee about the levels of bycatch impacting their conservation status, and even chances of survival for the Baltic porpoise in the near future, if the Commission does not take urgent action:

- The Baltic harbour porpoise is **critically endangered** and only a few hundred animals remain today. Bycatch is the most acute threat to the population as a single incidental killing of a fertile female could have a devastating effect on the ability of the population to recover or even survive in the long term.
- The North East Atlantic short-beaked common dolphin, which has an unfavourable conservation status in the European Atlantic, has been experiencing a dramatic increase in levels of bycatch rates in recent years

ICES Special Request Advice to the EC

26 May 2020

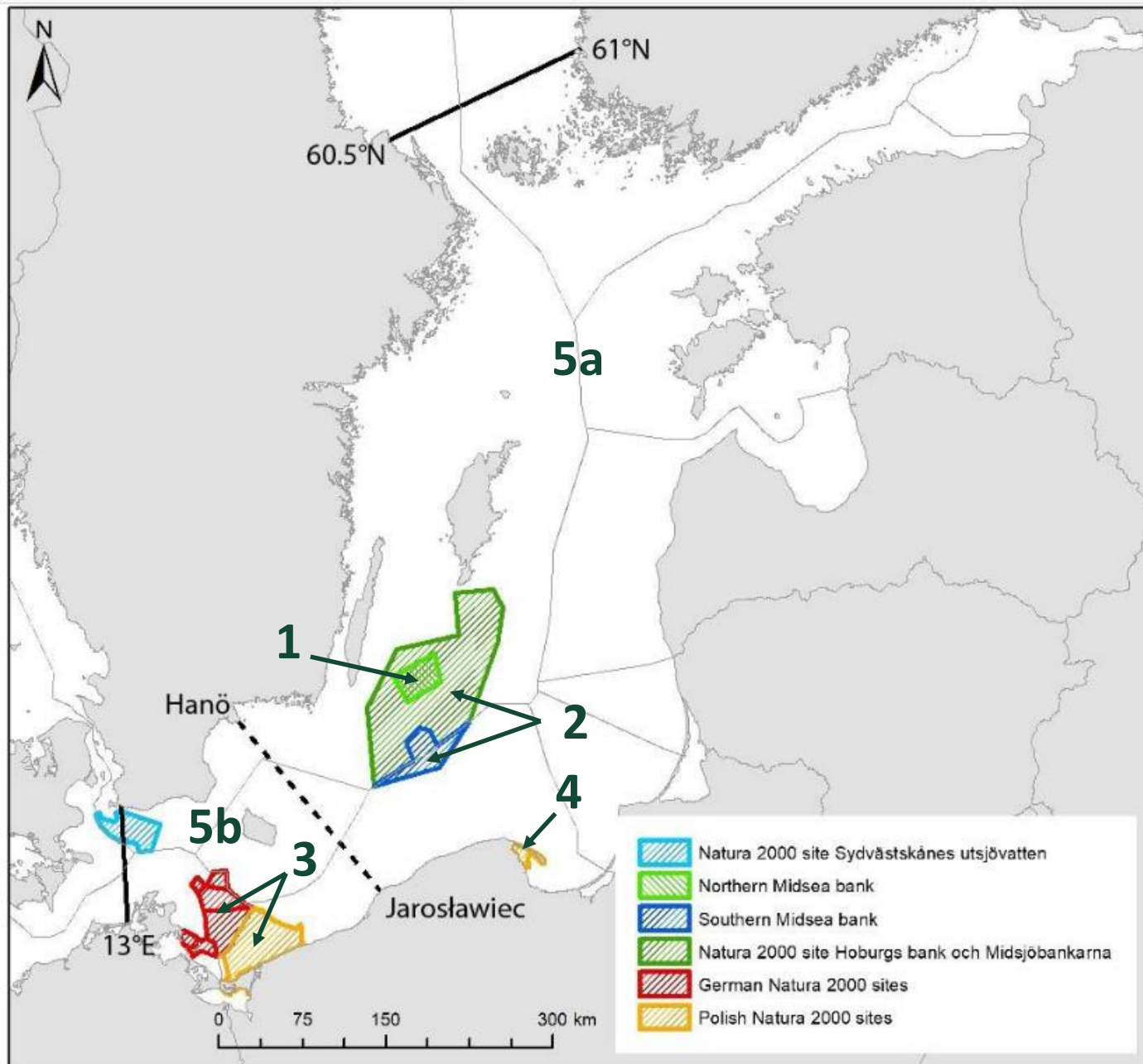


“If the Baltic Proper harbour porpoise management unit is to meet the management objective of achieving bycatches below the potential biological removal (PBR) limit (< 0.7 individuals per year), all fisheries of concern should be closed.”

