

Fishery closure in French waters during winter 2025



Common dolphin stranded in Jard sur Mer, ready for necropsy, 10/01/2023 ©Pelagis

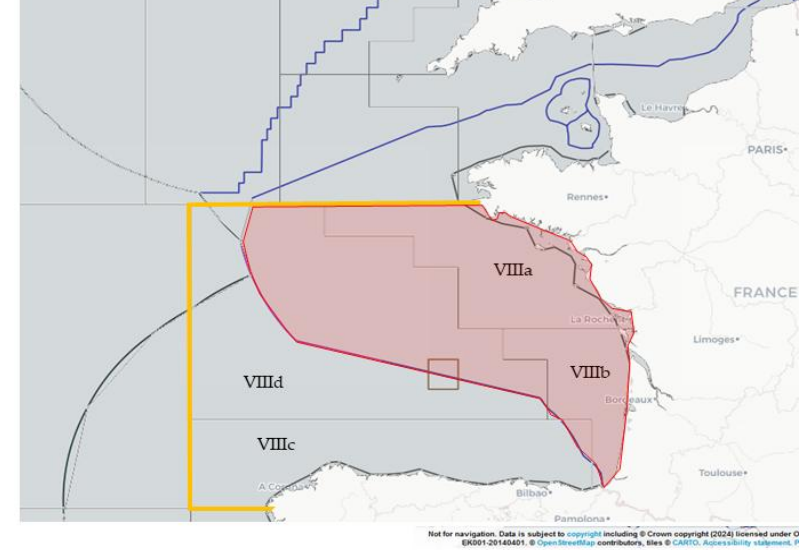
- H. Peltier, M. Authier, W. Dabin, C. Dars, F. Demaret, Meheust E., Mendez-Fernandez, O. Van Canneyt, S. Wund, J. Spitz

Previously, in the Bay of Biscay...

- High levels of winter strandings of common dolphins in the Bay of Biscay (France), especially since 2017
- Infringement procedure underway with the European Commission (failure to comply with the Habitat Directive) since 2020
- Several decrees to reduce bycatch contested alternatively by the fishing industry and NGOs
- The latest decree imposed 1-month fishing closure for high-risk gears, but many exceptions. Derogations annulled in December 2023 by the Council of State, following a referral from NGOs.

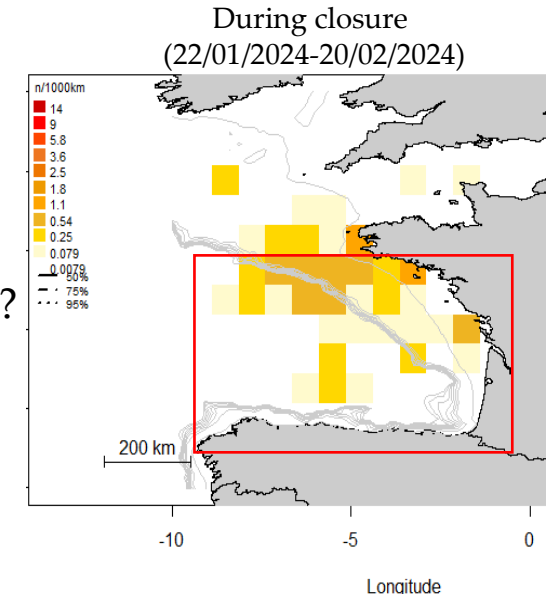
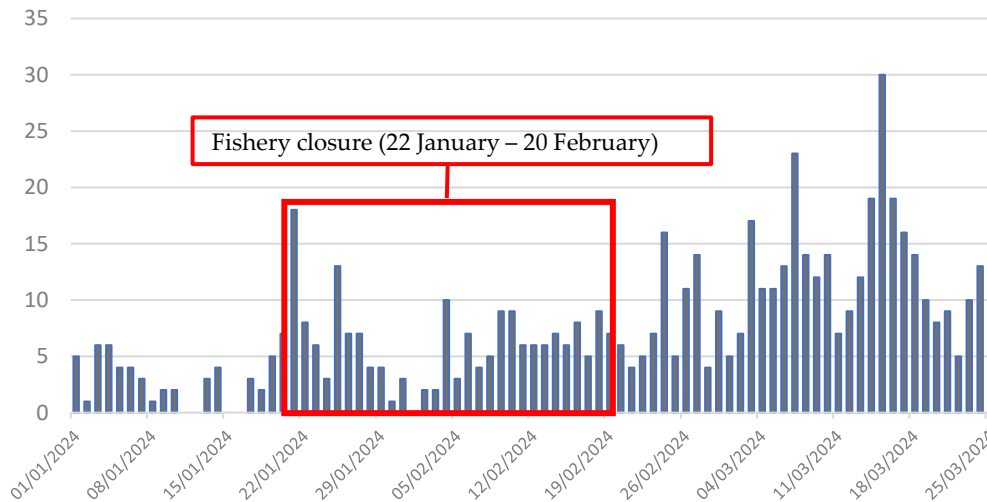
The order concerns:

