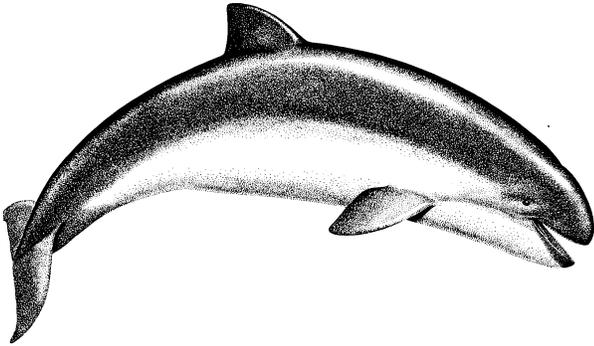# Harbour Porpoise (*Phocoena phocoena*) Species statement

The Harbour Porpoise is the smallest British cetacean, no more than 2m in length, and occurs in schools in all coastal waters. It is the only porpoise in British waters where it feeds on small fish and crustaceans.

Current status

There is some evidence of a decline in the numbers of Harbour Porpoise in the UK since 1940s. Generally the conservation status around the UK is not known, however a recent survey of small cetaceans in the North Sea, Channel and Irish Sea indicated a population of 350,000.

The species is found off the Suffolk coast although its local status is not known. Occasional sightings are received most years.

Natural Areas
Suffolk Coast Maritime

Current factors causing loss or decline
The current factors affecting this species are not clear but may include the following:
- Incidental capture and drowning in fishing nets
- Environmental contaminants (toxic substances at sea, marine debris, disease and noise disturbance)
- Environmental change (effects of fishing and possibly climate change)

Current Action
Post mortems and tissue studies are carried out on stranded specimens to establish the cause of death and condition of the animals at time of death
Suffolk Wildlife Trust have published articles to encourage members to send in sightings of the species

Objectives for the species
- Continue to encourage local people and Suffolk Wildlife Trust members to send in sightings of Harbour Porpoise to SBRC.

- Lobby for changes to national policies where opportunities arise.

Proposed action
Little can be done to protect this species unless changes to national fishing policy are implemented by DEFRA. Although the species is still present off the Suffolk Coast little can be done to protect it through direct local action thus the action plan has been replaced by a Species Statement. Continued awareness-raising with regard to clean seas and encouraging the public to send in records should continue.

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