REPORT
OF THE 6th MEETING OF THE
ASCOBANS COMMON DOLPHIN GROUP

Online

13-14 January 2026

Agreement on the Conservation of Small Cetaceans of the Baltic, North East Atlantic, Irish and North Seas

UNEP/ASCOBANS Secretariat, UN Campus, Platz der Vereinten Nationen 1, 53113 Bonn, Germany
Tel. +49 228 815 2416 | ascobans.secretariat@ascobans.org | www.ascobans.org

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13-14 January 2026, online

1. Opening of the Meeting

1.1. Welcome and Announcements

Jenny Renell (Secretariat) welcomed participants to the sixth meeting of the Common Dolphin Group (CDG), which was also the first ASCOBANS meeting of 2026. Melanie Jakuttek (Secretariat) presented housekeeping announcements.

CDG Co-Chair Sinead Murphy (Atlantic Technological University (ATU)) made further welcome remarks. She noted that Co-Chair Florence Caurant (CDG Co-Chair / La Rochelle University / Pelagis) is stepping down this year and announced they are looking for candidates for a new Co-Chair.

1.2. Adoption of the Agenda

Co-Chair Murphy outlined the Provisional Annotated Agenda and Schedule (ASCOBANS/CDG6/Doc.1.2b), which was agreed to. No additional items were flagged for Any Other Business.

2. Overview of progress in SAP implementation

2.1. Updates from Parties and Range States

France

Ms Caurant summarized the updates on activities undertaken in 2025 by France. She noted that over the past year, the most significant development was the decree establishing a one-month fishing closure for high-risk gears. Monitoring efforts expanded through increased use of multi-skilled observers and remote electronic monitoring, though fleet representativeness remains a challenge, with around 44 vessels currently equipped and a larger rollout planned for 2026. France continued to advance bycatch research and policy through major projects (e.g. DELMOGES, OFB EMFAF FRA, LIFE), further development of OSPARs' marine mammal bycatch indicator, new biopsy campaigns in the Bay of Biscay, and improved representativeness of strandings data for bycatch estimates. While mitigation measures such as pingers are still being tested and their effectiveness remains uncertain.

United Kingdom

Emily Martin (Joint Nature Conservation Committee) summarized the updates on activities undertaken in 2025 by the UK. She shared that the Joint Cetacean Data Programme (JCDP) continues to expand as a key regional evidence base, now compiling data from 11 providers, 1,003 surveys and over 570,000 km of effort between 1994 and 2024, covering 47 cetacean species and more than 35,000 observations. Common dolphin records showed particularly dense coverage in the Bay of Biscay, Celtic Sea and western UK waters, with SCANS-IV survey data expected to be integrated in 2026 and new options for deferred data access now implemented.

She noted that the UK Cetacean Conservation Strategy (2026) establishes a coordinated, four-nation framework addressing major pressures, with six high-level recommendations including on

bycatch and entanglement reduction, pollution and biotoxins, underwater noise, protection of key habitats and prey, and strengthened long-term monitoring and research. Bycatch action is advancing through the Bycatch Mitigation Initiative and Monitoring Programme, combining onboard observers, REM, hotspot-based risk prioritisation, and trials of mitigation technologies such as pingers, net reflectors and passive acoustic reflectors. She noted that IVMS devices were made mandatory in England for under-12m fishing vessels.

Clean Catch trials in southwest England integrate REM, self-reporting via a mobile app, and controlled testing of acoustic deterrents, supported by renewed wildlife licensing and fisher co-design. Complementary monitoring and management measures include expanded passive acoustic monitoring (over 54,000 hours of recordings with seasonal and diel patterns in dolphin detections), development of the Marine Noise Registry and impulsive noise indicators, updated Habitat Regulations and IUCN GB Red List assessments, and strengthened OSPAR indicator reporting (including bycatch, abundance, distribution and contaminants). Part 3 of the Programme of Measures of the UK Marine Strategy was published, detailing the measures the UK will use to support progress towards GES, including several measures relevant to common dolphins. Offshore wind and other industrial pressures are being addressed through new guidance, evidence programmes and coordinated research initiatives, further reinforcing the scientific basis for cumulative impact assessment and conservation planning.

Simon Berrow (Irish Whale and Dolphin Group) clarified that WAMMS refers to the Welsh Acoustic Marine Mammal Survey. He also raised questions about the IVMS devices, which is now mandatory for vessels over 12 metres, specifically asking about uptake, progress, and acceptance within the inshore fleet. Ms Martin noted that she would need to follow up and provide a response at a later stage.

Mark Simmonds (OceanCare) asked about where to find more information on the new national cetacean initiative. He also queried who was undertaking the IUCN-style Red List assessment and how it aligned with official IUCN processes. Ms Martin responded that assessments are being conducted in line with IUCN protocols, guidelines, and training, but are being carried out internally. She indicated that the work feeds into the 25-Year Environment Plan and associated reporting, and mentioned that a Master's student supported the completion of some assessments, which are currently under review. Marina Sequeira (Institute for Nature Conservation and Forests, Portugal) asked which type of fishery the mitigation trial is being conducted in. Ms Martin said she would need to follow up with the relevant contact and forward the information.

Ireland

Co-Chair Murphy provided an update on activities undertaken in 2025 by Ireland. She highlighted recent publications[1] arising from the ObSERVE II survey. Results showed a substantial increase in common dolphin abundance in Irish waters in 2021 and 2022, with summer 2021 estimates approaching 600,000 individuals, compared to approximately 42,000 during the first ObSERVE survey in 2015. While abundance estimates from contiguous SCANS surveys (SCANS-III and SCANS-IV) were broadly consistent, she noted that the sharp increase observed in Irish waters during 2021–2022 is thought to reflect changes occurring at a broader spatial scale rather than survey inconsistency.

She mentioned outputs from the first vertebrate necropsy project (2017–2019), funded by the Marine Institute and EMFF, noting that samples collected, particularly from common dolphins, have supported multiple MSc projects and a PhD. This work has led to recent publications on adrenal

[1] Giralt Paradell, O., Bennison, A., Scheidat, M., Mackey, M., Araújo, H., Geelhoed, S.C.V., Popov, D., Breen, P., Jessopp, M., Cañadas, A., Rogan, E. (2025). The times they are a changin': Temporal patterns in small cetacean abundance in the northeast Atlantic. Ecological Indicators, Vol.181, Article 114467. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecolind.2025.114467

stress response[2], gastric parasitism, and a PhD by Sofia Albrecht examining diet, body condition[3] metrics and blubber cortisol[4] as indicators of physiological health, as well as studies on pollutants, including a new PFAS investigation that would be presented the following day. She added that these findings have informed the development of a body-condition indicator for harbour porpoises, with potential application as a biodiversity indicator within OSPAR. This work was being undertaken as part of an ongoing PhD by Georgia Novak under Horizon Europe Marine Beacon project, with results still under review due to variation in morphology, assessment units, and health status. Other work in the PhD was evaluating a demographics indicator for common dolphins and harbour porpoises, and modelling temporal trends in survival, total and cause specific mortality and population projections. ATU's work on the Marine Beacon study was also undertaking an evaluation of the deployment of ADDs for mitigation of PETs bycatch, work that would be presented later today by Yasmin Viana Pinot.

Further funding had been secured for a new vertebrate necropsy and pollutant assessment project running from 2025 to April 2028. This collaborative project involves ATU, the Irish Whale and Dolphin Group, the Cork Regional Veterinary Laboratory, European partners in Germany, and the IOZ. Work packages include necropsy assessments, pollutant analysis, case history reviews, implementation of the BEEP protocol in Ireland, and evaluation of pollutant burdens and associated risks to marine mammals.

Finally, a national meeting on marine mammal stranding response, organised by Dublin Zoo and the Irish Whale and Dolphin Group, was held and attended by key stakeholders in Ireland from government, academia, NGOs, and UK partners. Presentations included intergovernmental perspectives, particularly on ASCOBANS and OSPAR. Discussion at the national meeting focused on conservation management planning, necropsy guidelines, and the European marine mammal strandings database, emphasising the need to reassess opportunities for Ireland to engage more formally with ASCOBANS and to reopen discussions with its secretariat.

Participants discussed the recent SCANS-IV and ObSERVE-II abundance estimates for common dolphins, with clarification that a very large proportion of the total estimated population in the SCANS–ObSERVE survey area—up to around 600,000 of approximately 730,000 animals—has been recorded in Irish waters, highlighting Ireland's growing importance for the species. While noting that abundance varies considerably between years (declining from nearly 600,000 in 2021 to around 400,000 in 2022), the data indicate a rapid and significant shift in distribution over a short time period. Participants noted that these findings reinforce the value of conducting large-scale surveys at regular six-year intervals to track population changes and movements, and emphasised that scientific evidence is now aligning with long-standing anecdotal observations. The discussion concluded by stressing the need for Ireland to take a more active role in developing and implementing effective conservation and management responses for common dolphins.

Spain

Paula Gutiérrez (IEO-CSIC) provided an update on activities undertaken in 2025 by Spain. In Spain, ship-based and aerial surveys (PELACUS, BIOMAN, JUVENA) continue to document strong seasonal and interannual patterns in common dolphin distribution, with higher coastal presence in autumn and an overall increasing trend of 9.9% per year between 2007 and 2023. Abundance estimates for 2022–2025 indicate substantially higher numbers in autumn than in spring, but a major warning signal emerged in 2025 when no common dolphins were recorded in the Cantabrian Sea during the spring survey for the first time since monitoring began in 2007.

[2] Medina Santana, C., Slattery, O., O'Donovan, J., & Murphy, S. (2025). Histological and Proteomic Approaches to Assessing the Adrenal Stress Response in Common Dolphins (*Delphinus delphis)*. Animals, 15(19), 2924. https://doi.org/10.3390/ani15192924

[3] Albrecht, S., Minto, C., Rogan, E., Deaville, R., O'Donovan, J., Daly, M., Levesque, S., Berrow, S., Brownlow, A., Davison, N. J., Slattery, O., Mirimin, L., & Murphy, S. (2024). Emaciated enigma: Decline in body conditions of common dolphins in the Celtic Seas ecoregion. Ecology and Evolution, 14, e70325. https://doi.org/10.1002/ece3.70325 ; Alwis, H. A. S. S., Albrecht, S., Murphy, S., O'Donovan, J., Berrow, S., Daly, M., Levesque, S., & O'Dwyer, K. (2025). Stomach parasites and health status of short-beaked common dolphins, Delphinus delphis, stranded along the Irish coastline. Marine Biology, 172(5), 66. https://doi.org/10.1007/s00227-025-04620-9

[4] Albrecht, S., Murphy, S., O'Donovan, J., Minto, C., Mirimin, L., Slattery, O. (2025). Assessing biomarkers in common dolphin: Insights from novel blubber cortisol analysis. Journal of Experimental Marine Biology and Ecology, Volume 589. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jembe.2025.152112

A suite of ongoing studies is strengthening understanding of population dynamics, ecosystem drivers and threats. Population viability is being modelled using the Gadget3 framework to assess future trajectories under different bycatch and contaminant scenarios. Long-term diet and health studies from the Galician coast reveal shifts in prey composition, declining body condition, changes in trophic structure and nitrogen cycling, and parasite loads linked to feeding ecology, supported by new work on body condition and microbiomes (EMPHATIC).

Bycatch remains a central focus through multiple national and international projects (REDUCE, Marine Guardian, MERMACIFRA, CIBBRiNA), combining drift modelling of carcasses, development and testing of low-impact fishing technologies, and mitigation trials. Spatial risk was being refined through analyses comparing AIS and VMS data to predict overlap between fishing activity and cetacean distribution along the Iberian Atlantic coast.

Co-Chair Murphy asked that as no common dolphins were sighted in spring 2025 for the first time since 2007, what the stranding profile looked like for 2025, whether it was lower than other years. Ms Gutiérrez confirmed that they observed a reduction in strandings in Galicia, where most of the strandings occur.

Portugal

Marina Sequeira (ICNF) presented an update of the activities undertaken in 2025 by Portugal. She provided an overview of recent developments in marine mammal monitoring and mitigation efforts in Portugal, highlighting that the National Stranding Network remained active in 2025 with common dolphins continuing to be the most frequently stranded species, a trend that will be discussed further in another presentation. She presented on progress by the national working group established in 2023 to develop an action plan to reduce bycatch along the Portuguese coast, noting that the plan is nearing completion and ready for submission to compensation authorities, alongside updates from the MSFD/MSMSFT reporting process. Finally, Ms Sequeira noted an ongoing project on the estimation of age in common dolphins stranded on the coast of Portugal, mainly on the North Coast of Portugal. She shared that a new project had started in the summer testing new pingers in a beach purse seine fishery, the preliminary results of which will be presented during this meeting.

Co-Chair Murphy asked if there was any indication of a decline in common dolphin occurrence in Portugal, similar to Spain. Ms Sequeira explained that Portugal was unable to conduct a survey in 2025, so they could only use data from the stranding network. She has no data to be able to say whether there has been a decline in occurrence.