- ICES VIII abcd
- Vessels >8m: OTM, PTM, PTB, GNS, GTR, PS
- The use of the gear identified [above] is prohibited in the Bay of Biscay from January 22 to February 20 inclusive for the years 2024 to 2026.
- French waters, all flags (emergency measures of the Common Fisheries Policy)
- Financial compensation



Summary of 2024 closure

- Lower apparent bycatch rate than in previous years (30% vs 60%-90% between 2017 and 2023)
- Drift conditions favorable to strandings (exception at the beginning of January): strandings globally representative of mortality at sea
- Significant drop in the number of bycatch during the winter of 2024
- Peak mortality between mid February and mid March
- Bycatch during the closure, especially in southern Brittany: unidentified gear at risk? gillnetters < 8m?



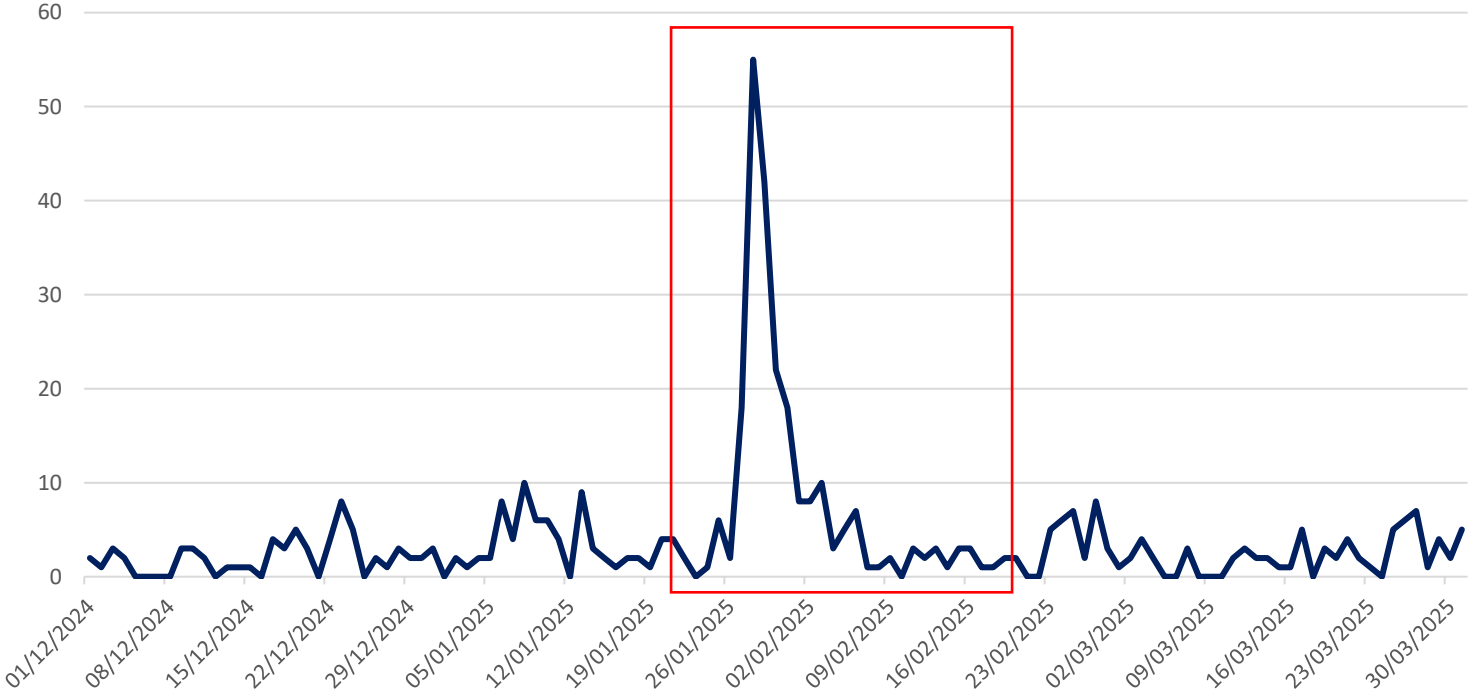
Common dolphin bycatch areas inferred from strandings before, during and after fishery closure.

