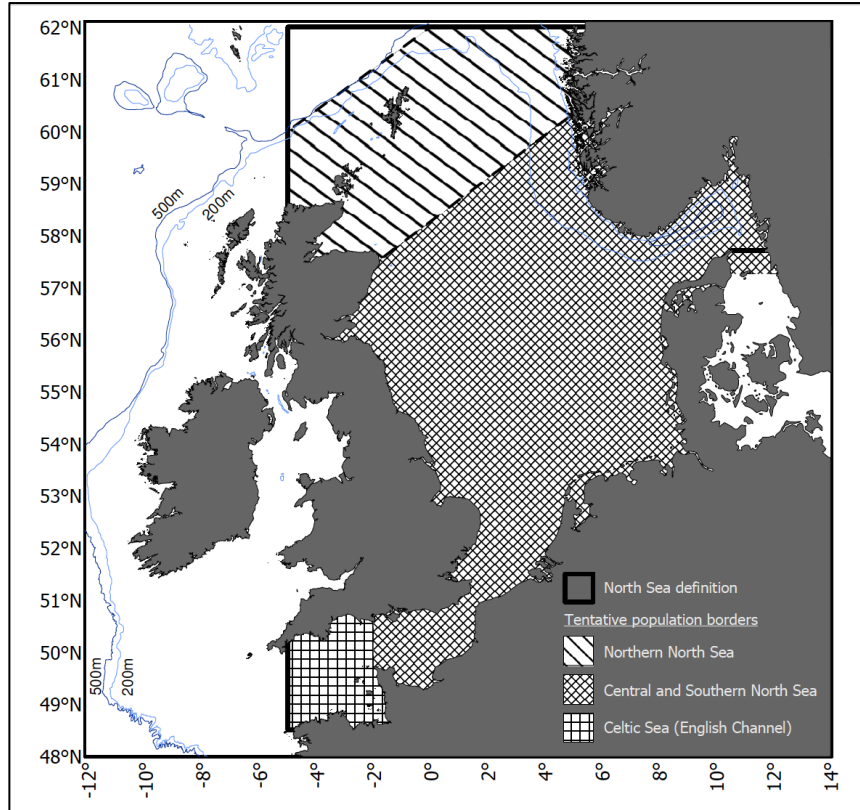


Agreement on the Conservation of Small Cetaceans
of the Baltic, North East Atlantic, Irish and North Seas