Ana Marcalo (CCMAR) explained that there are annual acoustic surveys from IPMA (Portuguese Institute of the Sea and Atmosphere) for sardine and other small pelagic stock assessment and distribution that take marine mammal observers on board, with the 2025 survey having taken place in spring. Although she was not aware of all the results, she knew common dolphin was still the most sighted species. She also noted that there is a time series available of those surveys that take place annually, as well as a publication that described the patterns of common dolphin from 2005-2020 along the coast related to the abundance of sardine.

3. Update on common dolphin stranding patterns, and causes of death where available, up to December 2025

Marie Petitguyot (IIM-CSIC) presented on a paper about European stranding networks as a tool for monitoring marine mammal populations.

The study assessed how effectively stranding networks contribute to monitoring cetacean populations and key threats such as bycatch across Europe, and how their functioning could be improved. Based on an expert questionnaire conducted in 2021 under the ICES Working Group on Marine Mammal Ecology, the review covered 45 organisations across 19 countries in the Northeast

Atlantic, Mediterranean and Macaronesian regions, examining network organisation, sampling and necropsy protocols, data quality, and the ability to detect bycatch and population trends.

Results showed that most networks were established in the 1990s, with generally stable effort over time and biodiversity data that broadly reflect large-scale species distributions and temporal trends. However, major geographical differences exist in funding, staffing, spatial coverage, necropsy capacity, data types collected and analytical depth, which affect representativeness and comparability. For common dolphins, 26 networks reported strandings, with increasing trends in France and Ireland, strong summer peaks around the Bay of Biscay and Iberian coasts, and spatial shifts in the UK possibly linked to climate change. A higher prevalence of bycatch was particularly evident in winter in southwest England, Ireland, the French Bay of Biscay and western Galicia, with increases over time in France and Galicia. Some stranding networks were able to identify gear-specific patterns (e.g. bottom gillnets in Galicia, trawls in the UK, oyster-farm entanglement in France). She also noted that some stranding networks have research programmes to tag common dolphin carcasses to better understand their drift at sea.

The paper concluded that stranding networks already provide invaluable long-term, large-scale monitoring of cetacean distribution, health and human impacts. However, their potential – especially for robust bycatch assessment – could be substantially enhanced, resulting in 10 recommendations to optimise their functioning and monitoring role, including through improved spatial coverage, stable funding, national coordination, standardized protocols, increased necropsy effort, harmonised data reporting, and better dissemination of results.

Co-Chair Murphy inquired about which countries were saying that their carcasses were in too advanced a stage of decomposition in order to run a stranding programme. Ms Petitguyot clarified that referred to Finland and the other Baltic countries that do not have stranding networks at the moment. Co-Chair Murphy further clarified that certain countries are undertaking drift modelling work, noting that included France, Spain, the UK and Portugal.

Ireland

Stephanie Levesque (IWDG) presented stranding records from 2021-2025 in Ireland. Stranding records since 2011 show an overall increasing trend, with a peak recorded in 2021. In 2025, however, there was a notable reduction in strandings, with a 15% decrease from 212 animals in the previous year to 180. This decline occurred primarily during the peak stranding period, particularly in February and March, after which numbers aligned with typical monthly patterns. Spatial analysis by county indicated consistent stranding hotspots in Cork and Kerry, likely influenced by prevailing south-westerly winds.

Confirmed and suspected bycatch cases have increased over time, with strandings diagnosed as bycatch rising from very low levels in 2017 to around 10 cases annually by 2023–2025, supporting concerns of sustained fisheries interactions. Necropsy results from the Irish Necropsy Scheme (2017–2019) indicate that infectious disease is the most common cause of death overall, but bycatch represents a substantial and increasing component: 7% of diagnosed cases in 2017–2018 and 23% in 2019, equal to infectious disease that year. A new dedicated Necropsy Pollutant Project (2025–2028) will examine 45 common dolphins and 30 harbour porpoises to generate high-quality data on contaminant loads and bycatch diagnostics, strengthening attribution of mortality causes.

Gemma O'Connor (IWDG) presented on live strandings in Ireland. County-level analyses for 2021–2025 identify two clear hotspots for live strandings of common dolphins: Blacksod Bay (County Mayo), accounting for ~34% of all live-stranded animals, and Brandon Bay (County Kerry), contributing ~25%, noting two mass strandings in that same county. Additional emerging hotspots were identified in North Clare and the Waterford–Wexford region. She suggested that these hotspots are largely driven by geographic and tidal features. Both areas are characterised by flat, sandy beaches and extensive tidal ranges, where rapidly receding tides, exposed sandbanks, and complex channels can disorient feeding dolphin pods and lead to live strandings.

Live strandings of common dolphins have risen sharply, with 107 individuals recorded in 2025—more than double the 51 in 2024 (+110% year-on-year). These events include single animals, mass strandings, and mother–calf pairs, with single-animal events most frequent but mass strandings increasing since 2023. All live stranding reports are assessed by trained volunteer teams, who evaluate both the animal's condition and the surrounding environment in order to determine whether the animal is compromised or suitable for refloating. In key hotspot areas, IWDG teams now actively relocate healthy animals out of high-risk zones prior to release.

The discussion covered recent stranding trends, live-stranding response practices, and coordination between organisations. In response to questions from Sarah Matthews (Dolphin Zone CIC), Co-Chair Murphy outlined that infectious diseases identified in stranded animals were largely associated with parasitism, including pulmonary parasitism leading to pneumonia, and verminous gastritis, and were broadly consistent with conditions commonly observed in stranded cetaceans. Ms Matthews also asked about refloating practices and potential social impacts. Ms O'Connor explained that animals are typically translocated around 20 km, often to the opposite side of a peninsula, and that while satellite tagging is not undertaken in Ireland, evidence from Cape Cod indicates that refloated individuals can successfully rejoin their original pods. She provided an example of a tagged dolphin that was relocated, re-stranded, and subsequently observed rejoining its pod, and noted that blow samples may be collected from stranded animals where possible.

Rob Deaville (Institute of Zoology) raised questions about overall outcomes for live-stranded animals, including differences between mass and single-animal strandings and the availability of summary data. Ms O'Connor noted that outcome data are limited due to factors such as nocturnal strandings, rapid mortality, and loss of carcasses due to tidal and weather conditions, although photo-identification through dorsal fin photography is used where feasible. The discussion then focused on coordination and guidance for live strandings.

While Co-Chair Murphy suggested incorporating structured discussion into the work of the ASCOBANS Unusual Mortality Events (UME) group, Mark Simmonds highlighted existing protocols, workshops, and ongoing work through organisations such as IWC and ECS. It was agreed that the UME group would review and summarise current live-stranding activities and circulate this information to ASCOBANS Parties. Finally, the emergence of Ballyvaughan as a recent stranding hotspot was discussed, with Ms O'Connor suggesting a likely navigational issue linked to local geography, tides, and muddy substrates, although no definitive cause could be identified. Co-chair Murphy noted that a mass stranding of juvenile common dolphins had occurred there in the early 2000s.

United Kingdom

Rob Deaville (Institute of Zoology) presented updates on the structure and outputs of the UK Cetacean Strandings Investigation Programme (CSIP), which provides one of the longest and most comprehensive cetacean stranding datasets in Europe. Between 1990 and 2025, CSIP recorded over 16,000 cetacean strandings, including more than 4,180 short-beaked common dolphins. Approximately 90% of strandings involved dead animals, with smaller proportions recorded alive or entangled in fishing gear. Common dolphin strandings have increased substantially since the early 2000s, with particularly high numbers from 2016 onwards, and are strongly concentrated along the southwest peninsula, the western English Channel and the west coast, although some regional reductions were noted during 2024–2025. Seasonal trends show clear winter–spring peaks (January–March), consistent with fisheries overlap and storm-driven drift patterns. In 2025, 207 common dolphin strandings were recorded, with 47 animals necropsied and sex determined for 92 individuals.

Cause-of-death analyses covering 1990–2024 identified bycatch as the most frequent diagnosed cause of mortality, followed by infectious disease, live stranding pathology, starvation, and trauma including ship strike, although many cases remained undetermined due to decomposition. Proportional analyses indicate that bycatch has remained a consistently significant contributor across decades, with 2025 patterns broadly aligning with recent multi-year trends. Regional analyses

for 2016–2025 showed the highest and most variable stranding rates in the southwest and west coast, with lower but increasing contributions from the Channel and east coast.

While detailed 2025 necropsy results are still being analysed, Rob outlined several relevant research initiatives. These include upcoming work on PFAS contamination in cetaceans, a regional study from Cornwall examining approximately 800–900 common dolphin strandings that confirmed bycatch as a major mortality driver, and a PhD project reviewing bycatch across CSIP and SMASS datasets. He concluded by highlighting emerging evidence of grey seal predation on dolphins, including recent cases in North Devon, suggesting this is an expanding issue affecting multiple cetacean species across northwest Europe.

Ms Matthews asked whether there are differences in causes of death between the summer and winter stranding peaks. Mr Deaville responded that bycatch-related mortality is still primarily a winter phenomenon, although this pattern has been changing in recent years. Earlier in the programme, bycatch was more associated with trawl fisheries, whereas it is now more commonly linked to static gear such as gillnets, possibly reflecting changes in dolphin distribution. Bycatch is now observed throughout the year, though still predominantly in winter. Disease-related mortality occurs year-round, with a possible slight increase in winter due to additional stressors such as colder water. Rob also noted that seasonal factors such as breeding and lactation may impose energetic constraints that influence mortality patterns.

Mr Deaville commented that strandings are now occurring year-round in areas where they were previously rare, citing the south coast of England as an example. He noted an apparent increase in strandings of harbour porpoises, common dolphins, and bottlenose dolphins in the eastern English Channel, possibly reflecting changes in distribution, including movement into the North Sea, though this remains uncertain.

Co-Chair Murphy asked whether the dolphins thought to have been predated by grey seals were in poor body condition or otherwise compromised, and whether there had been any assessment of their health status. She also wondered whether the predation could have occurred when the carcass was on the shore. Mr Deaville explained that one animal was an adult and the other a juvenile, and both appeared to be in reasonable nutritional condition. However, delays in post-mortem examination limited the ability to fully assess underlying health issues, and it could not be ruled out that the animals were compromised in ways that were not detected. He noted that compromised animals may spend more time at the surface, potentially making them more vulnerable to predation. He explained that they cannot rule out that predation happed post-mortem on the shore, but that the evidence is potentially consistent with grey seal predation.

Peter Evans (Chair of ASCOBANS North Sea Group / Sea Watch Foundation) made a clarifying comment in response to earlier discussion about the absence of common dolphins in Winter SCANS survey results. He explained that the Winter SCANS survey focused on the southern and central North Sea, whereas common dolphins in winter tend to move around the north of Britain and into the northern North Sea. This distributional pattern likely explains their low detection in the survey area.

Scotland

Andrew Brownlow (SMASS/University of Glasgow) presented a summary of the common dolphin strandings in Scotland. Data from the Scottish Marine Animal Stranding Scheme (SMASS) show a strong long-term increase in common dolphin strandings between 1992 and 2025. A total of 805 common dolphins were reported, representing about 31% of all pelagic delphinid strandings in Scotland. Strandings increased markedly after 2009, rising from an average of 7 animals per year in 1992–2008 (n=124) to around 40 per year in 2009–2025 (n=681), with a parallel increase in mass stranding events (from 3% to 16% of cases).

Strandings occur year-round but show a clear seasonal peak in late winter and early spring, with February consistently the highest month and elevated numbers from January to March and potentially a second peak in late summer. The cases in July and August tend to be part of the mass

stranding events. Spatially, most strandings are concentrated along the Atlantic-facing west and north coasts of Scotland, although occurrences are recorded around much of the coastline. Inter-annual variability is high, with episodic peaks in recent years and the highest annual counts occurring post-2015.

These trends are interpreted as resulting from a combination of changing distribution and prey availability, environmental variability, and improved reporting and response effort, with strandings providing an increasingly important indicator of population pressures and ecosystem change in Scottish waters. Of the 805 common dolphins, 155 were necropsied, 184 sampled, and 73 recorded as live strandings. Causes of death identified at necropsy were diverse: live stranding pathology and infectious disease were most frequent, with notable cases of Brucella-associated meningoencephalitis and pneumonia, alongside poor body condition and debilitation. Diagnosed bycatch was rare in the Scottish dataset, but the low number of confirmed cases, particularly in northwest Scotland, is considered likely to reflect under-detection rather than absence of fisheries interactions.

Bycatch Evidence Evaluation Protocol (BEEP)

Rachel Lennon (University of Glasgow/SMASS) presented the Bycatch Evidence Evaluation Protocol (BEEP) as a tool to improve detection and confidence in diagnosing cetacean bycatch when full post-mortem examinations are not possible, particularly in remote areas. Long-term SMASS data show that common dolphin strandings in Scotland have increased significantly since 1992, with a strong winter peak (especially February), but diagnosed bycatch remains much lower than in southwest England (only ~107 cases since 1992), raising concerns about under-detection rather than true absence of fisheries interactions.