Strandings of small cetaceans along the French Atlantic coasts during winter 2024 (*Delphinus delphis*, *Stenella coeruleoalba*, *Phocoena phocoena*, *Tursiops truncatus*, *delphinids sp*)

Strandings during winter 2025



Common dolphin tagged by fishermen, Jard Sur Mer, 09/01/2025 ©RNE



Strandings of small cetaceans along the French Atlantic coasts during winter 2025 (*Delphinus delphis*, *Stenella coeruleoalba*, *Phocoena phocoena*, *Tursiops truncatus*, *delphinids sp*)

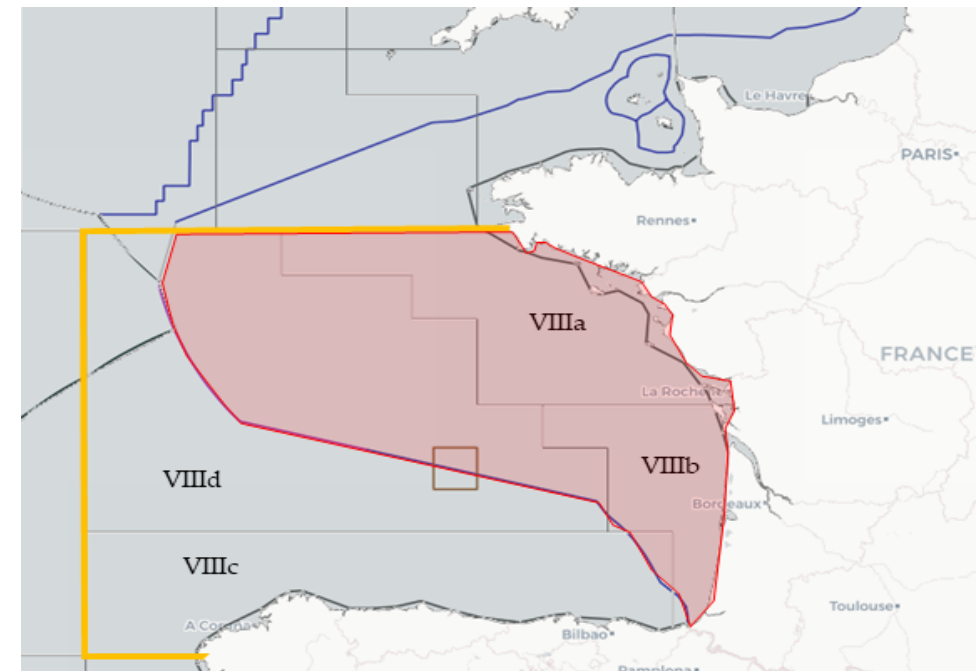
Strandings during winter 2025

1 December 2024 – 31 March 2025

- 467 strandings of small cetaceans / 456 found dead
- 353 strandings of common dolphins
 - 285 in the closure area, 134 with bycatch evidence
 - 68 North of the closure area, 14 with bycatch evidence



Common dolphin, Bretignolles, 25/02/2025 ©RNE



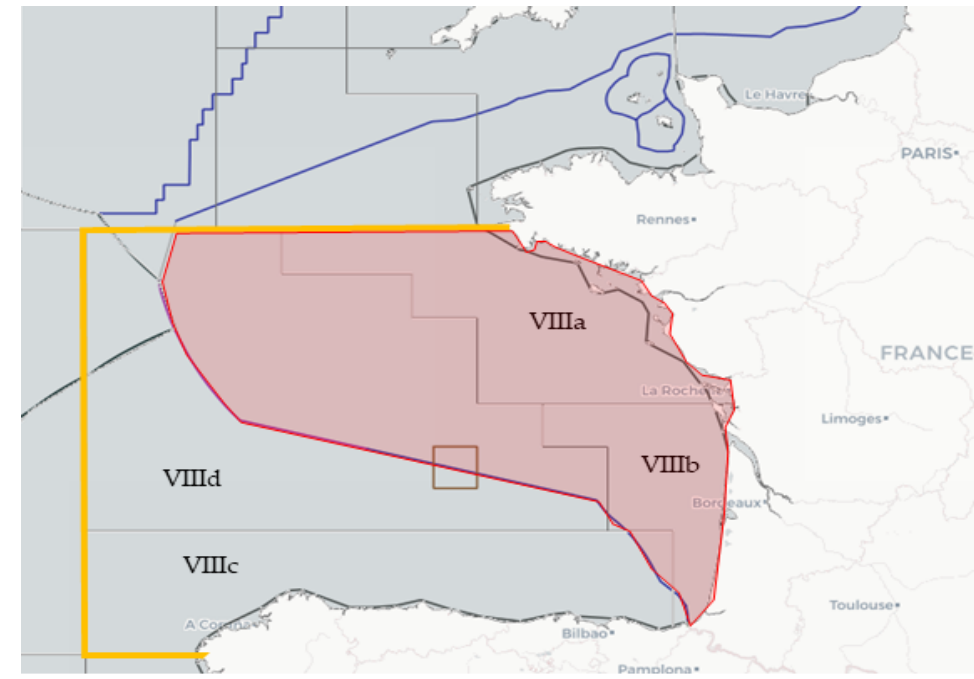
Strandings during fishery closure 2025

22 January– 20 February 2025

- 227 strandings of small cetaceans / 226 found dead
- 189 strandings of common dolphins
 - 169 in the closure area, 83 with bycatch evidence
 - 20 North of the closure area, 4 with bycatch evidence

