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Small cetacean bycatch in the Bay of Biscay

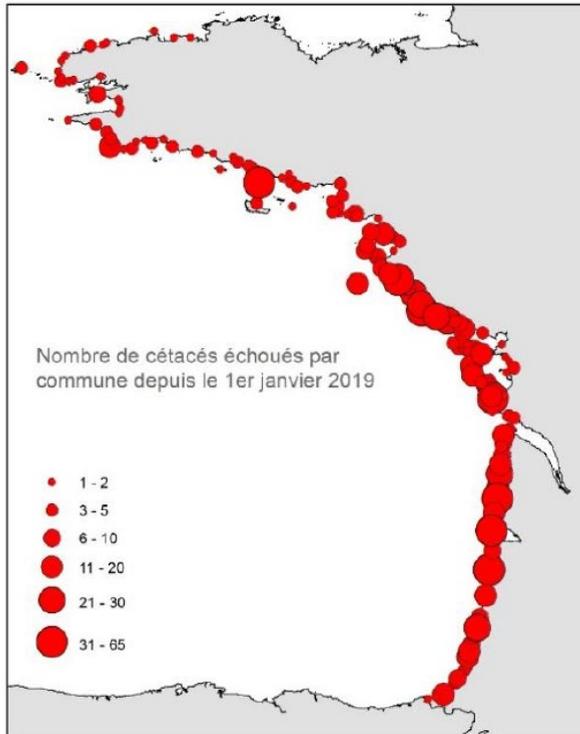
Overview and measures implemented by France

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Context



- **Winter episodes of small cetacean multiple stranding along the Atlantic seaboard (Multiple Stranding Events: MSE)**
- Recent increase in intensity of MSE :
 - 2017 : **950** stranded individuals;
 - 2018 : **700** stranded individuals;
 - 2019 : **1 188** stranded individuals.
- Most of them show marks related with fisheries activities;
- Environmental and societal issue.





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Establishment of a national working group

Objectives :

Establishment in April 2017 of a national **Working Group on cetacean bycatch** = administrations (central and regional services of Food and Agriculture Ministry + Ecology Ministry), scientists, fisheries, NGO:

- **to improve knowledge** for a better understanding of the interactions between fisheries and small cetacean populations;
- **to prevent bycatch** by implementing mitigation actions;
- **to sensitize fishermen** for a better participation to above mentioned objectives.





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Topics addressed within the national bycatch WG

First scientific analyses by *Observatoire Pelagis* (winter 2016-2017 data):

- **Reverse drift modelling** of stranded dolphins as a function of stranding location and decomposition status;

- **Strong correlation between common dolphin mortality areas and the distribution of three fishing fleets** in the Bay of Biscay:
 - French pair trawlers;
 - Spanish bottom trawlers;
 - French gill and trammel nets.

- Work in progress at *métiers* level on interactions between fisheries and common dolphin population.





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Topics addressed within the national bycatch WG

Definition of the WG framework:

- Area : Bay of Biscay (ICES VIII a & b) ;
- Period of higher risk (putatively) : **1st December to 30th April** ;
- Species : **common dolphin** (84% of strandings in 2017), harbour porpoise ;
- Gear of higher risk (putatively) : **French pair trawlers** (PTM_FR) during the period of higher risk = 14 pairs in recent years.





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Measures implemented for the winter 2018-2019

1st measure → to improve knowledge of interaction between the activity of this fleet (PTM_FR) and the populations of small cetaceans :

- **strong increase in observation effort** onboard this fleet by observers;



- **marking** experiments by observers on dolphin carcasses dropped off at sea to estimate the proportion of dead animals that reach a coast and get stranded.





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Measures implemented for the winter 2018-2019

2nd measure → to prevent bycatch:

- vessels of the fleet of interest (PTM_FR) will be fitted with **acoustic deterrents** aiming at preventing cetaceans from entering the trawls;



3rd measure → to enforce existing regulation:

- **compulsory declaration** of marine mammal bycatch by all fishermen from **January 1st, 2019**;



First Results

1st measure: on-board monitoring

- **Increased sampling rate of PTM_FR**: 205 days at sea out of 740 days at sea (**28%**);
- 12 out of 14 active PTM pairs have been monitored during at least one trip by an on-board observer. **The fleet sampling rate** appears to be good;
- **31 common dolphins bycaught during the period of higher risk (Dec-April) by PTM_FR**. Of those, 26 individuals have been tagged before being dropped off by observers, of which only 3 have been recovered by the stranding scheme;



First Results

2nd measure : deployment of pingers

- **All PTM pairs have been fitted** with 2 to 4 DDD003 pingers. On-board observers have reported on deployment conditions during fishing trips and particularly during gear operations;
- Pingers reported to be correctly deployed by fishermen; no technical issues reported.