The BEEP project, adapted from the Cornwall Wildlife Trust, uses a standardized, image-based protocol using 13 external bycatch indicators and confidence scoring, allowing trained responders to assess carcasses in situ. During a six-month trial (Oct 2024–Mar 2025), 26 SMASS volunteers applied BEEP to 135 stranded small odontocetes (7 species); 75 cases were suitable for assessment, and 14 (19%) showed potential bycatch signatures, including five common dolphins. This demonstrates that photo-based, structured assessment can reveal cryptic bycatch signals that might otherwise be missed, especially in regions with limited necropsy coverage. She noted that BEEP is applicable to other stranding schemes as well. They foresee a Scotland-wide implementation, but more resources and support are needed.

Ms Peltier asked whether there is a defined sampling strategy for carcass collection, and whether the high proportion of necropsied and live-stranded animals might bias representativeness. Mr Brownlow explained that sampling is largely opportunistic and constrained by accessibility and decomposition status. Live strandings may be overrepresented because they occur more often in summer and are easier to access, while winter strandings in remote western areas are likely underreported.

A question was raised whether the unidentified cases could be hybrids. Mr Brownlow noted that some cases rely on photographic evidence only, making species identification difficult when carcasses are decomposed. These cases were not considered hybrids but rather individuals that cannot be confidently assigned to species. Regarding striped dolphins, Mr Brownlow confirmed a similar trend, with a recent increase in cases occurring year-round. Striped dolphins show a high incidence of brucellosis and injury-related encephalitis, particularly in juveniles, and include both live-stranded and dead animals.

Co-Chair Murphy asked whether specific regions of the Scottish coastline could be prioritised if resources are limited. Ms Lennon suggested focusing on the west and north coasts, where most common dolphin strandings occur, while noting that the main challenge is having sufficient capacity to assess incoming cases using the BEEP protocol. Targeting known bycatch hotspots may be a useful future approach. Ms Lennon noted that injuries were more consistent with trawl gear than with

monofilament gear, including crush injuries and broken rostra, which differs from patterns seen in Cornwall and aligns with the Scottish fishing fleet profile.

France

Hélène Peltier (La Rochelle University / Pelagis) presented on strandings in France, though noting that the data for 2025 is incomplete, as they are still analysing most of that data. Therefore, she presented an update of her presentation given last year on the strandings and fishery closure in France in the Bay of Biscay. Winter 2025 common dolphin bycatch in the Bay of Biscay was reconstructed using a reverse-drift approach that links stranded carcasses to mortality at sea by accounting for buoyancy probability (~31%), drift conditions, and detection probability (~95%). This allows correction for animals that sink or are never discovered and provides spatial estimates of bycatch hotspots. Drift conditions were favourable for stranding-based inference until mid-February, but became less representative afterwards, increasing uncertainty for late-winter estimates.

Between 1 December 2024 and 31 March 2025, approximately 1,900 common dolphins (95% CI: 1,500–2,450) were estimated to have died in fisheries, with about 1,770 (95% CI: 1,400–2,290) occurring south of 48°N, i.e. within and adjacent to the seasonal closure area. In this southern zone, bycatch was estimated at ~290 animals before the closure, ~440 during the closure (22 Jan–20 Feb), and ~370 after, with mortality consistently concentrated along the continental shelf edge. Although strandings peaked at the beginning of the closure, this pattern is consistent with high bycatch occurring immediately before fishing stopped, followed by delayed arrival of carcasses on the coast.

Stranding numbers peaked sharply at the beginning of the closure period, which is consistent with high bycatch levels occurring immediately before fishing stopped and carcasses reaching the coast with some delay. Although the apparent bycatch rate during the closure (~75% of fresh animals showing fishing interaction) was comparable to the high levels observed in previous winters (60–90% between 2017 and 2023), the total number of bycaught dolphins in winters 2024 and likely 2025 was markedly lower than in the peak years prior to management action.

Nevertheless, significant bycatch persisted during the closure itself, particularly off southern Brittany, suggesting that residual mortality may be associated with fleet segments not fully covered by the measure (e.g. small gillnetters <8 m or unidentified gears) and possibly with uncertainties in carcass drift duration. Overall, the one-month closure appears to have reduced total winter bycatch, but not eliminated it, and its effectiveness will need to be assessed over the full three-year period, taking into account interannual variability in dolphin distribution, fishing effort, and oceanographic drift conditions.

Mr Brownlow commented on the importance of the work linking drift modelling with stranding data, noting that this approach addresses a long-standing gap in the interpretation of strandings. He asked for an update on progress toward developing a unified modelling framework across regions and whether a single model covering multiple areas might become available. Ms Peltier responded that this work is ongoing and remains a priority. She explained that three separate drift prediction models currently exist (Iberian Peninsula, Bay of Biscay, and Celtic Sea), and that a dedicated one-year contract is in place to consolidate these into a harmonised package, including cleaning functions and datasets. The aim is to run simulations using data from Spain, Portugal, France, the UK, Scotland, and Ireland, and to produce consistent bycatch estimates from 2010 to 2023 by the end of the year, with further dedicated effort planned into 2026. She noted that computations for the Celtic Sea are particularly time-consuming due to the complexity of the system.

Co-Chair Murphy asked whether aerial surveys, which ran alongside the closure during the first year, were conducted in 2025 and whether similar surveys were planned for 2026 to assess dolphin distribution before, during, and after the closure. Ms Peltier replied that while such surveys would be highly valuable, there is currently no funding to support large-scale aerial surveys in 2026. Only a smaller, near-shore survey (funded through a separate project) is expected to continue.

Mr Berrow raised a question about how the fisheries closure is currently perceived by the French fishing industry, given the initial strong opposition reported in the media. Ms Peltier replied that while the closure was difficult for the industry, it has been better accepted in 2025 than in 2024, largely because it was clearly communicated as a three-year measure. She noted that uncertainty about what will happen after 2026, whether the closure will continue or be replaced by other mitigation measures, remains a key concern for the industry.

Spain

Paula Gutierrez (IEO-CSIC) presented stranding patterns in 2025 for the North Atlantic in Spain. Common dolphin strandings along the Atlantic coast of Spain continue to show strong seasonality, with around 75% occurring in the first trimester and approximately 90% concentrated in Galicia due to prevailing oceanographic dynamics. A substantial decline in strandings is evident: Galicia reported 215 cases from January to November 2025, compared with nearly 400 in the same period in 2024. Information on causes of death is still being compiled.

Regarding population structure and abundance, annual ship-based surveys on the Bay of Biscay continental shelf (PELACUS, BIOMAN, JUVENA) confirm a marked seasonal distribution: common dolphins tend to move closer to the coast in autumn. MSFD reporting based on PELACUS data (2007–2023) indicates an interannual abundance increase of ≈ 9.9%, though with wide confidence intervals. Aerial surveys conducted since 2022 also detect higher presence and abundance in autumn (≈11,000 individuals) compared with spring (≈4,200). Notably, the 2025 PELACUS survey recorded no sightings of common dolphins in the Cantabrian Sea for the first time.

Ongoing work encompasses several research lines. A population viability model using the GADGET3 framework (Andrea Fariñas Bermejo *et al. in prep*.) is being developed, simulating trajectories under varying bycatch and contaminant scenarios. Dietary patterns are being reassessed by Alberto Hernández González *et al.* (*in prep*.). Studies on health status include "Longterm decline in the body condition of stranded common dolphins relates to environmental change and prey shifts in Galician waters" (Marie Petitguyot *et al. in prep*.), and "Cetacean isotopes reveal temporal shifts in Nitrogen cycling and trophic structure in a coastal upwelling ecosystem" (Marie Petitguyot *et al. in prep*.). Elisa RuedaDíez *et al*. (*in prep*.) is examining dietary predictors of *Anisakis* spp. loads. Additional work under the project EMPHATIC focuses on body condition microbiome analyses.

Several projects target bycatch quantification and mitigation such as REDUCE, Marine Guardian, MERMACIFRA and CIBBRiNA and risk assessment (Juliette Champsaur *et al*. *in prep*). Rebeca Paola Rodríguez-Mendoza *et al*. (*in prep*.), are performing studies in other areas, analysing cetacean occurrence patterns around Scotland using WDC Shorewatch data.

Co-Chair Murphy noted that the marked reduction in strandings matches with the results from the sighting survey.

Portugal

Catarina Eira (Universidade de Aveiro - CESAM) presented an overview of common dolphin strandings data for Portugal. The presentation provided an overview of common dolphin stranding trends along the Portuguese coast over the past decade, with an update for 2024–2025. Based on compiled national stranding data from the last 10 years, Portugal has recorded an annual average of approximately 206 common dolphin strandings. Interpretation of long-term trends takes into account that comprehensive national coverage by dedicated stranding teams has only been in place since 2022, particularly improving data availability in previously under-monitored regions.

Stranding numbers peaked in 2023, with a total of 341 common dolphins recorded—the highest number on record—driven in part by increased coverage in central and southwestern Portugal. Although numbers declined in 2024 and further in 2025, seasonal patterns remained consistent, with strandings peaking in winter and showing an even more pronounced peak during summer months,

while spring consistently exhibited very low stranding levels. Spatially, most strandings continue to occur in northern Portugal, mirroring patterns observed in Galicia (Spain), reflecting regional continuity in dolphin distribution and pressures.

Bycatch remains the dominant identified cause of death for common dolphins in Portugal, both over the past four years and across the full 10-year period. While summer accounts for the highest absolute number of bycatch cases due to higher stranding numbers overall, the northern region showed a slight decrease in bycatch-attributed strandings compared to previous years. This was accompanied by a relative increase in strandings classified as undetermined or "other" causes (including trauma and calves), likely influenced by lower overall sample sizes and fewer analysed individuals in 2024–2025. The observed reduction in strandings in the most recent years appears consistent with patterns reported by other countries.

Co-Chair Murphy noted broadly similar stranding trends across countries, aside from France due to fisheries closures, and highlighted geographic differences in causes of death. Ms Eira reported that recent Portuguese data show most stranded common dolphins in moderate body condition, not indicating an extreme situation, but expressed greater concern over harbour porpoises, which show increasing signs of disease and poor condition.

Co-Chair Murphy raised the need for greater harmonisation and coordination of stranding data analyses across countries and proposed a collaborative regional assessment. Mr Brownlow and Mr Deaville supported this, emphasising emerging efforts to collate European data, the importance of prioritising key variables, and the value of summarising broad spatial and temporal patterns. Co-Chair Murphy concluded by proposing follow-up on interest, sharing of presentations, and development of a simple, repeatable sentinel assessment. Mr Evans highlighted the added value of integrating strandings with sightings data and invited collaboration on comparative analyses.

4. Population genetic structure and population segregation in the NE Atlantic

Amelia Viricel (LEMAR - University of Western Brittany) presented work undertaken as part of WP1 of the Delmoges Project on population genetic structure and ecological segregation of CDs in the NE Atlantic.

In the northeast Atlantic, the common dolphin is widely distributed and abundant but subject to high bycatch rates in the Bay of Biscay. Previous studies assessing common dolphin population structure indicate that there is a single population based on traditional genetic markers (mitochondrial DNA and microsatellites), but that there is spatial segregation between the continental shelf of the Bay of Biscay and oceanic waters, according to ecological tracer data. The aim of this study was therefore to reassess common dolphin population structure in the north-east Atlantic using more consistent sampling (through biopsies taken from the oceanic zone), more powerful genomic markers (43,610 SNP markers), and more biogeochemical tracers.

Results of genomic analyses based on 56 dolphins recently stranded in the northeast Atlantic (2017-2023), and on 36 biopsies from French ocean waters (2022-2023) confirm that a single population of common dolphins occupies this geographical area. Besides, the 226 individuals analysed for carbon, nitrogen and sulphur isotopes in skin and muscle (short- to medium term tracers), and organic contaminants in blubber and renal cadmium concentrations (long-term tracers) showed two different profiles: an "oceanic one" supported by few biopsied dolphins and few stranded individuals from Ireland, which had higher $\delta^{34}S$ values on the short-term scale and higher %CB 4Cl ratio and/or renal Cd concentrations on the long-term scale; a "neritic one", presented by most of stranded or bycaught individuals regardless of their sampling location, with lower $\delta^{34}S$ values than oceanic dolphins and relatively low %CB 4Cl ratio and/or renal Cd concentrations. These two profiles demonstrate an ecological segregation between neritic and oceanic domains. In the absence of data on the level of demographic exchange between these two domains, and because a recent publication demonstrated a 7-year decline in estimated longevity in female common dolphins

stranded along the Bay of Biscay between 1997 and 2019, two distinct management units are recommended as a precautionary measure and pending further analyses.