ICES Special Request Advice

A set of 5 measures were recommended to *reduce* bycatch

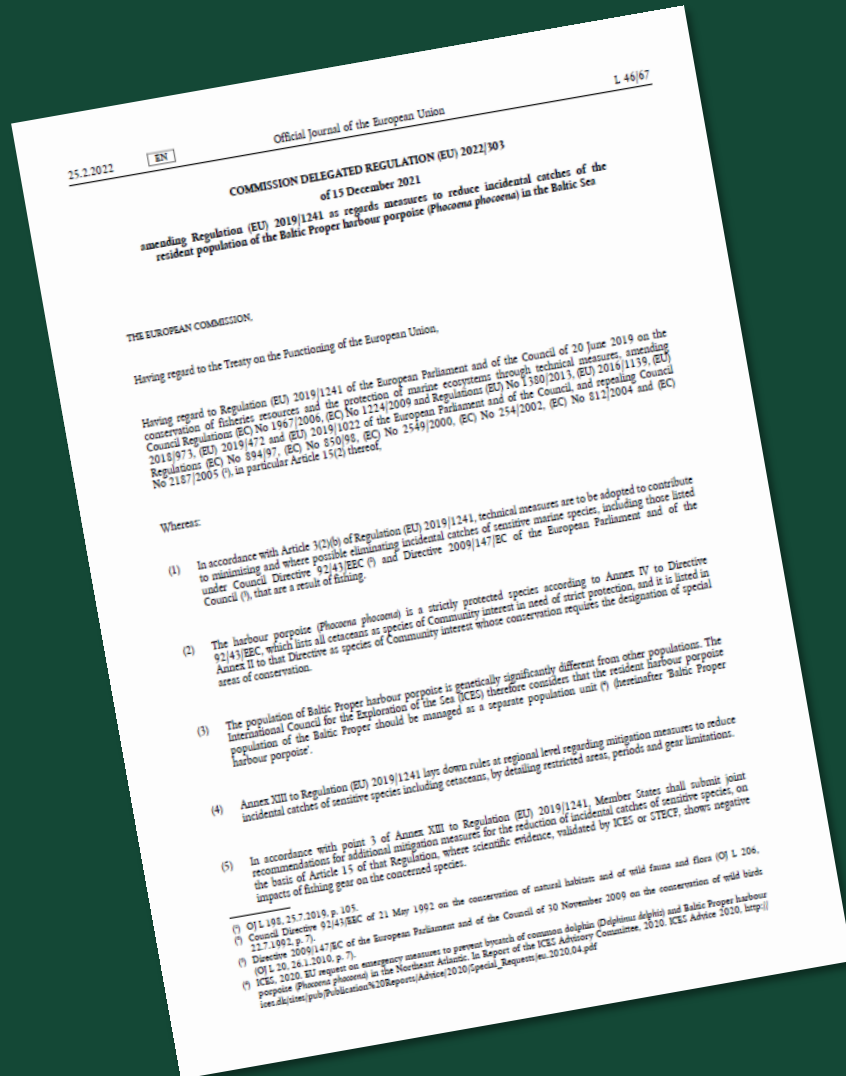
1. All year closure for most gears
2. All year closures for static nets
3. Nov-Jan closures for static nets
4. All year pinger use and small closure for static nets
5. a) All year pinger use, b) Nov-Apr pinger use on static nets



Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) 2022/303

15 December 2021

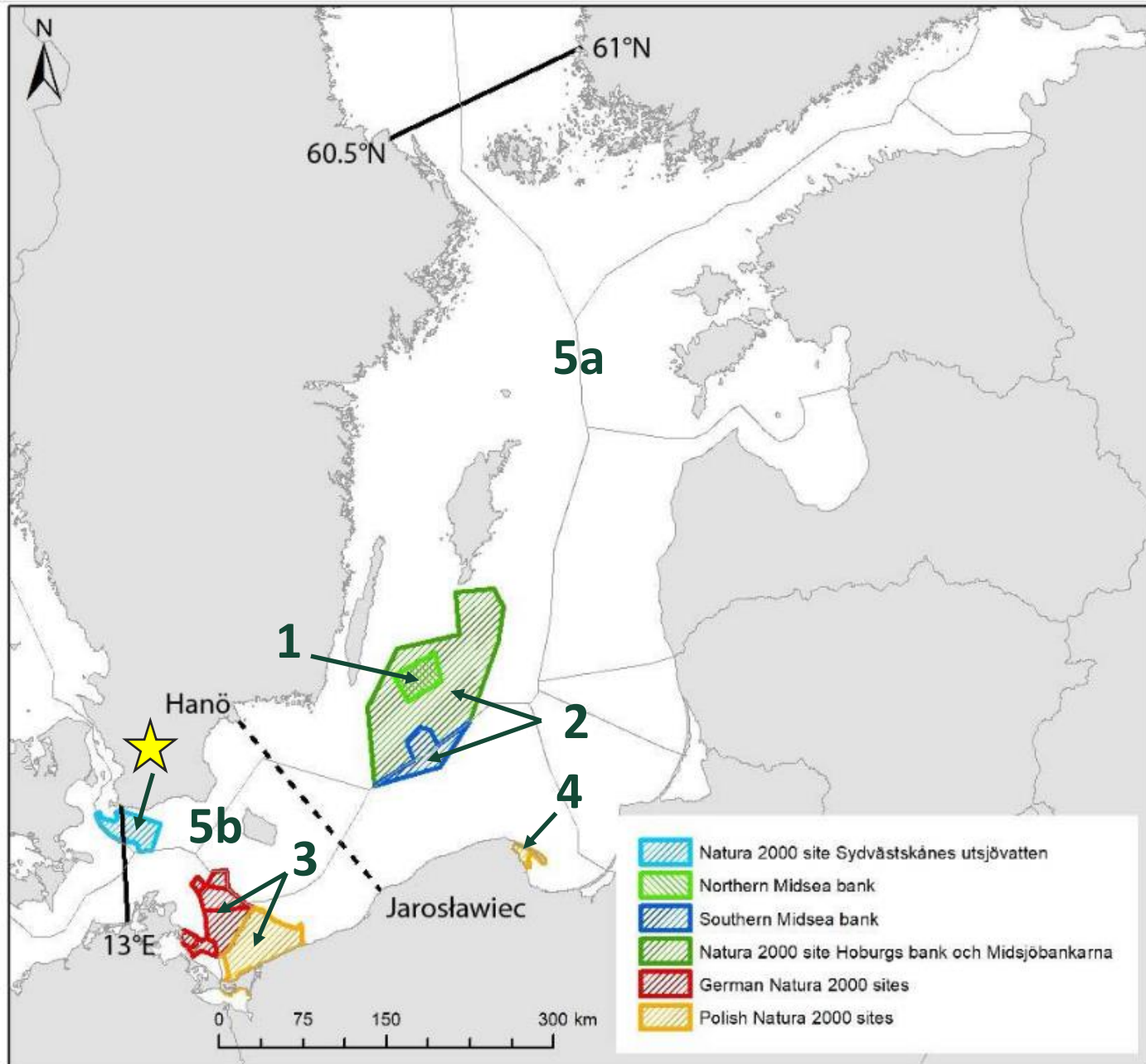
On measures to reduce incidental catches of the resident population of the Baltic Proper harbour porpoise (*Phocoena phocoena*) in the Baltic Sea



Delegated Regulation (EU) 2022/303

In comparison to ICES Advice:

1. All year closure for most gears ✓
 2. All year closures for static nets ✓
 3. Nov-Jan closures for static nets ✓
 4. All year pinger use and small closure for static nets ✓
 5. a) All year pinger use, b) Nov-Apr pinger use on static nets ✗
- ★ Nov-Jan closure for static nets, May-Oct pinger use on static nets ✓





Further needs

Bycatch mitigation:

- Outside areas with measures

Monitoring:

- Fishing effort (appropriate metrics and métiers, all vessels)
- Bycatch events
- Pinger impacts on porpoises
- Compliance of pinger use

Thank you!

Questions?



Acknowledgements

The SAMBAH Team

ICES WKEMBYC

Swedish Agency for Marine and Water Management