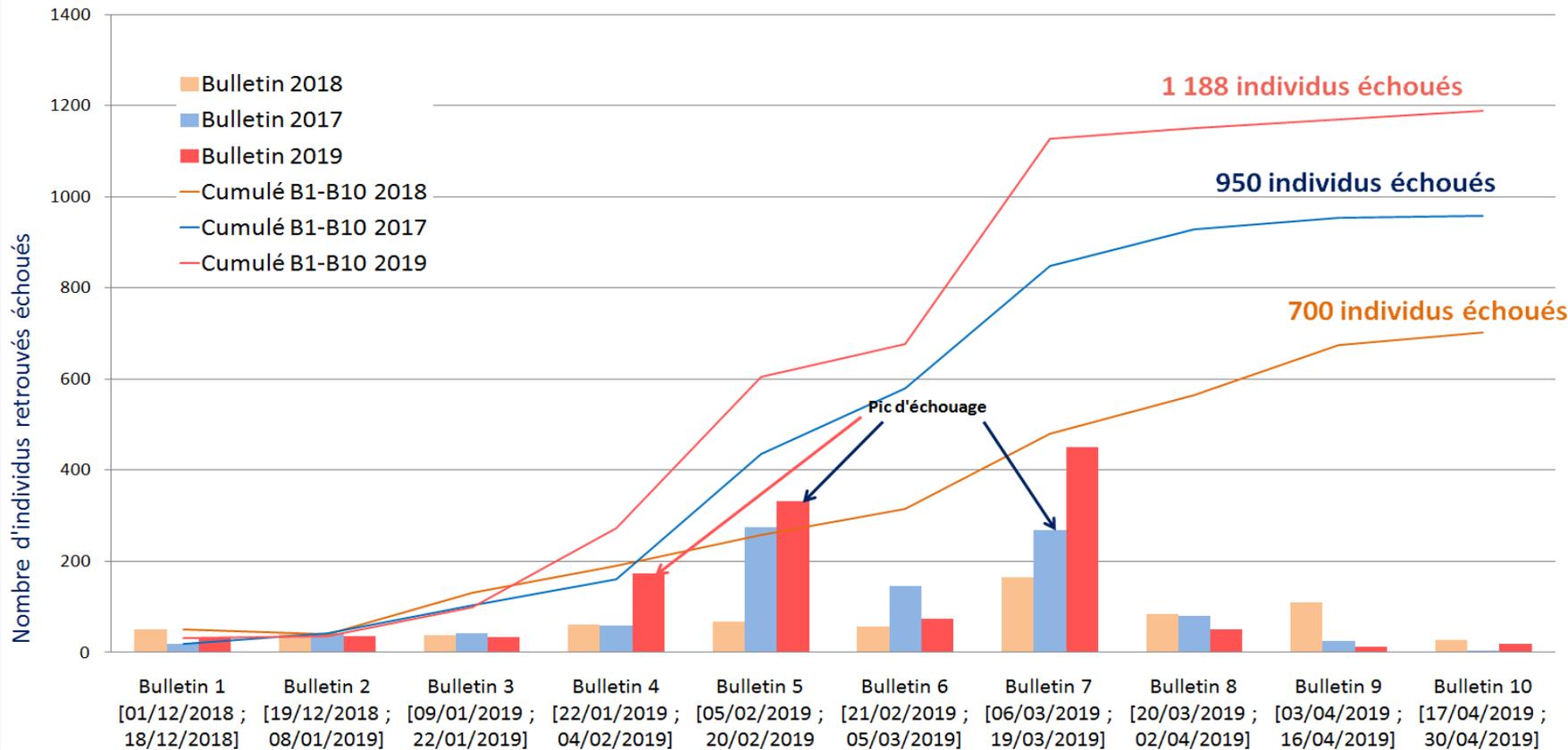
3rd measure : compulsory declaration

- a **guide** was prepared and distributed to help fishermen in this respect;
- Sensitisation of fishermen to be continued.



First Results

Standing numbers: a bimonthly bulletin was maintained to share information within the by-catch working group





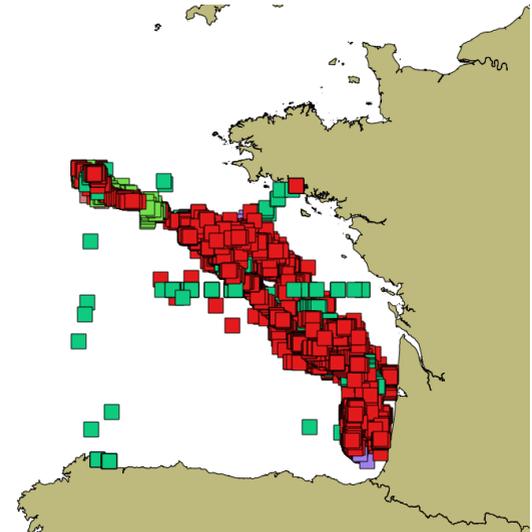
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Objectives for the winter 2019-2020

Results of 2018 – 2019: French pair trawlers do generate incidental catches of dolphins but are far from accounting for all observed strandings.

- Pursue **knowledge acquisition**;
- Develop measures for **French gill/trammel netters**;
- Start a collaborative work aiming at understanding, monitoring and **reducing small cetacean bycatches in French fishing fleets as well as from other EU member states operating in the area**;
- Need to associate stakeholders at regional level.





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Thank you for your attention

Next meeting of the French Bycatch working group: next Friday