Ms Petitguyot queried the apparent separation of Spanish and Portuguese common dolphins in the stable-isotope analysis; Co-Chair Caurant noted that the differences were small and currently unexplained. Mr Evans raised questions about seasonality and population structure, suggesting potential co-occurrence of resident and migratory components. Ms Viricel explained that sampling and analyses accounted for seasonal effects, with no seasonal signal detected in tracer data, and that comparisons were seasonally aligned. Mr Evans noted that site fidelity and consistent foraging in areas such as the Irish Sea could contribute to isotopic differences.

Mr Simmonds asked whether the identified units should be considered assessment or management units. Ms Viricel noted that, given localized bycatch and biological signals in the Bay of Biscay, management units could be a precautionary option, though this remains for the group to decide. Co-Chair Murphy stressed the need for a dedicated workshop to review definitions, revisit previous ASCOBANS/HELCOM work, and address complexity arising from wide-scale movements and sample sizes required for delineating management units, proposing an online small-cetaceans conservation unit workshop this year. Mr Evans highlighted lessons from earlier multi-evidence workshops and suggested considering whether a future workshop should sit under ASCOBANS or ICES, offering to explore this within ICES WGMME planning.

Mr Evans also flagged the absence of wider UK shelf data; Ms Viricel confirmed limited access to date, and Mr Evans suggested contacting CSIP and Mr Brownlow. Mr Deaville proposed collaboration on stable-isotope work via a joint discussion with an Exeter PhD project. Co-Chair Murphy concluded by noting new funding for stable-isotope analyses of Irish common dolphins, expected to substantially strengthen the dataset over the next two years.

5. Surveys

5.1. Status update on regional and NE Atlantic-wide sightings surveys
5.2. Population abundance estimates

Co-Chair Murphy provided an update on abundance estimates derived from the combined SCANS-IV and ObSERVE-2 aerial surveys conducted in 2022, and discussed whether available data are sufficient to assess trends. Trend analyses are ongoing, but updated abundance estimates were presented alongside figures from earlier SCANS surveys and ObSERVE-1.

A written briefing was provided by Anita Gilles, as she was unable to attend. The briefing is available as ASCOBANS/CDG6/Inf.5.2. For the Northeast Atlantic overall, combined datasets produced estimates of approximately 728,000 common dolphins, 186,000 striped dolphins, and 145,000 unidentified dolphins. Striped dolphins were not recorded during ObSERVE-2 in Irish waters in 2022 and therefore have no standalone abundance estimate for that survey, although limited sightings occurred in summer 2021 and were incorporated when combining datasets. Higher common dolphin abundances observed in 2022 may reflect large-scale redistribution of animals into more northerly waters. There was also improved survey coverage, notably previously unsurveyed offshore blocks in Portuguese waters.

The briefing also addressed species-identification uncertainty. Earlier SCANS surveys recorded many unidentified common and striped dolphins. The SCANS-IV[5] survey used the sToRM system, which applied post-survey species verification from digital images, resulting in the re-classification of some individuals. Results showed strong regional variation: common dolphins comprised 19% of individuals in the offshore Bay of Biscay, 93% on the Bay of Biscay shelf, and 100% in the southern Celtic Sea. Corrected estimates were generated for regions where sToRM analyses were available

[5] https://www.ascobans.org/document/estimates-cetacean-abundance-european-atlantic-waters-summer-2022-scans-iv-aerial-and

but not yet applied across the full Northeast Atlantic. A comparison of observer-identified sightings versus post-hoc image-verified identifications illustrated the scale and direction of reclassification.

6. Bycatch

6.1. Update on the French Action Plan to reduce common dolphin bycatch in the Bay of Biscay

Germain Boussarie (Ifremer) presented an update on the French Action Plan, focusing on monitoring and experimentation trials for common dolphin bycatch in the Bay of Biscay. He recalled that the French Action Plan to reduce small cetacean bycatch in the Bay of Biscay relies on three pillars: large-scale monitoring, total bycatch estimation, and understanding the mechanisms driving bycatch events. Monitoring is being implemented through REM (Remote Electronic Monitoring) under the OBSCAME programme. Initially launched as a voluntary scheme in 2021 with a few vessels, it has expanded to around 40 vessels and is now becoming mandatory. The system combines onboard cameras, at-sea observers and self-sampling, and is optimized using spatial prioritisation algorithms to ensure representative coverage. The objective is both to quantify bycatch and to evaluate technical mitigation measures such as pingers (DOLPHINFREE) and acoustic net visibility devices (PIFIL, reflective nets).

Total bycatch in the Bay of Biscay is estimated by combining REM data with fishing effort from SACROIS and modelling approaches (BEAM-like GLMMs, MrP, spatio-temporal smoothing). These models integrate gear type, species, effort, trip and vessel effects, allowing prediction of bycatch rates and scaling up to the full fleet. Results highlight particularly high risk for offshore gillnetters targeting sole and hake, with strong seasonal and spatial concentration in winter. Analyses of partial monitoring in winter 2024–2025 show that coverage was still incomplete, with many fishing days either unmonitored or only partially monitored, especially for offshore and coastal gillnet fleets. This limits the precision of estimates and justifies the move towards full monitoring in winter 2025–2026.

Further investigation of bycatch events indicates that:

- Dolphins are increasingly observed closer to the coast and in smaller groups.
- During high-risk periods, key prey species (sardine, anchovy) aggregate near the seabed, increasing overlap with gillnets.
- Stomach content analyses confirm recent feeding on these species at time of death.

Regarding mitigation, he noted that DOLPHINFREE pingers and improved acoustic visibility of nets appear promising, but results depend strongly on net materials and configuration. Important limitations remain: technological complexity, maintenance constraints, durability in harsh conditions, and uncertainty about long-term effectiveness. Acoustic reflectivity tests show large differences between net types, and confounding factors (mesh size, twine diameter, headline, fishing practices) must be controlled. The next critical step is to integrate mitigation trial results with bycatch information and comprehensive gear descriptions

Co-Chair Florence Caurant invited questions to help steer the group's recommendations, noting the aim to use the Q&A to define practical next steps. Co-Chair Murphy asked about interactive/informative pingers, referencing Lenhof (2022). She noted that the study reported higher whistle rates and changes in the signal characteristics during pinger deployment, and asked whether there were updates on whether responses remain consistent over time or whether animals habituate and change acoustic behaviour across years. Mr Boussarie indicated that no definitive update was available in-session and offered to check and send references/updates via chat or email after the meeting.

Building on device selection and deployment, Ms Marçalo added operational context from ongoing field work on Portugal's western coast, noting prior trials with DDDs and current work with pingers, including interest in low-pitch devices. She emphasized the need to identify best solutions and

equipment tailored to specific fisheries and welcomed any shared evidence that could inform device choice and protocols.

Discussions with fishery organizations

Co-Chair Murphy invited feedback from fisheries organisations on the implementation and acceptability of recently introduced measures and monitoring schemes, asking how the sector has adapted and how they feel about the requirements.

Aurélien Henneveaux (PO PDA – fisheries representative for the French southwest Atlantic coast and Basque Country) responded that fishers are not in favour of closures, primarily for socioeconomic reasons, but noted that the three-year closure was a court decision that had to be accepted. He added that French Government compensation facilitated acceptance. He stressed that fishers do not want accidental bycatch and have been actively engaged since 2018 with scientists to understand drivers of common dolphin bycatch and to co-develop mitigation devices aimed at sustainable cohabitation (e.g., reducing sound exposure). Mr Henneveaux referenced observations of increased near coastal winter presence of common dolphins and underscored the need for medium term management solutions: improved mitigation, better understanding of net-dolphin interactions, and building an evidence base robust enough to avoid renewed closures after 2027, while recognising the imperative to protect the species.

Chloé Pocheau (South Western Waters Advisory Council) highlighted that SWW AC – comprising sector and NGO members from France, Spain, and Portugal – has provided advice to the European Commission on common dolphin bycatch since 2018–2019. She emphasised the difficulty and importance of consensus, noting that advice issued in 2024 and 2025 achieved consensus – evidence that agreement and workable solutions are possible. She called on the Commission to intensify work now to deliver cohabitation solutions for 2027, cautioning that while stakeholders accepted the three-year closures, extending them further would likely erode consensus. Ms Pocheau advocated for more targeted measures beyond blanket closures.

Focusing on acceptability and practicality of acoustic deterrent devices (ADDs) and pingers, Mr Boussarie explained that the PFIL pinger (hull-installed) reached wide uptake (~100 vessels) because regulations indicated that equipping could avert closure and users found it relatively easy to operate (despite requiring a hull installation). In contrast, “dolphinfree” style net mounted pingers proved highly constraining operationally; despite prolonged efforts, few volunteers could be secured for trials, leading the French Government to mandate equipment in some cases—still controversial due to onboard complexity and safety concerns. He underscored that acceptability is pivotal: uptake correlates with operational feasibility, clear regulatory frameworks, and perceived benefits.

Co-Chair Caurant summarised that, with DELMOGES concluded and closures limited to three years, the group needs near-term recommendations for next year, acknowledging that none of the three major workstreams – technological solutions, improved bycatch evaluation/monitoring, and improved understanding of bycatch context/drivers – will be fully ready by then. She invited reflections on recommendations for pragmatic interim measures while research continues.

Mr Henneveaux agreed on the urgency to prepare for 2027 and beyond, stressing continuation and scaling of mitigation device trials, consolidation of new population and abundance knowledge, and development of a general action plan for common dolphins in the Northeast Atlantic management unit, articulating medium and long-term objectives and ensuring equitable, regionwide application (not only the Bay of Biscay).

6.2. Update on the Portuguese Action Plan to reduce bycatch

Ms Sequeira (ICNF) presented an update about the Portuguese Action Plan to reduce bycatch. The Action Plan was developed by a national Working Group established under Order No. 12140/2023 of 29 November, with a mandate to identify and propose measures to reduce interactions between fisheries and protected marine species, including marine mammals, seabirds, and marine reptiles.

The Action Plan has five core objectives: (a) to identify species whose long-term population status is compromised, taking into account current knowledge on abundance and bycatch levels; (b) to identify the fishing gears and areas associated with the highest levels of interaction and incidental capture of these species; (c) to propose management measures based on these findings; (d) to design research and monitoring programmes for bycatch, abundance and distribution; and (e) to propose strategies for the dissemination of good practices and capacity building to support implementation.

Based on the available scientific evidence, four cetacean species were identified as being of particular concern: the harbour porpoise (*Phocoena phocoena*), the common dolphin (*Delphinus delphis*), the bottlenose dolphin (*Tursiops truncatus*), and the minke whale (*Balaenoptera acutorostrata*). For each of these species, the Working Group assessed the fishing gears, geographic areas and seasons associated with the highest risk of interaction and incidental capture.

Gillnets and trammel nets were identified as the highest-risk gears for harbour porpoises and common dolphins, particularly in Zone A – North-Centre western Portugal, with seasonal peaks in spring for harbour porpoises and summer for common dolphins. Beach purse seine fisheries also posed elevated risk for harbour porpoises in Zone A. For bottlenose dolphins, overall risk was lower, with Zone B – Centre-South western Portugal identified as the main area of concern. For minke whales, fishing traps represented the primary risk, especially in Zone C- Southern Portugal, with higher interaction likelihood in spring and summer.

Based on these assessments, priority management measures were proposed, including actions to reduce cetacean bycatch in beach purse seine fisheries in Zone A and to mitigate common dolphin bycatch in purse seine fisheries in Zones B and C. The Action Plan also highlights priority research and monitoring actions, such as testing mitigation measures in gillnet, trammel net, and purse seine fisheries, strengthening observer programmes, and improving data collection on bycatch and species distribution. The Action Plan emphasizes the dissemination of good practices through capacity building and awareness-raising. This includes targeted training for skippers and fishers, the development of best-practice manuals, and the provision of specialized training for scientific observers. Strengthening of regulatory and enforcement capacity is also important, with particular attention to enhancing monitoring and compliance in areas and seasons identified with the highest bycatch risk.

The next steps for the Portuguese Action Plan to Reduce Bycatch involve the submission of the draft to the competent national authorities, followed by public consultation and subsequent final publication in the Official Journal of the Republic.

Co-Chair Caurant asked whether there are some national programmes for this research and monitoring. Ms Sequeira clarified that some are already in place, such as for purse seine. For other elements, funding still needs to be found.

6.3. Updates on the DELMOGES project

Camille Deslias (Pelagis La Rochelle University) presented an update on the DELMOGES project.

The DELMOGES project integrates high-resolution fishing effort data, common dolphin distribution and supervised machine-learning techniques to improve understanding of the drivers of bycatch in the Bay of Biscay. While numerous technical mitigation measures have been tested, the project highlights that bycatch risk results from the combined effects of prey distribution, dolphin spatial ecology, fishing practices, environmental conditions, and their spatial and temporal overlap. Using AIS and observer data from 2016–2023 (and electronic monitoring in 2022–2023), approximately 7,000 net fishing operations were reconstructed to derive key operational metrics, including net length, net height and soaking time, which were not captured by conventional effort indicators. Co-occurrence analyses with SCANS-III (summer 2016) and SAMM-II survey data revealed persistent seasonal hotspots of overlap between common dolphins and static net fisheries, particularly offshore

and in mixed coastal–offshore areas of the central and southern Bay of Biscay, consistent with observed stranding patterns.