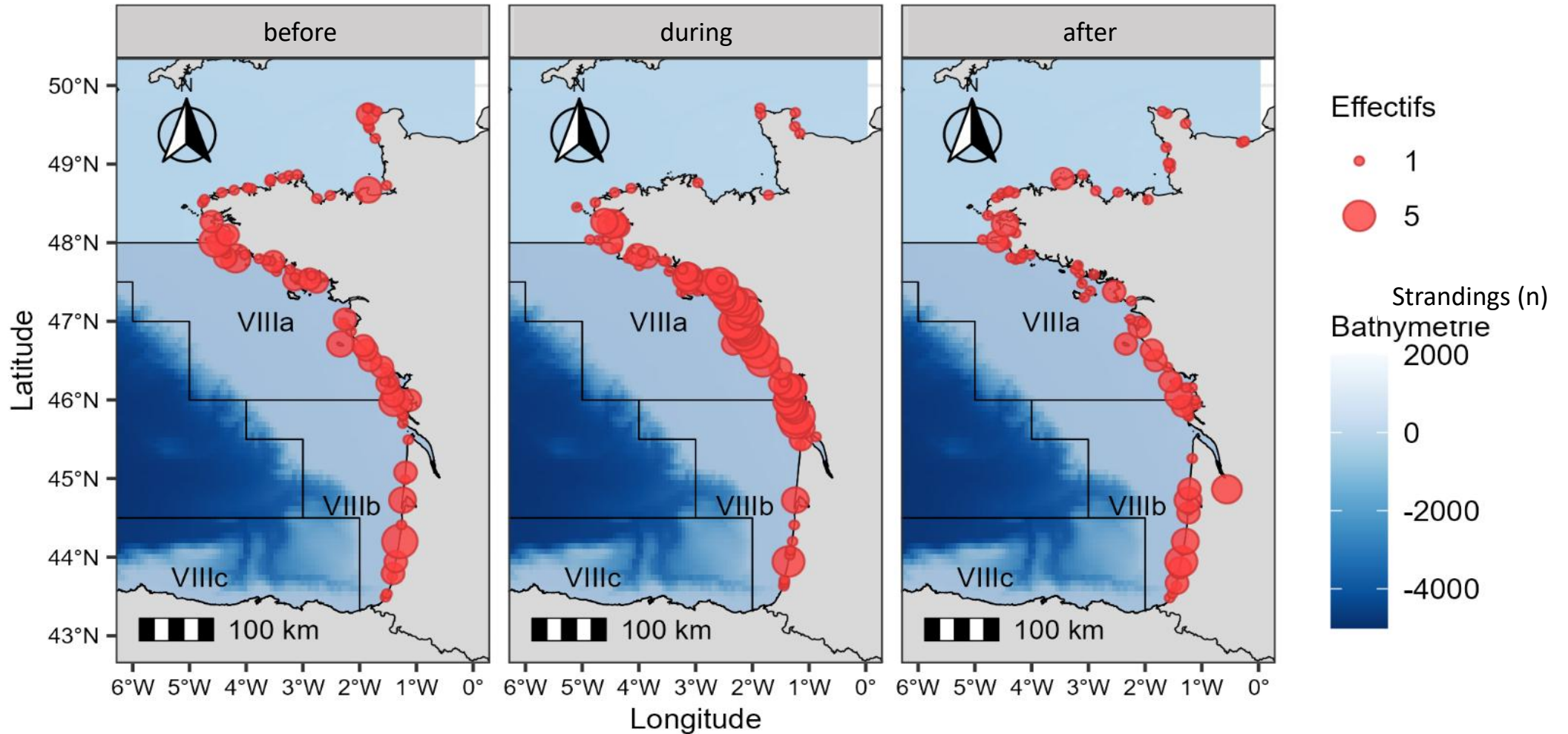


Common dolphin, Bretignolles, 25/02/2025 ©RNE



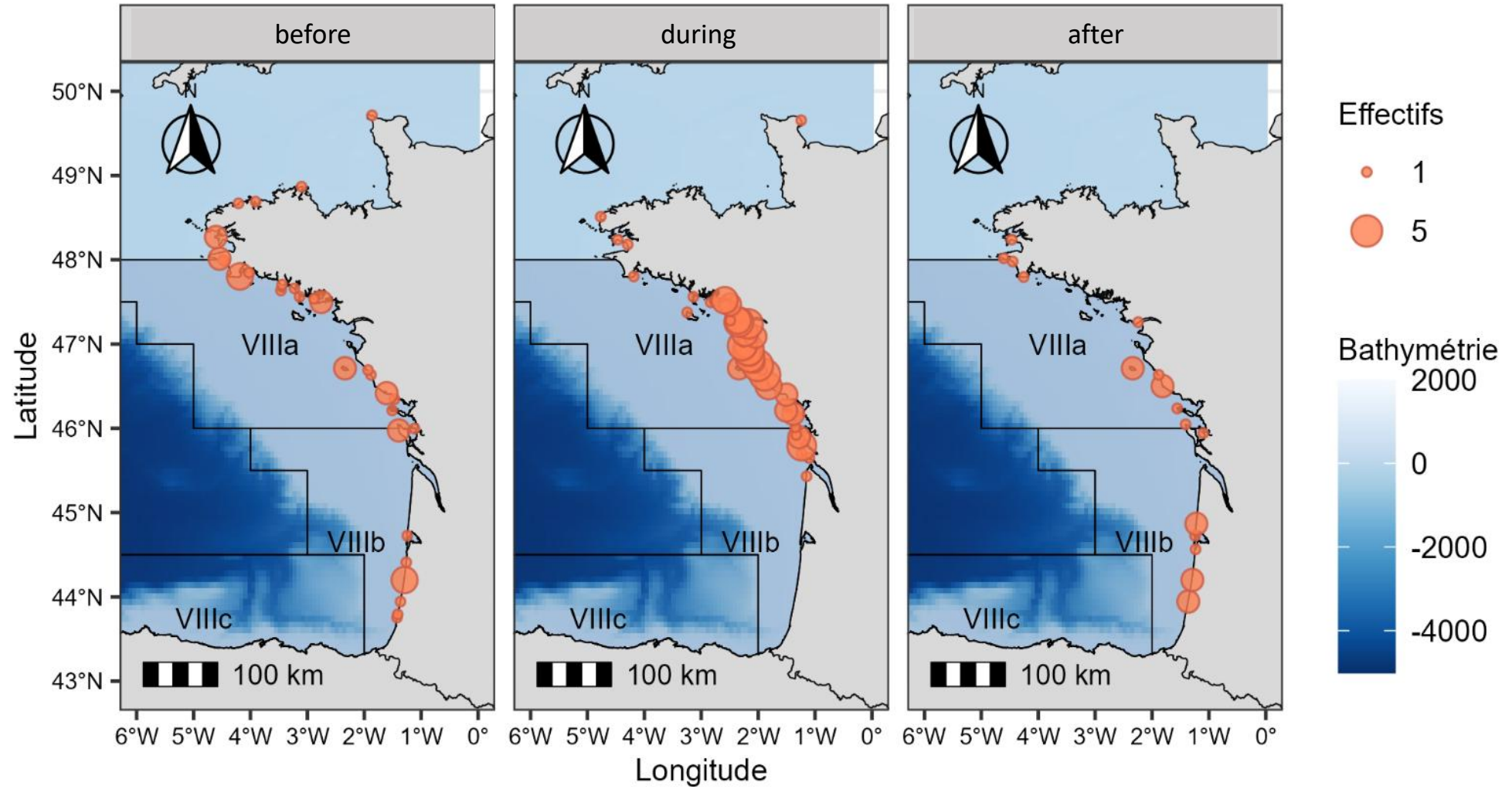
Strandings during winter 2025

1 December 2024 – 31 March 2025



Strandings of small cetaceans before (1 Dec. 2024-21 Jan. 2025), during (22 Jan. 2025-20 Feb. 2025) and after (21 Feb. 2025-31 Mar. 2025) fishery closure.

