

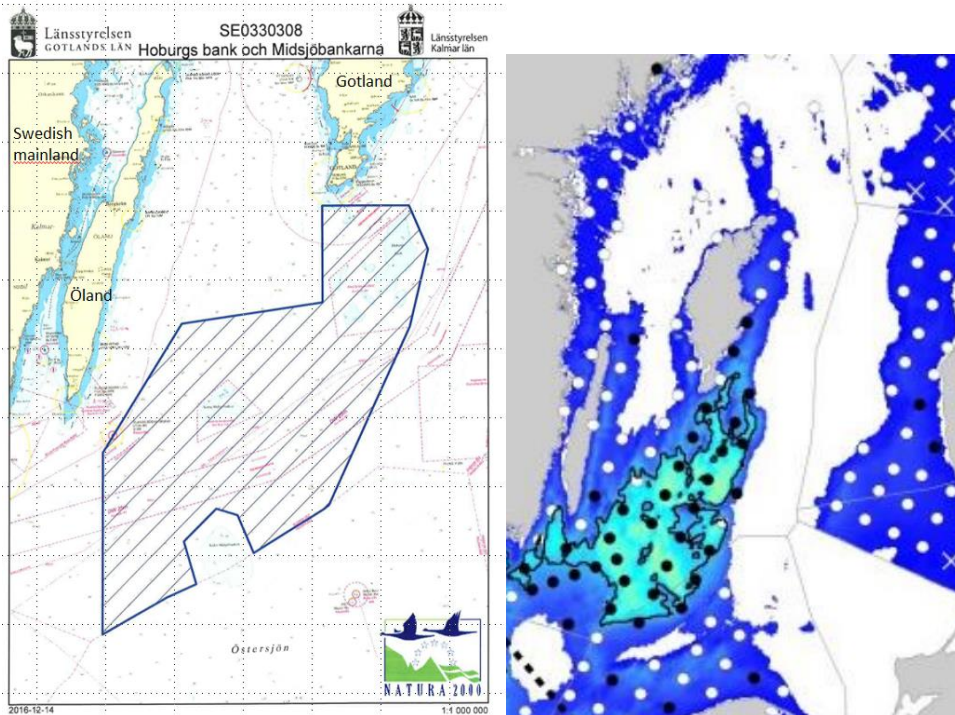


## The Swedish Government protects a huge marine area for the Baltic Sea harbour porpoise



Photo: Signe Sveegaard, DK.

In 2014, the EU LIFE-funded SAMBAH project, coordinated by Kolmården Wildlife Park in Sweden, presented completely new information on the seasonal distribution and abundance of the Baltic Sea harbour porpoise. Recently, based on the SAMBAH results, a decision has been taken by the Swedish government to designate a large marine Natura 2000 area in the Baltic Proper for the harbor porpoise. With more than 1 million hectares this is the largest marine area ever proposed by Sweden as a Natura 2000 site, and it includes the major part of the most important breeding ground, which mainly is within Sweden's EEZ, for this critically endangered population.



Map to the left showing the new Natura 2000 area in central Baltic Proper designated for the harbor porpoise by the Swedish Government. Map to the right shows porpoise summer distribution, based on the probability of detecting porpoises with the click detectors used in SAMBAH. Black dots are detector positions with and white positions without detections. Dark blue is low probability, light blue higher probability. White areas were not surveyed.

The harbour porpoise is the only cetacean species resident in the Baltic Sea. There are three separate harbour porpoise populations in the Baltic Sea Region, whereof the Baltic Proper population has decreased dramatically since the mid 1900's. In 2014, the SAMBAH project estimated that only approximately 500 animals now remain, and this population is in dire need of strict protection measures. The now designated Natura 2000 site is an important step towards securing the long-term survival of the Baltic Sea harbour porpoise.

### Facts on the SAMBAH project

The SAMBAH project ([www.sambah.org](http://www.sambah.org)) was funded by EU's LIFE+ program, and involved all EU countries around the Baltic Sea. Kolmården Wildlife Park was the international coordinator. SAMBAH was launched in 2010 and finished in September 2015. Since porpoises in the Baltic Sea are extremely scarce, they are virtually impossible to survey by traditional visual methods. Therefore SAMBAH employed a novel methodology, which was based on 300 fixed echolocation click detectors, spread in a systematic grid over the entire Baltic Sea. They collected data for two full years, from May 2011 until April 2013. Through advanced statistical algorithms, partly developed by the SAMBAH consortium, click data was converted to number of porpoises and distribution maps. The latter showed a summer cluster of porpoises on the offshore banks South of Gotland, which have now been designated to become a Natura 2000 area for the porpoises.

### Facts on Natura 2000

Natura 2000 ([http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/natura2000/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/natura2000/index_en.htm)) is a network of protected nature in the EU. The network includes areas that are protected under the Habitats Directive (Council Directive 92/43/EEC of 21 May 1992 on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora) or the Birds Directive (the Directive 2009/147/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 30 November 2009 on the conservation of wild birds).

States first carry out comprehensive assessments of each of the habitat types and species present on their territory. This is what the Swedish Government now has done. It will then submit this in a list of other **proposed Sites of Community Importance (pSCIs)**. Based on the proposals provided by the Member States, scientific seminars are convened for each biogeographical region, to determine whether sufficient high-quality sites have been proposed by each Member State.

Once the lists of **Sites of Community Importance (SCIs)** have been adopted, Member States must designate them as **Special Areas of Conservation (SACs)**, as soon as possible and within six years at most. They should give priority to those sites that are most threatened and/or most important for conservation and take the necessary management or restoration measures to ensure the favourable conservation status of sites during this period.

The Commission updates the Union SCI Lists every year to ensure that any new sites proposed by Member States have a legal status

### **Facts on the LIFE Programme**

The LIFE programme (<http://ec.europa.eu/environment/life/about/index.htm>) is the EU's funding instrument for the environment and climate action. The general objective of LIFE is to contribute to the implementation, updating and development of EU environmental and climate policy and legislation by co-financing projects with European added value.