A Random Forest modelling framework was applied to these heterogeneous and correlated datasets to identify the relative importance of multiple drivers of bycatch. Predictor variables included fishing characteristics (gear type, typology, target species, net dimensions, soaking time), vessel attributes, spatial location (latitude, longitude, distance to coast), temporal factors (year, month, day of season), and environmental and ecological covariates (such as dolphin density or primary production). The model confirmed that bycatch risk is primarily driven by the spatial and temporal co-occurrence between common dolphins and dense deployments of gillnets and trammel nets, with net length, immersion time and fleet typology emerging as key operational factors. Latitude reflected a strong north–south gradient in dolphin distribution and sampling effort, while the day of the season aligned with stranding peaks in mid-January and mid-February, indicating a pronounced seasonal component.

The results demonstrate that bycatch is not simply a function of overall fishing effort, but of specific combinations of gear characteristics, operational practices and spatio-temporal overlap with dolphin habitat. The approach provides a powerful tool for identifying high-risk areas, periods and fleet segments, and for prioritizing management actions targeting modifiable operational factors. However, important data gaps remain, notably in fine-scale horizontal and vertical distribution of dolphins and in the representation of small, very coastal vessels that are poorly covered by AIS. The study therefore underscores the need for broader and more representative monitoring, including high-resolution geolocation for all vessels and expanded observer or electronic monitoring coverage, to further refine risk assessments and support the design of targeted, evidence-based bycatch mitigation measures.

Co-Chair Murphy noted that many variables had similar effects (almost equal importance in the model) and asked why the analysis stopped at six variables. Ms Deslias replied that selecting six was an arbitrary choice, made in the absence of a formal rule for how many “important” features to display. Mr Evans asked why dolphin density ranked low in importance. Ms Deslias suggested this was likely due to strong collinearity with latitude, which was a top-ranked variable and could have absorbed density. Mr Evans added that the uncertainty in density estimates, stemming from non-comprehensive sampling, could also decrease the apparent importance of density. Co-Chair Caurant added that bycatch risk and events may be more closely tied to fishing activity and dolphins’ foraging behaviour than to density per se, especially at operational scales relevant to gear interactions.

Co-Chair Caurant referenced an earlier EU-funded pelagic trawl study PETRASET, which indicated higher bycatch rates when animals were present at higher densities. Co-Chair Murphy noted that captain decisions (e.g., choosing to fish in unsuitable areas on certain days) accounted for some of the higher bycatch rates observed in that study. Co-Chair Caurant emphasised that risk pathways differ by gear: pelagic trawl interactions versus gillnet entanglement represent distinct mechanisms, implying the need for gear-specific assessment and interpretation.

6.4. Update on activities of CIBBRiNA LIFE

Anne-Marie Svoboda (Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, Food Security and Nature, Netherlands) presented updates on the CIBBRiNA LIFE project. The CIBBRiNA project is a six-year European initiative aimed at reducing bycatch of marine megafauna through collaborative research and practical mitigation measures. Now two years into implementation, the project is structured around multiple work packages that support eight regional case studies across different fisheries.

A core principle of the project is the creation of a “Safe Working Environment” that promotes trust between scientists, managers, and the fishing industry. To encourage data sharing and cooperation, CIBBRiNA has developed a stakeholder engagement strategy, a code of conduct, and practical guidelines, including a video series demonstrating best practices for working with fishers. The project also collaborates closely with other European bycatch initiatives through joint webinars, workshops,

and shared methodologies, and is helping to organize an international conference on marine megafauna bycatch in 2027. Several key technical outputs have already been delivered. A comprehensive Bycatch Mitigation Toolkit has been published, summarizing available mitigation options for the fisheries involved. Work is also underway on a Decision Support Tool, supported by a survey collecting published and unpublished mitigation experiences. Progress has been made in bycatch assessment modeling, including the development of the SCOTTI and BEAM frameworks in collaboration with ICES, which aim to improve monitoring design and estimation of bycatch rates.

Four case studies are particularly relevant to cetaceans: northern and southern gillnet fisheries, UK static nets, and pelagic trawls. These include trials of acoustic pingers, alternative gears, passive acoustic monitoring, and excluder devices. Notably, engagement with pelagic trawl skippers has improved considerably, leading to successful mitigation trials for seal bycatch and growing cooperation across countries. Issues such as dolphin depredation have also been identified as a priority topic for future collaboration. Finally, the project is developing a long-term implementation roadmap to ensure that successful measures are adopted beyond the project lifetime. This includes policy recommendations, regulatory options, and alignment with EU and regional management processes. Overall, CIBBRiNA is making strong progress in combining scientific innovation with practical stakeholder engagement to support effective bycatch reduction across European waters.

In addition, a bycatch conference was planned for 2027. The seven major bycatch projects have coordinated and, while not yet officially published, the working plan is to hold the conference in the week of 11 October 2027 in Santiago de Compostela. Mr Simmonds noted that planned work on depredation should be brought urgently to ACCOBAMS, given the upcoming timetable. Co-Chair Murphy added that to support implementation of measures across all bycatch projects, one would be to develop a website that collates information across the ongoing projects; however, she noted that funding would be required to establish and maintain such a resource Ms Svoboda confirmed that funding and governance for the shared website are being discussed and emphasized the need for a dedicated conference web presence, ideally within a single site that aggregates all seven projects (REDUCE, Marine Beacon, Eco-catch, Marine Guardian, Sea4Future, and LIFE Prometheus) and conference information.

6.5. Update on the Marine Beacon Horizon project

Julia Calderwood (Marine Institute) presented an update on Marine Beacon, a Horizon Europe project now two years in, focused on the monitoring and elimination of bycatch of endangered and conserved species in the Northeast Atlantic and High Seas. She outlined the programme spanning knowledge gap identification, risk evaluation, next generation monitoring (AI/eDNA), mitigation, and stakeholder cocreation, with several components specifically targeting dolphins as described below.

WP3 — Identify & overcome knowledge gaps

- A gap analysis based on an ICES data call has compiled where bycatch records exist across European countries for marine mammals (including several dolphin species).
- Task 3.1 has assembled a knowledge matrix for PETs covering life history traits, current bycatch estimates, demographic parameters, and other key data to pinpoint where information is missing and prioritise future work (to be released shortly).
- A PhD is assessing conservation status of small cetaceans via life history characteristics.
- To address spatial knowledge gaps, partners are developing species distribution models (SDMs) for common dolphins in the Bay of Biscay, using annual oceanographic surveys and GAMs to map likely occurrence.

WP4 — Evaluate bycatch risk & vulnerability

- Using a bycatch risk assessment approach (referred to as “ByRA/buyer”), partners combine SDM outputs with fishing effort data to generate risk maps showing where species–gear interactions are most likely.
- Work is ongoing, with teams testing spatial resolution and binning choices that feed into the final risk products.

WP5 — Next generation monitoring (AI & eDNA)

- AI (image recognition): Building a large image library to support monitoring and mitigation (e.g., underwater cameras that can trigger escape panels for non-target species).
- eDNA: Partners are optimising protocols to detect common dolphin interactions with trawlers (Bay of Biscay) using passive samples (e.g., "metaprobes") on pair trawlers with observers. Early extractions from a small number of water samples, although amplified, did not detect dolphin DNA despite visual sightings during sampling—consistent with very low dolphin DNA relative to fish DNA. Teams will increase volumes, expand sample sizes, and, if still negative, test alternative water collection methods.

WP6 — Mitigation strategy to reduce bycatch

- Following a literature and expert review for cetaceans in active gears, acoustic pingers and enhanced "smart" technologies were identified as offering the best potential deterrence. These are now under test across the project, including in the Bay of Biscay with partners noted as AST.

WP7 — Integrate assessment & quantify effectiveness

- Developing best practices, conducting cost–benefit analyses, and ecosystem service evaluations for mitigation. (Details to be presented by Yasmin Viana in a later agenda item.)

WP8 — Stakeholder consultation & co-creation

- The project runs a bycatch mitigation platform inviting stakeholders, experts, industry, and the public to learn about project activities; contribute data, experiences, and practical insights; and engage via topic pages, discussions, surveys, and questionnaires.
- A live survey on acoustic pingers (led by Ms Viana) is collecting experience across Europe and beyond to inform comparative analysis of deterrent devices.

Ms Peltier highlighted opportunities to streamline the project's analyses for the Bay of Biscay. She noted that Denmark -led projects have already undertaken substantial redevelopment of fishing effort metrics for the region and suggested that Marine Beacon consult, compare, and potentially reuse these outputs to avoid duplication and save time—for example, by harmonising effort layers, definitions, and resolutions. She observed that Bycatch Risk Assessment (ByRA) is particularly well suited to data deficient contexts, whereas the Bay of Biscay is relatively data rich, and therefore more precise, advanced modelling frameworks might be more appropriate for bycatch risk analyses in this case.

Ms Peltier encouraged collaboration to leverage the extensive analyses completed within the Denmark project rather than redoing similar work. Ms Calderwood welcomed these suggestions and confirmed that Marine Beacon partners are early in their exploration of fisheries effort inputs for the Bay of Biscay, making this a timely moment to incorporate the Denmark project's metrics. On the modelling strategy, she explained that the team is benchmarking ByRA outputs against other risk assessment models—drawing on experience with seabirds in the Celtic Seas—and is adapting result presentation for data rich environments, with awareness of how methodological choice should reflect data availability and quality. She agreed that linking up with the Denmark project would be beneficial to accelerate delivery and avoid double work.

Evaluation of the deployment of ADDs for mitigation of PETS bycatch

Yasmin Viana (Atlantic Technological University) presented ongoing work undertaken for Task 7.1.2 *Evaluation of the deployment of ADDs for mitigation of PETS bycatch.* The project evaluates when and how acoustic deterrent devices (ADDs) can be safely and effectively deployed for bycatch mitigation, considering both efficacy and potential behavioural, physiological, and soundscape impacts. She distinguished warning type pingers used on set nets (tonal, narrowband, lower level, prone to habituation) from deterrent devices used around trawls/longlines (broadband, complex, high level, more effective but noisier). Captive trials suggest effectiveness wanes when food rewards are present, underscoring real world foraging trade-offs. A potential design pathway, quieter but sharper signals, may reduce noise while maintaining salience, though shorter range remains a constraint. Since April last year, the team has selected devices via a literature review and multi-country questionnaire. Next steps include securing (derogation) licences, collecting noise propagation/soundscape data, and modelling underwater propagation to assess effects on target

and nontarget fauna. Fieldwork will include moored pinger trials in Irish waters to validate sound modelling and real-world impacts. Yasmin invited collaboration on an EIA style best-practice framework for ADD deployment and welcomed loaned units from other groups for comparative testing.

Co-Chair Murphy noted that Ms. Viana has conducted a comprehensive review of available publications and developed a questionnaire to capture current practice. The next step is to contact all respondents to verify that relevant materials – including grey literature and non-public reports – are included, and to identify who is using which pingers, on what fishing gears, and where. She highlighted gaps in awareness, citing Ireland as an example where devices had been sold to fishers without national bodies (e.g., BIM) being aware. The aim is to build a regionwide inventory across ASCOBANS of pinger use and associated gear as part of the review. She added that participants who completed the questionnaire should expect follow-up within the next couple of weeks, and that the team may reach out to additional contacts in ASCOBANS countries to ensure sufficient coverage if needed.

6.6. Update on Horizon Marine Guardian

Ana Marcalo (CCMAR) presented an update on the Horizon Marine Guardian project.

The Marine Guardian Horizon Europe project (2025–2029) aims to develop and demonstrate innovative solutions to reduce fisheries bycatch and support sustainable fishing practices across multiple case studies in the Atlantic and Arctic Sea basin. Within the Bay of Biscay and Iberian Waters case study, common dolphin (*Delphinus delphis*) bycatch remains a recurrent conservation and management concern, including in Portuguese coastal fisheries. This presentation focused on ongoing work led by CCMAR to address cetacean bycatch in the Portuguese beach seine fishery ("xávega"), one of the country's most traditional fishing methods operating in shallow coastal waters, particularly during summer months. Although the use of acoustic deterrent devices (pingers) has been legally mandated in this fishery since 2020, no dedicated monitoring programme is currently in place and quantitative information on bycatch rates remains limited. Cetacean bycatch events, often highly visible when animals are brought ashore, continue to occur annually in some locations.