Strandings during winter 2025 1 December 2024 – 31 March 2025



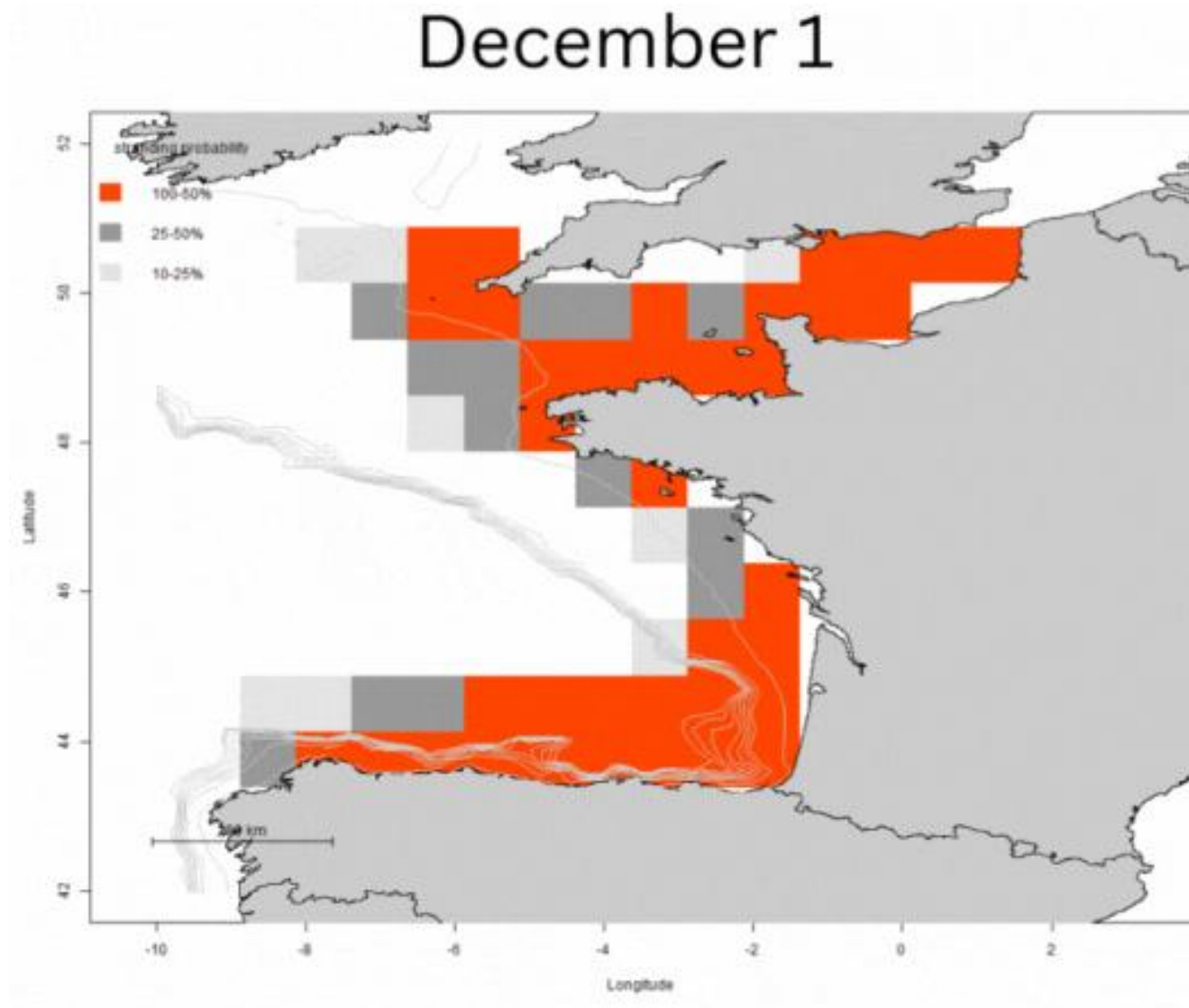
Strandings of common dolphins with bycatch evidence before (1 Dec. 2024-21 Jan. 2025), during (22 Jan. 2025-20 Feb. 2025) and after (21 Feb. 2025-31 Mar. 2025) fishery closure.

Strandings during winter 2025
1 December 2024 – 31 March 2025

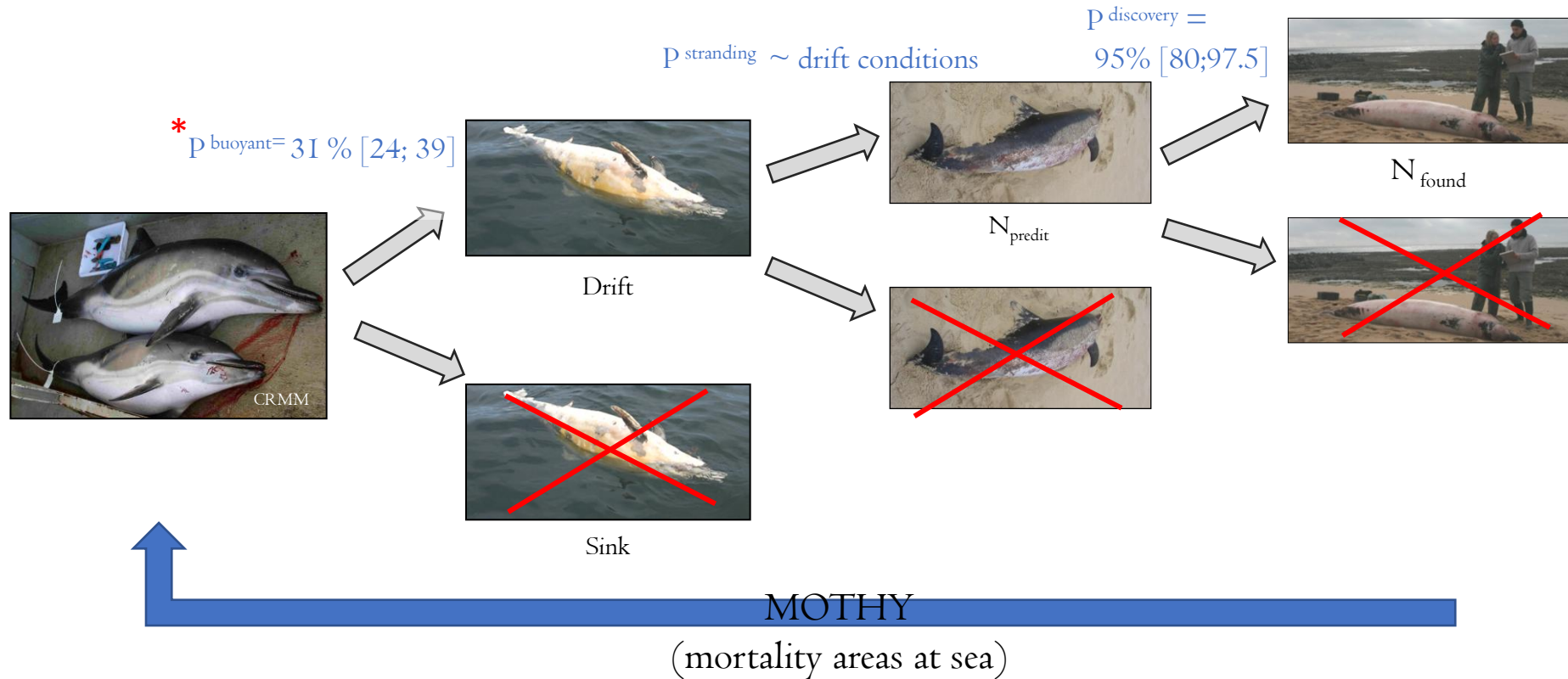
- Apparent bycatch rate =
common dolphins fresh or slightly decomposed with bycatch evidence /
all common dolphins fresh or slightly decomposed examined

