

**RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE
6TH MEETING OF THE ASCOBANS COMMON DOLPHIN GROUP**

(Adopted by the Advisory Committee)

These recommendations were made at the 6th Meeting of the Common Dolphin Group (CDG6, 13-14 January 2026), which reviewed the latest information related to bycatch and other significant threats. The CDG made the following recommendations:

CDG6 /Rec#	Recommendation	Long-/short-term + Deadline if possible	Priority (High / Medium / Low)
Surveys			
1.	Parties and Non-Party Range States are encouraged to allocate adequate funding to future SCANS summer (June-July) and winter surveys in a timely manner to ensure that such surveys are undertaken in as short a time as possible, noting the Common Dolphin is a highly mobile species and the abundance in an area may vary greatly between seasons. (CDG3/Rec1*)	Long-term	High
2.	France to prioritise the recommencement of the Capacet aerial survey before, during and after fisheries closures in the Bay of Biscay, as these surveys are essential for understanding the causes of bycatch and supporting effective management measures. (CDG5/Rec2*)	2027	High
Strandings			
3.	Considering the increase in cases of infectious disease and starvation reported in the UK and Ireland, Parties should ensure sufficient funding is available for stranding programmes to assess health status, and monitor changes in causes of death. The CDG also recommends this to Non-Party Range States. The need for a consistent and holistic approach to collection and analysis of data and samples from stranded animals should be borne in mind. (CDG3/Rec2)	Long-term	Medium
4.	Parties and non-Party Range States should continue efforts to harmonize and coordinate assessments for Common Dolphin and other cetaceans for reporting under the MSFD and Article 17 of the Habitats Directive, including employing OSPAR's common indicators. (CDG3/Rec9*)	Long-term	High
5.	Parties and non-Party Range States should enhance their pollution monitoring programmes to ensure sufficient data for reporting to OSPAR, to facilitate the Marine Mammal persistent pollutant indicator assessment. (CDG4/Rec4)	Long-term	Medium
6.	Parties and non-Party Range States are recommended that North-east Atlantic-wide information on life history parameters be collected and analysed in a standardised way	Long-term	Medium

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	from stranded and bycaught animals to assess for evidence of temporal changes in those parameters at the population level that may have resulted from anthropogenic activities. (CDG2/Rec7*)		
Bycatch			
7.	France and countries fishing in the area are urged to provide a clear long-term coordinated action plan for the reduction of bycatch in the Bay of Biscay that considers other mitigation options in addition to fisheries closures. The action plan cannot only rely on technological and technical measures, such as pingers or gear modifications. It is recommended for France to maintain the REM monitoring programme at least in its 2026 form, and for other countries fishing within the region to establish regular REM monitoring programs. Funding should be allocated for further research, enabling specific findings to be translated into management measures, as for example more targeted closures in time and space for given practices or areas. (CDG4/Rec7*)	Short-term	High
8.	Parties and non-Party Range States are urged to contribute and further develop their joint recommendations for the continued reduction of bycatch in the Bay of Biscay which subsequently informs the delegated authority.	Short-term	High
9.	Parties and non-Party Range States are urged to quantify the effects of their bycatch reduction measures to ensure that they minimize and where possible eliminate the incidental catches of Common Dolphins in fisheries in the Bay of Biscay. The 25 October 2023 Joint Recommendation of the South Western Waters High-Level Group lacked an evaluation of their proposed measures. This includes information on pingers that will be employed, together with their technical and operational specifications and the proof of their effectiveness on Common Dolphins, as outlined by STECF (2023). As well as knowledge on the scale of pinger deployment, both spatially and temporally. Caution should be exercised with the use of powerful acoustic deterrent devices, considering their potential impacts on species, such as the Harbour Porpoise, but including Common Dolphins as well. A more detailed strategic plan for pinger deployment is required. (CDG4/Rec6)	Immediate action; long-term activity	High
10.	Parties are encouraged to implement the recommendation from IWC: “Using the three-year period of the closures to develop and implement a longer-term strategy for structural changes to fisheries in the Bay of Biscay that minimise bycatch of cetaceans and other protected species but enables continuation of a viable fishing industry, including by transitioning to fishing gears with less deleterious side-effects of biodiversity.” Noting that consideration could also be given to advancing technology in reducing bycatch. (CDG5/Rec9)	Immediate action; long-term activity	High
11.	Parties and non-Party Range States are urged to include all stakeholders (scientists, fishers, governmental entities, and NGOs) to discuss and implement practical measures to	Immediate action; long-term activity	High

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	combat bycatch. Collaborative and inclusive approaches in developing mitigation strategies should be applied at all stages of the process. (CDG4/Rec8)		
12.	Parties and non-Party Range States are encouraged to continue to review and test a range of mitigation options to reduce bycatch of Common Dolphins. These should include acoustic deterrents, gear modifications, fishing practices, time-area closures, move-on procedure etc., mitigation measures that could be implemented at the fleet level. (CDG2/Rec4*)	Long-term	High
13.	Parties and non-Party Range States are encouraged to collect large sample sizes over a long time period to demonstrate the efficacy of mitigation (or at least to obtain statistically significant results). Collection of such data should continue beyond project-based trials and be incorporated into routine practice when mitigation is implemented. This would also allow changes in efficacy (e.g. due to habituation) to be detected and acted on. (CDG5/Rec12)	Medium-term	High
14.	Parties and non-Party Range States should encourage fishers to adopt less harmful alternative gears, and to develop the economic viability of fishing gear substitution/adaptation. (CDG4/Rec10)	Immediate action; long-term activity	High
15.	Parties and non-Party Range States should request the fishing industry to improve the resolution of their fishing effort data, by mandating use of VMS on vessels below 12m. (CDG4/Rec11*)	Medium-term	High
16.	Parties and non-Party Range States should better target their bycatch monitoring efforts at the areas and métiers of high bycatch risk for the Common Dolphin, particularly using REM systems. These include static net fisheries (GNS and GTR) over the Biscay shelf (subareas 8a and 8b) and the coastal zone of the Iberian Peninsula (subareas 8c, 9a, 9b) where current monitoring effort covers only a very small fraction of fishing effort. (CDG3/Rec6*)	Long-term	High
17.	Portugal and Spain are encouraged to actively increase monitoring (e.g. REM) in small vessel fisheries for estimating bycatch and monitor the effectiveness of mitigation measures, given the increase in strandings of bycaught Common Dolphins in recent years. (CDG3/Rec7*)	Medium-term	High
Other			
18.	SAP Range States to complete the 'Achievements Table' by end of the year to identify data gaps, as well as actions and funding that are required going forward. The Steering Group should then set priorities for each country. (CDG2/Rec11)	By early 2026	High
19.	Parties are encouraged to conduct further analysis towards fine-scale risk-mapping of anthropogenic noise sources and consider the cumulative impacts of exposure in the future on the Common Dolphin. (CDG4/Rec14)	Medium-term	Medium

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20.	The Secretariat and the Range States to organize a workshop to review conservation units and their delineation for small cetaceans. (CDG5/Rec18)	Mid-2026	High
21.	Letters of invitation to be sent from the Secretariat to request Non-Party Range States' participation in implementation of the SAP on Common Dolphins. (CDG2/Rec10)	Short-term	High

* Updated/edited.