A preliminary assessment based on interviews covering approximately 50% of the licensed fleet indicated that bycatch involved exclusively common dolphins for 2024 and 2025, with fishers reporting that around 90% of individuals are released alive, although post-release condition and survival remain unknown. A pilot mitigation trial was conducted between August and November 2025 on three commercial vessels (≈16% of the fleet requiring pingers), testing two pinger brands (Future Oceans Netguard, 60–120 kHz; Fishtek Banana, 50–120 kHz) against a control condition using dummy devices. Preliminary results suggest a reduction in common dolphin bycatch rates in pinger deployments compared to controls, while dolphin sightings during hauls remained frequent in both treatments. Future work will refine device selection, expand trials, and integrate complementary monitoring tools (e.g., cameras and acoustics) to better understand drivers of bycatch and support evidence-based recommendations for improved mitigation and policy implementation.

Ms Viana asked about the comparison criteria she planned to use when deciding between the Fishtek "banana" pinger and the Future Oceans pinger for bycatch mitigation, and whether the decision would be based on overall performance. Ms Marcalo explained that while she has some preliminary results, the decision will not be made this year. She has not yet deployed hydrophones and aims to begin acoustic and video monitoring (cameras in the water) later this year, with a view to collecting at least three years of data before drawing firm conclusions. Current insights are constrained by a small sample size and the fact that the fishery is presently closed, with operations expected to restart in May, allowing further data collection. To date, the only incidental capture observed with pingers in place occurred with the Fishtek banana pinger. From an operational standpoint, fishers prefer the Future Oceans units, as pingers must pass through hauling devices and the Future Oceans models appear to work better within the hauling system. Ana intends to film animal behaviour in and around the nets to understand interactions with target fish and to deploy

hydrophones to measure acoustic profiles, with comprehensive evaluation and conclusions planned after a multi-year dataset is assembled.

6.7. PLOUF: Improving the accuracy of dolphin mortality estimation models through telemetric monitoring of their buoyancy

Hélène Peltier (La Rochelle University / Pelagis) provided an update on the PLOUF project, a three-year research initiative (2025–2028) aimed at improving estimates of common dolphin bycatch derived from stranding data. Funded by European fisheries and aquaculture programmes, the project is led by a French research team (La Rochelle University / Pelagis) in collaboration with the Laboratory of Computer Science, Robotics and Microelectronics at the University of Montpellier.

Current bycatch estimates rely on reverse drift modelling of stranded dolphins and on assumptions derived from plastic tags that have been deployed on carcasses since 2004. These tags have suggested that only around 31% of bycaught dolphins remain floating long enough to strand, but past deployments were largely opportunistic. A first objective of PLOUF is therefore to design a more representative and theoretically optimal sampling strategy for future tag deployments, using information on fishing effort and fleet strategies from existing observer programmes and recent French projects such as DELMOGES. The project will also assess the consequences of the gap between ideal sampling plans and real-world implementation for the interpretation of bycatch estimates.

A central component of PLOUF is the deployment of 50 new GPS tags on bycaught common dolphin carcasses over three winter seasons. These tags will provide full drift trajectories and include pressure sensors to monitor buoyancy, allowing researchers to determine whether carcasses float or sink, how rapidly they sink, and whether they may refloat. This will enable direct validation of the MOTHY drift model, which previously relied on only two fixed locations per individual. Deployments will be carried out by fisheries observers and volunteer fishers, supported by an online tracking platform, harbour outreach materials, and a €100 compensation per tag. Initial prototypes have already been tested successfully, and full deployment is expected to begin in the coming weeks.

Finally, PLOUF would conduct a comprehensive sensitivity analysis of the bycatch estimation chain to identify key sources of uncertainty and assess how they propagate through the modelling process. While major changes to sinking-rate estimates are not expected, the project should substantially improve understanding of the stranding process. In parallel, related work is extending bycatch estimation to the full common dolphin management unit across Spain, Portugal, France, the UK, Scotland and Ireland up to 2023, with the goal of producing harmonised bycatch estimates for the past 15 years.

Participants discussed the long computation times required for modelling the Celtic Sea. Ms Peltier explained that producing daily stranding probabilities for a single year takes roughly three weeks of computation, and a further three weeks are needed to estimate the likely origin of stranded individuals: about two months per year if scripts and data run without issues. The Celtic Sea requires more parameters at higher spatial–temporal resolution than Bay of Biscay or the Iberian Peninsula, with a lengthy initialization of the drift model. The team has also moved from calculating probabilities once every 10 days to once per day (then averaging), which is more representative but computationally heavier. In practice, a dedicated machine must be committed to these tasks for extended periods.

Co-Chair Murphy asked about tag deployments in the Celtic Sea. Ms Peltier noted there are no GPS tags planned there under PLOUF (focus is Bay of Biscay, possibly Western Channel). Under the CIBBRiNA project, plastic tags were distributed widely, but actual deployments occurred in Denmark and France, with one or two in Portugal; deployments elsewhere have proved operationally challenging. Tags were sent to UK fish observers (via Al Kingston), but none have been deployed to date; this may change next year. She confirmed that no tags are currently deployed in the Celtic Sea.

Co-Chair Murphy also asked about the revision to carcass buoyancy-related estimates. Ms Peltier clarified the corrective parameter has been updated to 31% (from 24%), based on an expanded plastic-tag dataset. Methodologically, carcasses predicted to strand by the drift model but not recovered within 25 days are treated as sunk, and the difference between predicted and recovered informs this correction. In terms of model sensitivity, she emphasized that the sinking/buoyancy correction (31%) is the largest corrective factor; for trajectory prediction, carcass buoyancy is the most influential parameter. With ~100 recoveries out of 455 tagged carcasses, the team plans simulation-based sensitivity analyses to test how parameter variation influences bycatch estimates.

Mr Brownlow asked which parameters most affect predictions and where data gaps remain; he suggested potential collaboration with SAMS/Ben Wilson's team (noting past tank experiments on buoyancy/windage). Ms Peltier responded that earlier real-world pontoon trials (on a harbour porpoise and a striped dolphin) examined decomposition and buoyancy, and drift predictions were most accurate when buoyancy was fixed at ~90%. She agreed that additional real-life cases would be valuable and was interested in expanding empirical datasets that could further constrain buoyancy and windage parameters.

7. Updates from other meetings on relevant intergovernmental work

7.1. ICES WGMME

Peter Evans (Chair of ASCOBANS North Sea Group / Sea Watch Foundation) presented updates from the ICES Working Group on Marine Mammal Ecology (WGMME) and the Working Group on Bycatch of Protected Species (WGBYC).

He presented recent research and survey efforts undertaken across the UK, Ireland, France, Spain, and Portugal to assess the distribution, abundance, and seasonal movements of common dolphins and other cetacean species. He covered the UK's Poseidon project, a three-year programme aimed at improving knowledge of offshore areas in the context of expanding offshore wind development. This project synthesised 25 years of vessel and aerial survey data, corrected for detectability, and produced new spatial models and density maps across seasons, revealing hotspots and gaps in coverage.

Results showed that in UK waters, common dolphin densities were consistently highest along the West Coast, particularly in the Celtic Seas and Hebrides. The species displays strong seasonal movements, entering the region both from northern and southern offshore waters, contradicting the earlier assumption that they migrated solely from the south. Ireland's Observer Programme data from 2021–2023 indicated higher summer numbers compared to winter, though comparisons across years were influenced by variation in survey conditions. Ongoing modelling work is examining discrepancies between design-based and model-based abundance estimates for Irish waters.

French, Spanish, and Portuguese datasets were also reviewed, drawing on multiple survey programmes such as SCANS, SAMM, PELGAS, and KEPT. These data highlight high densities of common dolphins along the shelf edge in the Bay of Biscay, particularly in winter, and show a general long-term increasing trend (around 10%) since 2007. Seasonal movements and species distributions continue to shift, influenced by changes in prey availability. Notable regime shifts include rising presence of sardines, anchovies, and associated predators such as bluefin tuna in northern areas.

He further presented work from the ICES Working Group on Bycatch (WGBYC), which is assessing bycatch rates, data quality, and mitigation measures across gear types and regions. Modelling efforts are improving estimates by analysing gear-specific impacts, though confidence intervals remain wide due to limited monitoring coverage and heterogeneous fishing practices. Case studies from the Bay of Biscay and Celtic Seas show progress in refining estimates, but significant data gaps remain, especially for gillnets and other static gears.

Co-Chair Murphy asked what years of data were used in producing the bycatch estimates within the BEAM assessment. Mr Evans explained that although he was not directly involved in that specific analytical component, his understanding was that the assessment included the most recent year plus several preceding years, likely covering around a five-year period. He noted that the exact details are documented in the report and offered to verify them.

Co-Chair Murphy then asked whether the recently completed UK analyses—specifically the Paxton et al. report—were publicly available. Mr Evans confirmed that Natural England and Defra are overseeing the release, that he had seen the latest draft, and that it should be published soon. A scientific paper based on the work is also planned for a later date. She also commented on linking strandings data with sightings data, and Mr Evans responded that this would be highly valuable. He noted that long-term datasets now show clear seasonal and long-term changes in distribution across UK waters, with particularly marked shifts in recent years. Co-Chair Murphy clarified whether the bycatch of over 100 animals for the North Sea for the purse seine fishery is happening in the channel itself or in the actual North Sea. Mr Evans responded it is primarily in the channel itself, maybe some in the northern North Sea.

Ms Matthews asked whether there are any known identifiable common dolphin individuals in the Irish Sea and whether it indicates site or regional fidelity. Mr Evans explained that through multispecies surveys – mostly conducted in summer due to weather constraints – his team had repeatedly photographed certain identifiable individuals over several years. Sample sizes remained small because only a limited number of dolphins could be reliably identified within large groups, but the re-sightings suggest at least some degree of regional fidelity.

Ms Matthews added that in her own research she had already documented seven re-sightings from several hundred individuals, indicating that even a small proportion of repeatedly encountered dolphins may be meaningful for understanding site fidelity. Mr Evans agreed and noted that wildlife tour operators in regions such as Penzance help generate regular photographic opportunities, improving the chances of building a useful catalogue of individuals.

7.2. ICES WGBYC

See 7.1.

7.3. IWC

Iain Staniland (International Whaling Commission (IWC)) presented on relevant discussions within the IWC. With the new Biennial meeting structure the IWC Scientific Committee (IWC-SC) has not met since SC69B in 2004. At this meeting, members expressed serious ongoing concern about common dolphin bycatch in the Bay of Biscay and Northeast Atlantic waters and scientific data indicating population-level impacts. The IWC-SC welcomed France's 2024-2026 spatial fisheries closures but emphasized that these data require further analysis and that current mitigation measures may be insufficient.

The SC recommended continuing efforts to estimate total annual bycatch, extending temporal closures to cover peak risk periods more completely, conducting additional seasonal pattern analysis, and using the three-year closure period to develop longer-term structural changes in fisheries management, including potential transitions to less harmful fishing gear types that support both dolphin conservation and sustainable fishing practices. The IWC-SC will be meeting in April-May 2026 where further discussions are likely to take place given the developments over the last few years.

Co-Chair Caurant asked whether the issue of common dolphin bycatch in the Bay of Biscay would be taken up again this year. Mr Staniland confirmed that, provided submissions are received, the topic will be placed on the agenda given strong member interest. Co-Chair Caurant added that the Delmoges project is concluding, so substantial new results and publications are anticipated, which should feed into that agenda item.

Ms Matthews asked how long it might take to move from a data deficient status to a formal vulnerability assessment in regions where data are lacking. Mr Staniland noted that while the IUCN leads Red List classifications, the IWC has now completed its first small cetacean assessment, demonstrating that such assessments are feasible for small cetaceans; however, they require robust inputs (e.g., bycatch rates and abundance estimates) and typically take four to six years to complete, and an assessment for common dolphins is not currently on the IWC's radar. Co-Chair Caurant added that numerous results exist, but timelines remain uncertain; forthcoming outputs will be presented to the European Commission, after which next steps should become clearer.

Co-Chair Murphy explained that no Red List assessment has been conducted at the North Sea level for common dolphins, so they are not formally classified as data deficient there. She emphasized that IUCN regional assessments can appear biased toward higher risk populations and outlined ongoing work: data collation at the ASCOBANS level and a review under the Habitats Directive to enable a transboundary assessment and produce consolidated conclusions on overall status. She underscored that, for the Northeast Atlantic, common dolphins should not be considered data deficient, though key knowledge gaps, particularly regarding range and population structure, continue to constrain comprehensive assessment.

8. Update on other work on any hazardous substances, causes of mortality, health status, nutritional status, diet or life history analysis on the common dolphin

Organohalogen of emerging concern in Common Dolphin

Co-Chair Caurant referred participants to ASCOBANS/CDG6/Inf.6.3, which contained the information about the paper she was going to present.

Differential accumulation of per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) and legacy organochlorines in Common Dolphins from the Celtic Seas ecoregion

Shannon Finnegan (Atlantic Technological University) presented.