	Before	During	After
Apparent bycatch rate South 48°N	63%(n=48)	75%(n=93)	59%(n=32)
Apparent bycatch rate North 48°N	28%(n=25)	27%(n=11)	11%(n=9)

Drift conditions during winter 2025



Reverse drift method

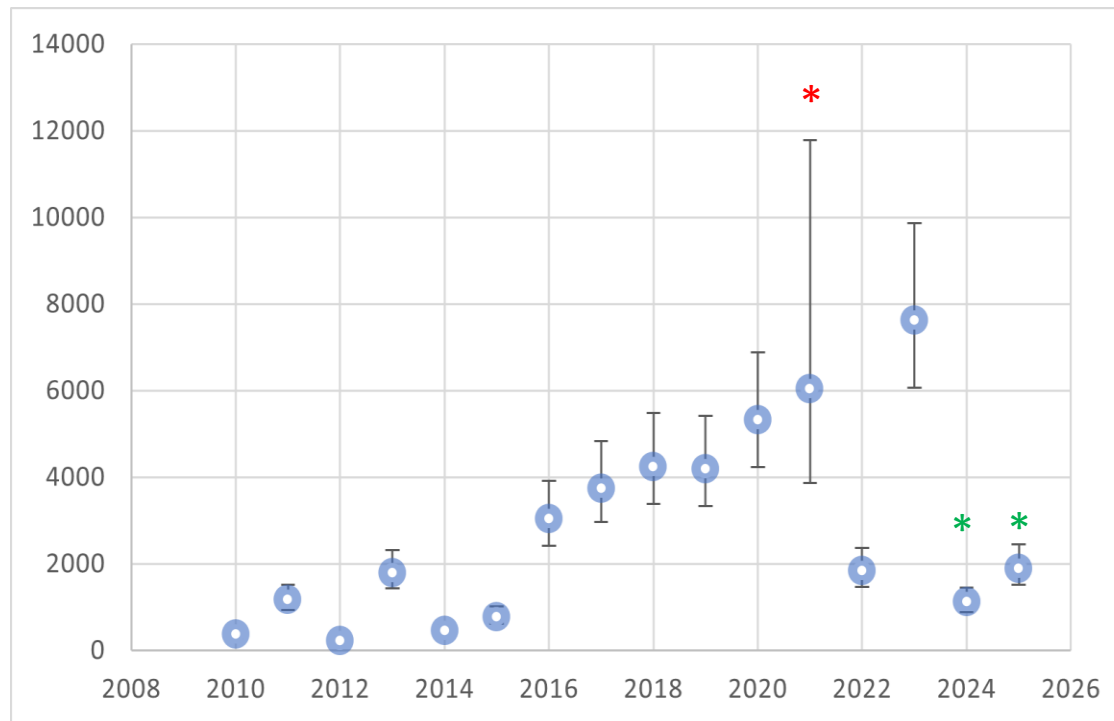


- * Probability of being buoyant updated in 2025 (last rate = 24% (CI95% [17; 32]))
All bycatch estimates have been recalculated using this new rate for comparison purposes. As the same rate is applied each year, it does not change the pattern of the estimates, but rather the absolute values.

