



PL

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# “Baltic Smart Gear” – Improving selectivity of fishing gears

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## What is the issue?

The harbour porpoise and many important sea bird species are in serious decline in both the central Baltic basin, the Belt Sea and Kattegat. Many of them drown in gillnets. These nets are the most commonly used gear type in coastal waters, because they are easy to handle and less expensive to buy. Though highly selective regarding fish, they can be a threat to diving sea birds and harbour porpoises in coastal waters. So far, no convincing solution has been found for the dominating conflict between fisheries management and management of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs). Some research has been done to evaluate the impact of fisheries and the location of fishing activities in the Baltic with respect to MPAs. Such projects include EMPAS and BALTFIMPA, which both focused on the protection and bycatch mitigation of harbour porpoises. These and further projects focus on testing already existing, ecologically sustainable, fishing gears (longlines, jigging reals and pots) in certain pilot regions in German waters.

**Together with gear technologists, fisheries research institutes, fishermen and underwater acoustic experts WWF aims at developing and testing, in Polish, German and Danish waters, an alternative technique that fulfils both, nature conservation demands (low bycatch) and fishing sector viability.**

## What is the goal?

**The project “Baltic Smart Gear” aims at closing the gap between the importance of reducing negative impact of human activities on marine species and habitats and the interest of having a productive fisheries sector in the Baltic Sea.**

Within this project a **new alternative to the conventional gill nets fishing gear** will be developed in order to reduce bycatch of endangered marine mammals (e.g. harbour porpoises) and protected sea birds. A successful development of a new net will help to fulfil the obligation of all EU member states to develop management plans for their designated Natura 2000 sites. A team-work and collaboration between fisheries research institutes, gear technologists, active fishermen and nature conservation NGOs will ensure synergies, and field testing will be conducted in a joint approach in waters of Germany, Denmark and Poland. The exchange of knowledge and know-how will be conducted in **regular meetings** with the different project partners.

This project is thought to increase the sustainability of economically important fisheries and at the same time work towards the protection and improved management of the most endangered marine species of the Baltic Sea. It aims at providing concrete steps to how implement a new gear in selected areas and should serve as hands-on role model to be copied by neighbouring fisheries organisations and nature conservation management authorities. If the project is successful, the new fishing gear, alternative to conventional gill nets, could revolutionise fishing and would mean a substantial increase in sustainability due to a significant reduction of bycatch of many endangered species and simultaneously without harm to the fishing sector viability. **If the gear is proven to be successful in other regions, such a development would be of global interest.**

## What will WWF and its partners do?

**Phase 1** of the project runs from February 2014 to February 2015 under the Grant Agreement with the EUSBSR (“Seed Money Facility”) and aims at developing a full proposal to either LIFE+, EMFF or Bonus-Program of the EU. WWF is currently looking for ideal partners to cooperate with in an ambitious, longterm and, in terms of implementing new CFP-rules, highly relevant project.

Under **Phase 1** WWF, together with chosen partners, will use its international contacts to gather and assess the experiences and outcomes related to the work on reduction of bird and cetacean bycatch. All involved WWF offices (DE/DK/PL) will collect data on initiatives in their respective countries in close collaboration with partnering scientific institutes and fishers. WWF Germany will lead the review and evaluation and will conduct a SWOT analysis.

In order to finalise Phase 1, an international expert working group will be established, consisting of all relevant stakeholders from Denmark, Germany and Poland (fisheries, science and eNGOs). This group will evaluate the needs, options and potential (practical) solutions that could reduce bycatch in the Baltic. The results of this evaluation will form the basis of the full application to be submitted from this consortium of partners, either to LIFE+, EMFF or BONUS programme.

**Phase 2**, financed by one of the programmes mentioned, aims at constructing and testing the new gear developed in phase 1 as well as at distributing the results as a hands-on model. Compared to currently used nets the newly developed gear could differ in net materials, net structure and height, setting patterns or colour. Results of field tests in at least three pilot regions will be discussed within a workshop for the expert working group, where the involved fishermen get acquainted with the newly developed gear. WWF will use its international network and contacts to promote the new developed gear. Within the testing phase a monitoring plan will be applied, which shall continue in an institutionalised manner beyond the project.

## What can you do?

1. **Become a project partner:** If your organisation or yourself is interested please get in touch with one of the three WWF offices (see below). Indicate your field of expertise and area of research and in which way you may contribute to the “Baltic Smart Gear” project.
2. **Review and evaluation:** Help us to review and evaluate national and international projects dealing with the development of alternative passive gear regarding their performance.
3. **SWOT analysis:** Be part of an analysis regarding the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the main questions (i.e. researchers, fishers, pilot regions) in this project.
4. **Give your input to the project database:** Feed and use a newly established platform to exchange information and knowledge with other project partners within the project area.

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