This study employed *Delphinus delphis* as an indicator species to assess per and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) in Irish waters. Further analysis assessed the burdens of legacy pollutants polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) and Dichloro-diphenyl-trichloroethane (DDT). Finally, an integrated approach explored the potential inter and intra tissue interactions between pollutants. The results emphasize the use of hepatic tissue as the optimal matrix for PFAS sampling. Furthermore, across all sexual maturity groups, the PFAS congeners with the highest concentrations were PFOS and PFOSA. Longer chain PFAS congeners were proportionally higher in mature individuals and this was among further observable patterns related to age, sex, and sexual maturity. The PCB suites analyzed in earlier sample series highlight the potential importance of CBs 149 and 187 which are excluded from the ICES7. Individual blubber PCB concentrations remain below the highest reported threshold but exceed the threshold for the onset of toxicological symptoms in two individuals. Concentrations of PCBs and DDT metabolite p,p'-DDE support bioaccumulation and maternal offloading hypotheses. The integrated approach showed little correlation between PFAS and legacy organochlorines highlighting differences in binding affinity and lipophilicity. This emphasizes the need for further research on PFAS in common dolphins, as well as PFAS in the context of other marine pollutants.

Participants discussed whether the higher diversity of PFAS observed in liver versus blubber reflected the presence of metabolites or original compounds, which could not be said definitively at this stage. Ms Finnegan explained they analyzed a suite of 32 PFAS congeners, but only seven were quantifiable across all individuals; many were detected but not quantifiable, and two congeners appeared only in blubber and not in liver. She emphasized that, consistent with broader PFAS uncertainties, the physiological implications of these distribution patterns are not yet clear.

Participants wondered why immature males showed higher PFAS concentrations than mature males, which runs counter to expectations from other pollutants. Ms Finnegan agreed this was unusual; unlike lipophilic pollutants, PFAS are protein-philic, and differences in protein turnover or metabolic processing could influence burdens, but current evidence is sparse across species. Co-Chair Caurant suggested that immature enzymatic systems might metabolize PFAS differently, though this remains hypothetical. Co-Chair Murphy added that the group also observed higher levels in juvenile males than juvenile females, aligning with literature suggesting males may be more susceptible and females may have greater metabolic capacity for certain pollutants. She noted this was a pilot study (with the Marine Institute) intended to gauge PFAS levels in marine mammals and inform indicator development. She highlighted preliminary recommendations for OSPAR: to include additional PFAS (e.g., PFOS) in monitoring suites and to refine congener groupings (e.g., by chain length/carbon number) beyond approaches used for lower-trophic biota.

Facultative generalist foraging strategies of Common Dolphins in the Celtic Seas ecoregion

Sofia Albrecht (ATU) presented about blubber cortisol levels and foraging ecology of common dolphins in the Celtic Seas ecoregion.

In relation to a health issue in the Celtic Seas ecoregion, which was previously identified through a decline in body condition, increased cases of disease, and relatively high stomach parasite loads, we investigated the application of cortisol as a physiological biomarker and examined dietary variation in common dolphins.

To explore blubber cortisol as a health marker while improving the general application of blubber cortisol techniques, cortisol concentrations were quantified from blubber tissue using a simplified extraction protocol followed by a commercial enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay, with key validation steps undertaken. While further refinement of the method is required to improve accuracy and reduce variability, this approach showed promise for more efficient application in future health assessments. Analysis of 71 dolphins stranded along the Irish coastline between 2017 and 2019 revealed clear age-related differences in cortisol concentrations. Automatically selected generalised linear models indicated that cortisol was significantly higher in sexually immature individuals and negatively correlated with body length, suggesting that developmental or metabolic processes, alongside stress-related factors, may strongly influence cortisol levels in younger animals. Cortisol concentrations also varied across nutritional status and cause of death, with lower concentrations observed in individuals in good nutritional condition and those that died from acute trauma, compared to higher concentrations in animals with moderate to poor nutritional status and those that died from infectious disease or starvation. However, following automated model selection, maturity status together with body length were the only variables explaining significant differences in cortisol concentration. Larger sample sizes and further methodological development may enable detection of the influence of nutritional status and cause of death.

Dietary analyses provided complementary insights into the ecological context of these health patterns. Using stomach content data from 138 individuals collected over three decades, changes in dietary composition, trophic level, energy intake, and foraging strategy were examined in relation to biological and temporal variables. Contemporary diets were found to be less reliant on *Trisopterus* spp. compared to earlier periods, while showing increased prey diversity and higher species richness. Costello diagrams indicated a shift towards a more generalist foraging strategy with a wider trophic niche in the recent period. These changes likely reflect alterations in prey availability, ecosystem structure, and foraging constraints in the Celtic Seas ecoregion. Overall, common dolphins were identified as facultative generalists, with *Trisopterus* spp. remaining the most important prey. Despite limitations of morphological dietary methods, which capture only a portion of daily energy intake, the results highlight shifts in foraging ecology that are essential for understanding current health challenges and informing ecosystem-based management.

Participants discussed how cortisol can be used to define stress levels in the species, specifically whether cortisol differs between bycaught animals (acute stress) and those stranded with disease (chronic stress). Ms Albrecht noted that prior work in the western Pacific reported higher cortisol in

stranded than in bycaught animals, and their dataset showed a similar pattern, but it was not statistically significant or a strong explanatory variable in their models. She added that this may reflect methodological constraints.

Participants also discussed a notable dietary change, noting that over roughly two decades they observed a shift toward lower energy prey in common dolphins (with no evidence of compensatory increases in prey quantity) and that related findings had been published by the Pelagis team; Co-Chair Caurant offered to share the publication. Co-Chair Murphy explained that they emphasized prey counts rather than weight in the main model due to otolith erosion, which made biomass extrapolations less reliable. However, the paper also included estimates of prey weight consumed.

Body condition of Common Dolphins off Galicia

Ms Petitguyot presented a study examining long-term changes in the body condition of stranded common dolphins along the Galician coast in northwest Spain.

She explained that this region has undergone pronounced oceanographic and ecological changes in recent decades, including shifts in plankton and fish communities linked to climate variability. Previous work has shown that common dolphins off Galicia have altered their trophic ecology, expanding their dietary niche, feeding closer to shore, and increasing consumption of higher-trophic-level prey such as hake. The present study aimed to determine whether these ecological changes have translated into measurable effects on dolphin health, using body condition as a proxy in the absence of long-term pathological data. The analysis was based on morphometric data from 521 stranded dolphins recorded by the Galician stranding network (CEMMA) between 1998 and 2019. Two body condition indices (BCIs) were calculated from residuals of models relating body length to blubber thickness and girth measurements.

Temporal trends in body condition were assessed while accounting for potential confounding factors, including sex, season, reproductive status, decomposition state, stranding location, and evidence of bycatch. Generalised additive models were used to explore relationships with trophic variables (prey composition, availability, and quality) and environmental drivers such as sea surface temperature, upwelling intensity, chlorophyll-a concentration, and the North Atlantic Oscillation. The two BCIs were only moderately correlated, indicating that they captured different aspects of body condition and can be used complementarily. Both indices revealed a similar long-term trend in males, with improving condition from 1998 to around 2009–2010 followed by a steady decline until 2019, whereas no significant temporal trend was detected in females. The indices successfully distinguished animals in good versus poor condition based on bycatch evidence. The blubber-based index showed sensitivity to season and reproductive status, while the girth-based index was more stable.

Participants discussed sex differences in diet, wondering which sex appears to consume higher quality prey—whether females might target higher quality items due to reproductive demands, or whether all male groups could be following a distinct feeding strategy. Ms Petitguyot noted she would review the data in detail and respond by email. Participants also discussed when animals might be most vulnerable, considering the intersection of environmental temperatures, physiological resilience, and prey availability. Ms Petitguyot explained that, based on current analyses, dolphins may be more vulnerable from late summer into early autumn. This period coincides with post-summer recovery of blubber thickness, requiring higher energy intake as animals rebuild reserves. In Galicia, this timing aligns with a decline in sea surface temperature, a pattern visible in the dataset and consistent with the literature. She added that the annual low point in prey availability has not yet been determined and will be investigated further.

Co-Chair Murphy noted that related work found thinnest blubber in autumn for common dolphins in the Celtic Seas ecoregion, and cautioned that reproductive status can confound girth-based metrics. She asked whether pregnant females were excluded from analyses, which Ms Petitguyot confirmed. She added that decomposition state was carefully screened due to its potential to inflate girth and had not biased body condition outcomes. She noted plans to use a combination of indices for Galicia,

emphasizing that the Galician dataset differs from the Celtic/UK datasets used in prior work. Specifically, Galicia does not show a straightforward ventral blubber thickness–length relationship, which means the team accounts for length effects and uses residuals to isolate body condition for more reliable comparisons.

Life history traits and bycatch vulnerability of common dolphin populations in Southern Atlantic Iberia (Portugal)

Jan Hofman (Universidade do Algarve) presented research on the life history traits of common dolphins in southern Portugal and how these traits influence vulnerability to bycatch. He explained that this work is part of a broader PhD project aimed at improving understanding of small cetacean ecology in southern Atlantic Iberian waters to better inform conservation and fisheries management. The study analysed a 46-year national stranding dataset. Common dolphins were identified as by far the most frequently stranded cetacean species in the region, greatly exceeding other species such as striped and bottlenose dolphins, minke whales and harbour porpoises. Strandings were spatially clustered near major fishing grounds and in areas where the continental shelf is narrow, particularly along the western portion of the study area. Investigations into causes of death indicated that bycatch is a major driver of mortality for common dolphins in southern Portugal, supporting a strong link between strandings and fisheries interactions.

To assess which segments of the population were most affected, the study combined biological and demographic analyses. Gonadal histology was used to determine sexual maturity, while tooth histology provided age estimates. These life history traits were then compared with documented causes of death. Preliminary results from samples collected between 2021 and early 2025 showed that recent stranding patterns remain consistent with long-term trends. Females slightly outnumbered males in the sample, and a wide range of reproductive states was recorded. Early findings suggested sex-specific differences in bycatch vulnerability. Females from nearly all age and maturity classes appeared affected, whereas very few mature males were recorded, possibly indicating later sexual maturity in males and prolonged exposure to bycatch risk during immature stages. Estimates of female size and age at maturity aligned with other regions, though individuals in southern Portugal may be slightly smaller. Conclusions for males remained tentative due to limited sample size. The study used spatial kernel density analyses to identify clear bycatch and stranding hotspots near major ports and fishing areas along the Algarve coast. Ongoing and future work will expand sampling, including collaboration with the ARROJAL network along the Alentejo coast, to strengthen inferences about demographic patterns and bycatch vulnerability across southwestern Portugal.

Co-Chair Caurant clarified whether the life history presented was for bycaught individuals or all stranded individuals. Mr Hofman confirmed that it was for all stranded individuals. Co-Chair Caurant asked whether there was any segregation for bycaught individuals, whether there are some parts of the population with a higher frequency of bycatch. Mr Hofman clarified that they have not looked at it as a whole yet, as they were just focusing on trying to get a picture of what the situation looks like, where they observed bycatch as still the main concern in Portugal.

Using the ICES SmartDots platform to conduct ageing cross-reading exercises of cetacean teeth

Co-Chair Murphy (ATU) presented on the use of the ICES SmartDots platform to improve consistency in ageing small cetaceans through collaborative cross-reading of tooth samples. The presentation focused on methodological challenges in estimating age from Growth Layer Groups (GLGs) in odontocete teeth, particularly for common dolphins and harbour porpoises, and proposed SmartDots as a potential solution. Age estimation in small cetaceans relies on counting GLGs in tooth dentine, a well-established approach that is nevertheless subject to multiple sources of uncertainty. Factors such as mineralization interference, marker lines, cemental resorption, pulp stones, and regional differences in tooth structure can complicate interpretation. Harbour porpoise teeth from the North Sea were highlighted as especially difficult to read compared with those from

other regions, raising concerns about regional bias. Common dolphin teeth are typically clearer, but ageing older individuals remains challenging due to pulp stones and compression of growth layers near the pulp cavity.

To assess reliability, studies were conducted on captive dolphins of known or minimum known age. Teeth from long-term captive individuals in New Zealand were processed using different preparation techniques. In one dolphin that lived at least 31 years, GLG counts were consistent with its known age, but extremely narrow growth layers near the pulp cavity suggested that ages of older animals (>30 years) may be underestimated once the pulp cavity becomes nearly closed. Another dolphin held for 33 years showed abnormal tooth structures and reduced calcium deposition, possibly linked to systemic stress or osteoporosis, illustrating how physiological condition can further complicate age determination.[6]

Given the importance of accurate age data for population modelling and conservation assessments, she proposed adapting the ICES SmartDots platform for cetacean ageing. SmartDots allows multiple experienced readers to independently annotate the same digital tooth images and compare results, supporting quality assurance and calibration across laboratories. The proposed exercise would involve voluntary participation, is unfunded, and is intended for experienced age readers rather than training purposes. If sufficient interest exists, an initial inter-laboratory calibration exercise could be organized, focusing on common dolphins and harbour porpoises, with the aim of improving confidence and consistency in age data used across the Northeast Atlantic.

