

# Management plan for the Baltic sea seals in Finland

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\*This is a draft of the management plan update currently in progress.

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# Main objectives for the management plan



- To maintain a favourable conservation status for the grey seal and to ensure that the Baltic ringed seal conservation status will not deteriorate by 2030 and ultimately reach a favourable conservation status.
- Due to the grey seal population being at a favourable conservation status, it is not necessary to establish new conservation areas or prohibit or restrict hunting in larger areas.
- The focus of the management measures for the Baltic ringed seal is especially on research and conservation measures in the Gulf of Finland and the Archipelago Sea, and on more accurate stock assessments in the Bay of Bothnia.
- The Baltic ringed seal population has grown in the Bay of Bothnia and therefore there is no need to establish new protected areas.

# Main objectives for the management plan



- The aim is to appropriate the management of seals, so that the operation conditions for the fishing industry would improve in cooperation between game, nature conservation and fisheries.
- Reduce the damage seals cause fishing and fish farming by developing traps preventing seal damage, protection measures for fish farms and by enabling hunting of grey seal more extensively.

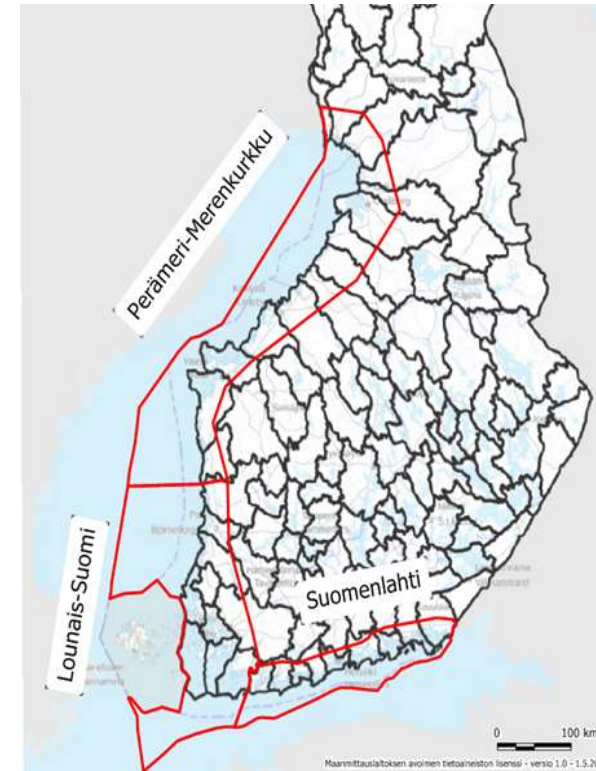
# Main objectives for the management plan



- The objective is to improve the awareness and research of seals as a part of the coastal biodiversity and as a valuable natural resource that can be utilised.
- The aim is to increase sustainable utilisation of seal populations as a renewable natural resource. Seal hunters are encouraged and trained to increase efficient and ethically acceptable hunting.
- The objectives of the management plan will be promoted at an international level.

# Key measures: management areas

- Finland is divided into three management areas:
  - 1. Bay of Bothnia-Kvarken
  - 2. Southwestern Finland
  - 3. Gulf of Finland
- In order to better target the hunting of seals, the fishery regions define key and special areas in their management plans, where the negative effects of seals must be effectively prevented.
- To ensure the sustainability of the measures taken on the management areas and to guarantee the achievement of the conservation objectives, ongoing discussion is upheld between interest groups.



# Key measures: monitoring and research of seal populations



- The aim is to ensure the protection of seals and simultaneously promote seal as a renewable natural resource. The effects of human pressure on the conservation status of seals must be monitored.
- The aim is to ensure that the seal abundance and health monitoring programs produce the necessary data to implement population management.
- Monitoring of health and abundance is carried out regularly in Finland as part of the Baltic Sea-wide monitoring of seal populations.
- The Natural resources institute emphasises the need to specify the population estimates of the Baltic ringed seal in Bothnia Bay, the Archipelago Sea and the Gulf of Finland. Monitoring is carried out whenever the ice conditions permit it.