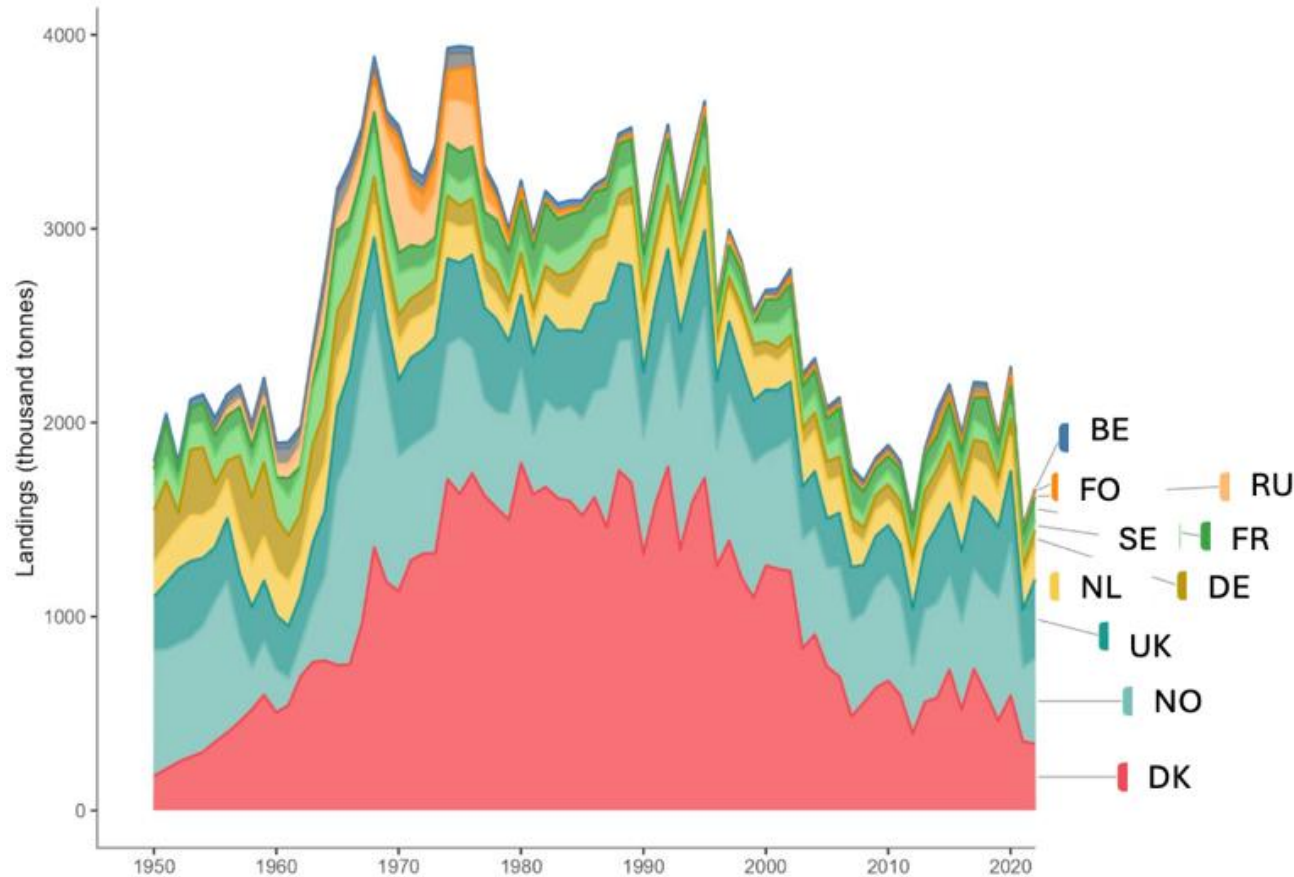
Conservation Plan Action Points

RES-01	Identify priority bycatch issues and relevant stakeholders	ESSENTIAL
RES-02	Improve estimates of bycatch rates to support development of conservation strategy	ESSENTIAL
MIT-01	Implement and assess pinger and other mitigation measures to reduce bycatch	ESSENTIAL
MON-01	Implement wide-scale surveillance programme to monitor distribution & abundance trends	HIGH
RES-03	Improve understanding of seasonal & annual variation in distribution & abundance	HIGH
MON-02	Monitor health and nutritional status, diet, life history parameters, and causes of mortality	HIGH
RES-04	Further understanding of population structure	MEDIUM
MIT-02	Improve understanding of and develop mitigation for the risks of anthropogenic sound	MEDIUM
MON-03	Ensure screening & assessment of occurrence & effects of hazardous substances	MEDIUM
MON-04	Monitor for potential increases in anthropogenic activities that lead to death, injury or adverse health effects	LOW
MON-05	Monitor habitat quality, including protected sites, to ensure management is effective and that the ecological functions are maintained	LOW

Identify the priority bycatch issues and relevant stakeholders (RES-01)