Co-Chair Caurant emphasized the need for intercalibration across teams and noted that Pelagis could contribute to this effort. Co-Chair Murphy responded that a free ILVO-developed tool, further adapted within ICES, can standardize ageing analyses, overlay age classes, and automate calculations/statistics, making it well suited for collaborative calibration. Co-Chair Caurant cautioned that ageing work remains time consuming. Co-Chair Murphy agreed, citing hundreds of teeth currently being processed at ATU, and stressing that, despite the workload, ageing is foundational to many studies.

9. Updates on other relevant work

9.1. Discussion on a Transboundary Assessment for the common dolphin for reporting under article 17 of the EU Habitats Directive, with updates by countries on their reporting under Article 17

A subgroup was established in 2024 to explore the possibility of producing a transboundary conservation status assessment for the common dolphin to support reporting under Article 17 of the EU Habitats Directive. The subgroup includes representatives from Ireland, the UK, France, Spain and Portugal and met several times to discuss methodology and coordination. Following initial meetings, the group sought formal guidance from DG Environment on how such a transboundary assessment could be undertaken and how the reporting templates should be completed.

During discussions with DG Environment, it was clarified that UK data cannot be included in official transboundary assessments submitted under Article 17. As a result, and given that many Member States had not yet finalised their national assessments, it was agreed that a formal transboundary assessment would not be feasible for the current 2025 reporting round. The subgroup therefore decided to postpone the official process and instead consider developing an informal, collaborative transboundary assessment that would include UK data for scientific purposes.

Updates were provided by countries on the status of their national assessments. Ireland reported an overall “Favourable” conservation status for 2025, largely based on positive assessments of population size and range, although gaps were noted regarding pollutants and other pressures. The UK also reported a “Favourable” status, driven mainly by recent increases in range and population.

[6] Murphy, S., Perrott, M., Mcvee, J., Read, F., Stockin, K. (2014). Deposition of growth layer groups in dentine tissue of captive common dolphins Delphinus delphis. NAMMCO Scientific Publications. 8. 10.7557/3.3017.

Portugal confirmed that it maintained the same classification as in the previous reporting round, assessed as “Unfavourable–Inadequate,” largely due to ongoing bycatch concerns. Spain indicated that its assessment remained “Unknown,” pending final confirmation from national authorities. France was unable to provide an update at the meeting due to technical issues and internal constraints, but did follow up with this after the meeting noting the outcome of their assessment.

The subgroup agreed to continue compiling and comparing national reports in order to identify differences in methodology and data interpretation. Further meetings will be organised to review the assessments in detail and to determine a common approach for a future transboundary evaluation that integrates data from both EU Member States and the UK. Progress on this collaborative assessment is expected to be reported later in the year.

9.2. Discussion on the development of a strategic bycatch reduction plan

Co-Chair Murphy reported that a list of materials for review has been compiled and a subgroup has been established, but the work is currently on hold because no coordinator has been appointed. She offered to circulate links to relevant presentations to support preparation, noting that the three-year closure period is approaching its end, and it would be timely to bring everyone together soon.

Amanda Perez Perera (European Commission) explained that the delegated acts setting the one-month closure for common dolphin and other small cetaceans in the Bay of Biscay during 2024-2026 were adopted on the basis of the regionalisation approach set in the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP). The procedure is the following:

- The South-Western Waters Member States group (i.e. Belgium, France, the Netherlands, Portugal, and Spain) discuss bycatch mitigation measures for common dolphins, and the result is adopted as a Joint Recommendation by the group.
- The Commission assesses the joint recommendation and consults its scientific body, i.e. the Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries (STECF).
- If the STECF is favourable, the Commission launches the adoption procedure for delegated acts (around 2 months) and then consults the European Parliament and the Council (for these acts, the scrutiny period is 4 months).
- If the STECF raises concerns, the Commission reverts to the SWW MS group asking clarifications and/or additional information. The adoption of the delegated act may be delayed.

Therefore, for a delegated act to enter into force before the end of the calendar year, the joint recommendation needs to be adopted by end of May and assessed by the STECF at its summer plenary at the latest (early July). The Commission then adopts the act by early September, and the scrutiny period runs for 4 months (September-December).

With regard to measures for 2027, the workplan of the SWW MS group is under discussion. But ideally, ASCOBANS recommendations should be available during the first quarter of the year and no later than May (before adoption of a possible joint recommendation).

Ms Murphy reiterated that progress is stalled pending a coordinator and suggested that ASCOBANS should develop a plan to move this forward, though this will depend on securing funding to formalize the subgroup.

Co-Chair Murphy proposed convening again in a few weeks, contingent on presentations being made available. She noted that additional data from France for last year are still needed, after which the group can identify remaining gaps for the current year. She offered to help facilitate, referenced possible contributions from the Southwestern Waters, and underscored that the subgroup must be supplied with presentations and associated information to craft sound recommendations.

Co-Chair Murphy added that if the Southwestern Waters can contribute to the subgroup, it would enable joint progress; Ms Perera said she would need to consult the Southwestern Waters on this. Co-Chair Murphy aimed to schedule a meeting in the coming weeks and suggested grounding the discussion in best practice, including reviewing approaches used in the United States—where, she noted, programmes are years ahead—and obtaining up-to-date monitoring information. Ms Pocheau asked whether the session would be open; Co-Chair Murphy welcomed participation from anyone interested.

Mr Simmonds asked what, specifically, is not working in the U.S. approach and what should be reviewed. Co-Chair Murphy responded that she was relaying comments from Paul Wade rather than offering a detailed critique, but added that she appreciates the U.S. model's use of explicit timebound targets (e.g., six-month and five-year milestones) and its attention to the timing of actions to maximize effectiveness.

10. Any Other Business

Nothing was raised under this agenda item.

11. Review of Activities Table

The Activities Table was not ready for review at the time of the meeting and was therefore not addressed during the meeting.

12. Review and update of Recommendations

Participants exchanged views on possible recommendations, updating and building on those developed by CDG5. The agreed Recommendations would be sent to the ASCOBANS Advisory Committee for adoption via email correspondence.

The adopted Recommendations are contained in Annex 1 to this report, and available on the ASCOBANS website.

13. Election of CDG Co-Chairs

Co-Chair Caurant informed she was stepping down, and received thanks for her many years of service. The Secretariat sought for nominations for the new Co-Chair, but none came forward. The Secretariat would follow up on nominations via email. Co-Chair Murphy volunteered to continue in the post, and there were no objections.

14. Date and venue of the 6th Meeting of the Common Dolphin Group

Ms Renell suggested a two-day meeting to be held in person, as the last meeting in-person was held in 2019. No country volunteered to host, so the Secretariat would follow up via email correspondence.

Participants discussed potential complexities with holding an in-person meeting, providing considerations to take into account such as the length of the meeting, combining it with a workshop, and the option of a hybrid meeting. There was interest to have a workshop-type meeting on several topics over two days.

15. Closure of the Meeting

Co-Chair Murphy thanked Co-Chair Caurant for her excellent chairing over these years. She declared the meeting closed on 14 January 2026 at 16:40 CET.

Annex 1:

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 Capecet 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 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*)	Long-term	Medium
Bycatch			

CDG6 /Rec#	Recommendation	**Long-/short-term** + Deadline if possible	**Priority (High / Medium / Low)**
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 combat bycatch. Collaborative and inclusive approaches in developing mitigation strategies should be applied at all stages of the process. (CDG4/Rec8)	Immediate action; long-term activity	High
12.	Parties and non-Party Range States are encouraged to continue to review and test a range of mitigation options to	Long-term	High

CDG6 /Rec#	Recommendation	Long-/short-term + Deadline if possible	Priority (High / Medium / Low)
	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*)		
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 metiers 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
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.

Annex 2:

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

MEMBERS OF STEERING GROUP

Name	Affiliation	Email
France		
Florence CAURANT	CDG Co-Chair / La Rochelle University / Pelagis	fcaurant@univ-lr.fr
Hélène PELTIER	La Rochelle University / Pelagis	hpeltier@univ-lr.fr
Ireland		
Sinéad MURPHY	CDG Co-Chair / Atlantic Technological University (ATU)	sinead.murphy@atu.ie
Portugal		
Catarina EIRA	Universidade de Aveiro - CESAM	catarina.eira@ua.pt
Marina SEQUEIRA	Institute of Nature Conservation and Forests	marina.sequeira@icnf.pt
Antonio TEIXEIRA	DGRM / Marine Administration / Environmental Dept.	teixeira.apt@gmail.com
Spain		
Paula GUTIÉRREZ	Instituto Español de Oceanografía - Centro Oceanográfico de Canarias (IEO-CSIC)	paula.gutierrez@ieo.csic.es
United Kingdom		
Emily MARTIN	Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC)	emily.martin@jncc.gov.uk
IGOs		
Amanda PEREZ PERERA	European Commission	Amanda.PEREZ-PERERA@ec.europa.eu
Iain STANILAND	International Whaling Commission (IWC)	iain.staniland@iwc.int
NGOs		
Simon BERROW	Irish Whale and Dolphin Group	simon.berrow@iwdg.ie
Peter EVANS	Chair of ASCOBANS North Sea Group / Sea Watch Foundation	peter.evans@bangor.ac.uk
Nicola HODGINS	Mara	nicolahodgins@hotmail.com
Eunice PINN	NatureScot	eunice.pinn@nature.scot
Mark SIMMONDS	OceanCare	mark.simmonds@sciencegyre.co.uk

INVITED EXPERTS

Sofia ALBRECHT	Atlantic Technological University	sofia0albrecht@gmail.com
Germain BOUSSARIE	Ifremer	germain.boussarie@ifremer.fr
Andrew BROWNLOW	SMASS/University of Glasgow	andrew.brownlow@glasgow.ac.uk
Julia CALDERWOOD	Marine Institute	julia.calderwood@marine.ie
Gemma O'CONNOR	Irish Whale and Dolphin Group	gemma.oconnor@iwdg.ie
Rob DEAVILLE	Institute of Zoology	rob.deaville@ioz.ac.uk

INVITED EXPERTS *(continued)*

Name	Affiliation	Email
Camille DESLIAS	Pelagis La Rochelle University	camille.deslias75@gmail.com
Joan GIMÉNEZ	Instituto Español de Oceanografía - Centro Oceanográfico de Canarias (IEO-CSIC)	joan.gimenez@csic.es
Rachel LENNON	SMASS/University of Glasgow	r.lennon.3@research.gla.ac.uk
Stephanie LEVESQUE	Irish Whale and Dolphin Group	stephanie.levesque@iwdg.ie
Ana MARÇALO	Centre of Marine Sciences (CCMAR)	amarcalo@ualg.pt
Marie PETITGUYOT	Institute of Marine Research - Spanish National Research Council	mpetitguyot@iim.csic.es
Anne-Marie SVOBODA	Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, Food Security and Nature of the Netherlands	a.m.svoboda@minlnv.nl
Amélia VIRICEL	LEMAR - University of Western Brittany	viricelpa@univ-brest.fr

OTHER

Name	Affiliation	Email
Shannon FINNEGAN	Atlantic Technological University	shannon.finnegan@imbrsea.eu
Léni GUILLOTIN	Comité National des Pêches Maritimes et des Elevages Marins (CNPMEM)	lguillotin@comite-peches.fr
Aurélien HENNEVEUX	Producer Organization Pêcheurs d'Aquitaine- Southern Western Waters Advisory Council	aurelien.henneveux@pecheursdaquitaine.eu
Alberto HERNÁNDEZ GONZÁLEZ	Institute of Marine Research (IIM-CSIC)	ahernandez@iim.csic.es
Jan HOFMAN	Universidade do Algarve	Jdhofman@ualg.pt
Margaux HONNORE	Comité National des Pêches Maritimes et des Elevages Marins (CNPMEM)	mhonnore@comite-peches.fr
Sarah MATTHEWS	Dolphin Zone CIC	sarah@dolphinzone.org
Georgia NOVAK	ATU Galway / Marine Beacon	georgia.novak@research.atu.ie
Chloé POCHEAU	EU South Western Waters Advisory Council	cpocheau@cc-sud.eu
Quiterie SOURGET	Producer organization "Les Pêcheurs de Bretagne" / SWACC member	quiterie.sourget@pecheursdebretagne.eu
Yasmin VIANA	Atlantic Technological University	yasmin.vianapinto@atu.ie

SECRETARIAT

Jenny RENELL	ASCOBANS Coordinator	jenny.renell@un.org
Melanie JAKUTTEK	Programme Management Assistant	melanie.jakuttek@un.org
Louisa BREIMANN	Consultant, CMS Aquatic Species Team	louisa.breimann@un.org
Daan DE LEUR	Consultant, CMS Aquatic Species Team	jennifer.deleur@un.org
Catriona FERGUSON	Intern, CMS Aquatic Species Team	catriona.ferguson@un.org
Emily MARTENS-OBERWELLAND	Intern, CMS Aquatic Species Team	emily.martens-oberwelland@un.org
Claire WILLIAMSON	Intern, CMS Aquatic Species Team	claire.williamson@un.org