Bycatch estimates inferred from strandings during winter 2025

- **1 900 (IC95% [1 500; 2 450]) estimated common dolphin bycatch,** including 1 770 (IC95% [1 400; 2 290]) South of 48°N between 1 Dec. 2023 and 31 Mar. 2024

- In the closure area (South 48°N)
 - > before : 290 bycatch (IC95% [760; 1240])
 - > during : 440 bycatch (IC95% [350; 570])
 - > after : 370 bycatch (IC95% [290; 480])



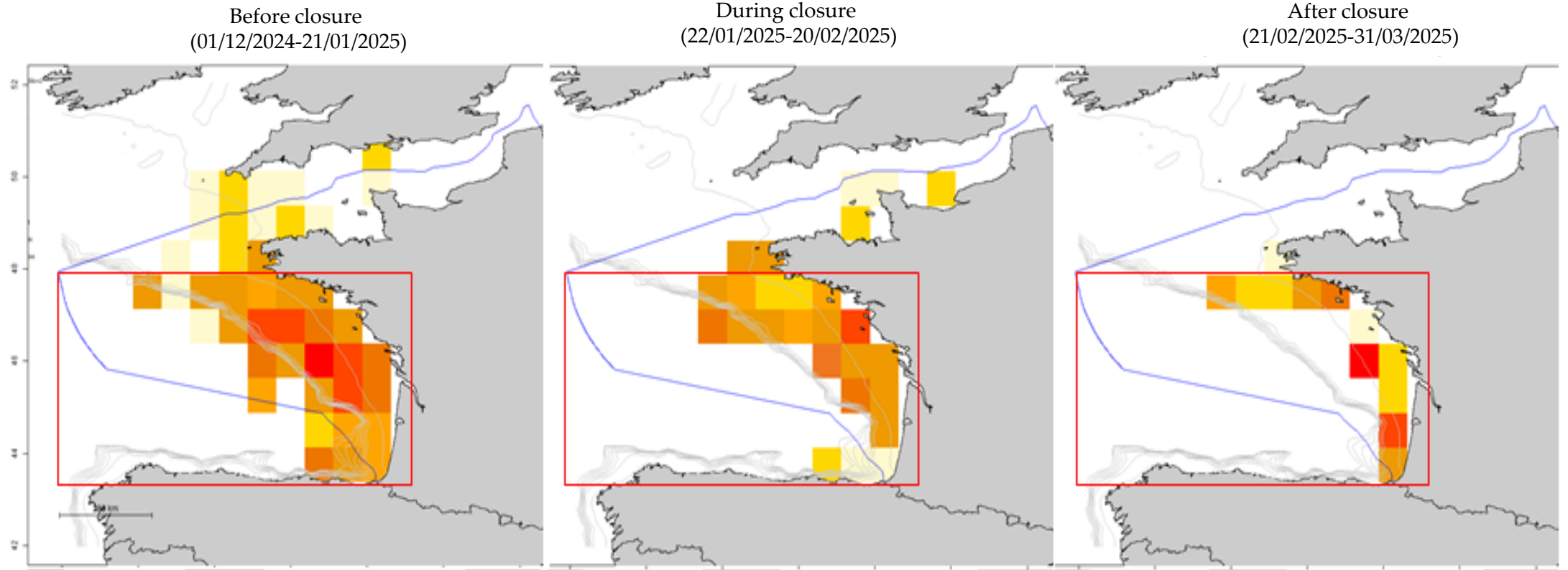
Common dolphin bycatch estimates in French waters since winter 2010 (December n-1 to March n)

* Winters with fishery closures

* Estimates based on both strandings and carcasses seen during aerial surveys (Peltier et al., 2024)

Min IC95% CI
Mean bycatch estimates
Max IC95% CI

Bycatch estimates inferred from strandings during winter 2025



Common dolphin bycatch areas inferred from strandings before, during and after fishery closure.

Summary of bycatch during winter 2025

- Drift conditions favorable to strandings until mid-February, and unfavourable and therefore unrepresentative until the end of March
- Significant drop in the number of bycatch during the winter of 2024 and presumably 2025
- Peak of stranding at the beginning of the closure period, compatible with high bycatch level occurring just before the closure
- Comparable apparent bycatch rate during the closure (75% vs 60%-90% between 2017 and 2023)
- Bycatch during the closure, especially in southern Brittany: unidentified gear at risk? gillnetters < 8m? Uncertainty around drift duration?
- The efficiency of the closure will have to be assessed at the end of the 3 years (variable depending on the year, the distribution of the dolphins and the seasonality of the bycatch risk)



The image features a central graphic consisting of several concentric circles. The innermost circle is a solid dark blue. Surrounding it are several rings of varying shades of red, from a bright, glowing red to a deep, dark red. The overall effect is reminiscent of a target or a tunnel. Overlaid on this graphic is the text "To be continued..." written in a white, elegant cursive font. The text is positioned diagonally across the center of the circles, starting from the left and moving towards the right, ending with three dots.

To be continued...