

**Konklusioner og anbefalinger fra Sælgruppen under HELCOM,  
2001**

**Conclusions and Recommendations**

The HELCOM Seal Project Group proposes HELCOM to consider the following recommendations.

NOTING that the populations of grey seal (*Halichoerus grypus*) in the Northern Baltic and common seal (*Phoca vitulina*) in the Kattegat and inner Danish waters are increasing and their health status is improving, however, for some sub-populations not still satisfactory.

RECOGNISING that the population growth rate for the ringed seal (*Phoca hispida*) is lower than expected, and that its population state is uncertain in the Gulf of Finland.

Further NOTING that the conservation objectives of populations of grey seal and common seal in the south-western Baltic Sea and the grey seal population in the Gulf of Finland have not yet been achieved.

CONVINCED that marine mammals play an important role as biological indicators on the effects of certain types of marine pollutants, in particular POPs.

RECOGNISING that the three seal species move freely, and that the conservation of seal is a common responsibility of countries bordering the Baltic Sea and Kattegat.

AWARE of the current and increasing problems regarding seal/fisheries interactions and the difficulties in mitigating and managing damages on fishing gear and catches.

CONCERNED about the numbers of seals taken as incidental by-catch and by poaching.

AWARE of the HELCOM fourth periodical assessment (6.4.2 and 10.2.6).

RECOGNISING that seals are wildlife species and should as such, as an integral part of the natural ecosystem, be conserved, managed and utilised in a sustainable way.

REALISING that, although general hunting (open hunting season) may have a mitigating effect on seal/fisheries conflicts, general hunting is not considered as a mitigating measure.

REGRETTING that consensus on issues regarding general hunting could not be achieved within the group.

The Seal Project Group recommends HELCOM to:

1. Modify recommendation 9/1, 1988 based on the new information on populations of seals in the Baltic and their conservation and health status.
2. Urge the HELCOM partners to implement coordinated monitoring programmes on seals, especially on population size and structure, reproductive and mortality parameters, health condition and impacts on seal populations from fisheries including by-catch. Collected data should be available to HELCOM partners, national and international institutions and wildlife management authorities.
3. Suggest HELCOM partners to initiate research on the impact on seal behaviour from fisheries activities, on the effects of existing seal reserves for the development of the Baltic seal populations, and on the role of the seals in the ecosystem.
4. Request the responsible National Wildlife Management Authorities and Nature Conservation Authorities to develop an efficient reporting system on damages to fishing gear and catches caused by seals.
5. Urge the HELCOM partners to develop and implement as soon as possible mitigation measures to reduce by-catch and damage such as modification of fishing-gear and scaring devices based on existing knowledge. Technical solutions are necessary elements in all successful long-term mitigation. The HELCOM partners should be requested to support and coordinate efficient development in this area.
6. Request ICES to assess seal/fishery conflicts at regular intervals, and to implement when appropriate coordinated cooperation and management of straddling populations of seals.
7. Urge the HELCOM partners to develop management plans based on options outlined in **Annex 3** including the establishment of seal reserves when necessary.
8. Urge the HELCOM partners to implement measures in order to mitigate seal/fisheries conflicts including taking of seals as defined in section 4.5.2 where appropriate. Whenever taking of seals is applied the following principles should be considered:
  1. Taking must occur in accordance with the ethical principles of animal welfare.
  2. Taking should be supervised and regulated by the responsible Wildlife Management Authority.
  3. Taking of seals may not jeopardise the conservation of seal stocks and the activity should not be conducted within seal reserves and in the breeding season.
  4. Taking should be coordinated with neighbouring countries managing the population involved.
  5. The numbers of seals taken in a certain area should be based on scientific information on the seal stock.
  6. Taking should be organised in a way that serves the needs of

7. monitoring programmes in terms of relevant data and tissue samples. Permission for taking should be issued individually by the management authority.
  8. Permission should be issued for a specific number of individuals and within a specified time of the year in order to avoid disturbance in the breeding period.
  9. Precondition for taking of seals should include that non-lethal mitigating measures have been considered.
  10. Annual reports on individuals taken should be presented to HELCOM or the appropriate coordinating body, which may revise the principles of mitigating measures in regular intervals.
9. Invites the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) continuously to assess the condition of the seal populations of the Baltic Sea and also to assess seal/fishery conflicts at regular intervals, and to implement when appropriate coordinated cooperation and management of straddling populations of seals on the basis of new evidence presented by the Contracting Parties and other relevant information.