# Key measures: monitoring and research of seal populations



- The Natural resources institute will provide annual information on the key results of the monitoring of the seal species.
- In order to achieve a sufficient number of samples for research, the natural resources Institute strives to pay an adequate fee for the submission of seal samples for research.
- The aim is to research the movement of Baltic ringed seal using GPS transmitters, especially in the Gulf of Finland and the Archipelago Sea and research the impacts of climate change.
- Continue to research the impact seals have on the local economy of the coastal zone, including seal conservation, the impact of seals on fishing and the potential for using seals.



# Key measures: seal conservation



- There is no need to establish new conservation areas to protect seal populations in the Baltic Sea. If marine protected areas are established to protect other natural values, hunting of seals should not be prohibited. Hunting of seals should not be restricted by time, disembarkation or area restrictions.
- Co-operate with Sweden to establish larger number of catches.
- The key habitats needed by seals will be taken into account in maritime spatial planning in order to avoid measures that weaken the quality of the habitats.
- Better solutions will be planned to prevent seals from becoming by-catches and their introduction will be promoted through various support measures.

# Key measures: seal and the fishing industry



- Enhance the cooperation between the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry and Ministry of the Environment, in the planning and decision-making concerning seals.
- A study will be launched to examine the impact seals have on fish stocks and fishing and the impact of seals feeding on migratory fish stocks at population level.
- Develop the system for reporting commercial fishing catches, to provide more reliable information on the damage caused by seals.

# Key measures: seal and the fishing industry



- The development of seal-resistant properties of fishing gear and fish farms and the introduction of seal-resistant solutions in commercial fishing and fish farming in the marine area will be supported.
- Continue ongoing and launch new projects to improve the efficiency and use of seal repellent equipment for different gear types and fish farms.
- A pilot project will be carried out to investigate the factual loss of catch.
- Extend the period of the statute 184/2020 on the costs of removing grey seal males causing damage to commercial fishing and fish farming until the end of 2027.

# Key measures: seal hunting



- Develop the planning of hunting quotas.
- Raise awareness of the opportunities offered by seal hunting among hunters.
- Develop the Oma riista- app, so that it can be stated if the seal caught was caught near a fishing gear or fish farm in order to prevent damage.
- Increase the number of areas suitable for seal hunting. Create networks and innovations to enable active catching of damage causing seals near fishing gear and fisheries.
- Launching of projects that aim to develop hunting methods, raise interest in hunting seals and educate on the possibilities of using the catch.

# Key measures: other use of seal



- Survey the businesses that offer seal watching and hunting tourism.
- Enable the continuation of seal-watching tourism in protected areas.
- Develop and maintain training materials on the use of seal catch.

# Other measures: cooperation between interest groups



- Organize cooperation with interested parties.
- The aim is to influence, the amendment of the EU seal trade ban, both statutes and their interpretation in such a way that national special features are highlighted in decision-making and that the principle of sustainable use is restored as the basis for the utilisation of seals.
- Finland will continue and intensify active contacts with the bodies responsible for the management of seal populations in the countries around the Baltic Sea.
- Finland actively participates in the activities of the necessary international bodies dealing with marine mammals (e.g. Helcom).

# Other measures: Information for the public



- Survey the possibilities of finding information relating to seals on the internet.
- Research information related to seals can be found on [luonnonvaratieto.luke.fi](http://luonnonvaratieto.luke.fi).
- Information of hunting and utilisation of seals will be centralized on [riistainfo.fi](http://riistainfo.fi).

# Implementation of the management plan



- The implementation of the objectives and measures of the management plan will be monitored.
- The need to update the management plan is assessed every five years.



# 2007 vs. now



- Quota hunting of grey seal started in 2014-2015.
  - The quota is 1050 seals.
- Hunting of ringed seal started in 2015, before that only damage-based hunting was possible.
  - Quota hunting started in 2021-2022.
  - The quota is 375 seals.
- EU trade ban 2009
  - Finland is promoting for ending the trade ban.
- At present, compensation for damage caused by seals are paid from the European maritime and fisheries fund.
  - The compensation is 15% of the calculated value of the catch and not more than EUR 7,000.
- After legislative amendments in 2016, the support level for larger fyke nets is 90 % while the support for other types of traps (including nets) will be 40 %.
- The statute 184/2020 on the subsidies for costs of removing grey seal males causing damage to commercial fishing and fish farming.

**Thank you!**





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