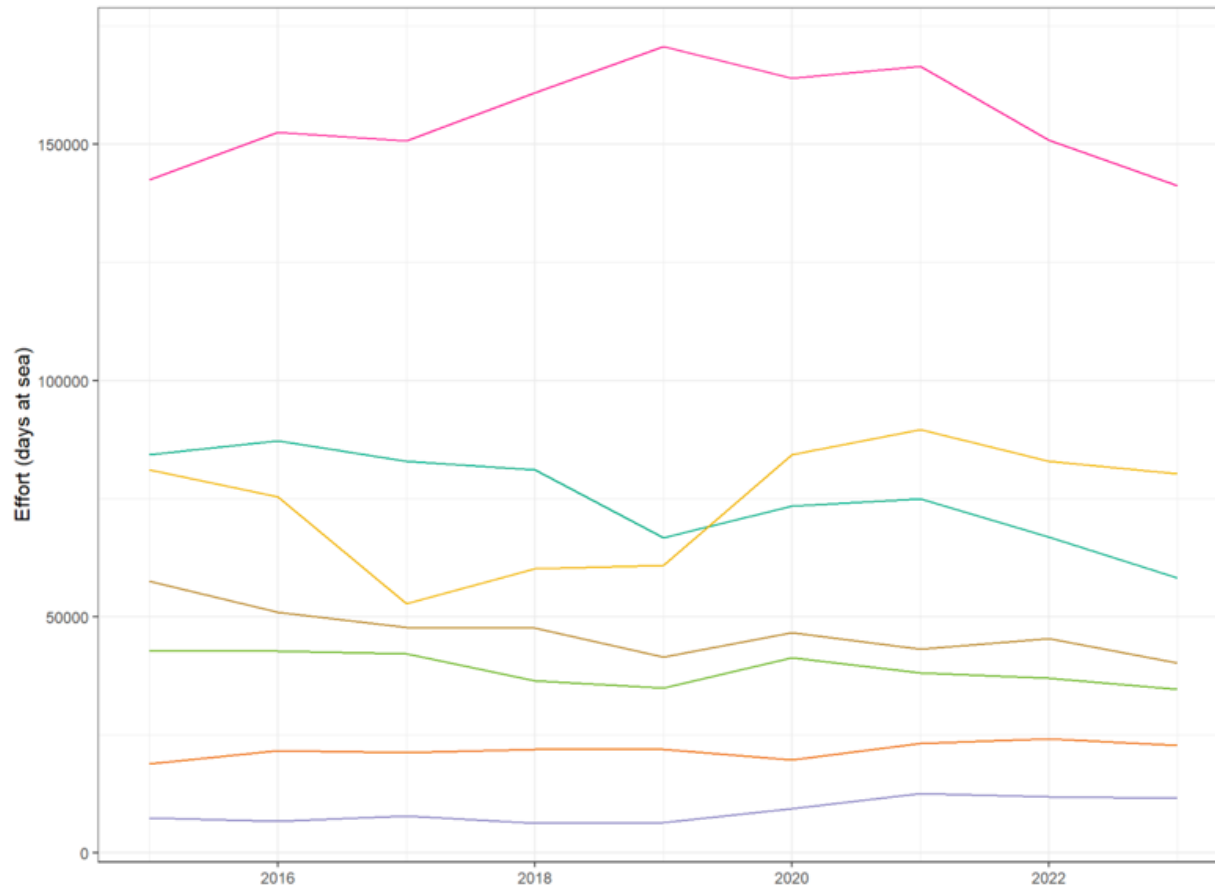


Landings by Country 1950-2022



Source:
ICES (2025)

Identify the priority bycatch issues and relevant stakeholders (RES-01)



Fishing Effort by Gear Type 2015-2023

- Beam trawl
- Dredge
- Other
- Otter trawl/seine
- Pelagic trawl/seine
- Pots
- Static/Gill net/long line

Source:
ICES (2025)

Identify the priority bycatch issues and relevant stakeholders (RES-01)



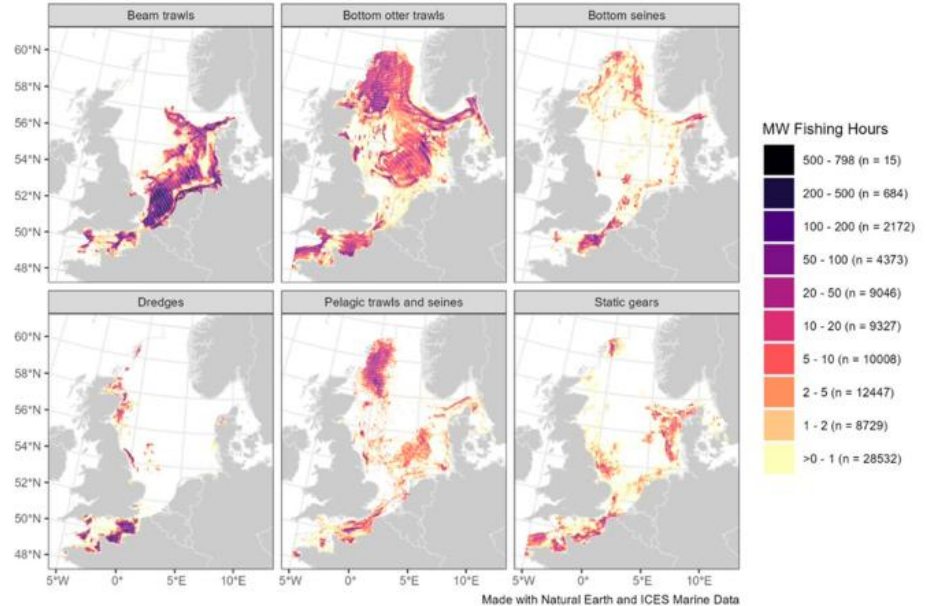
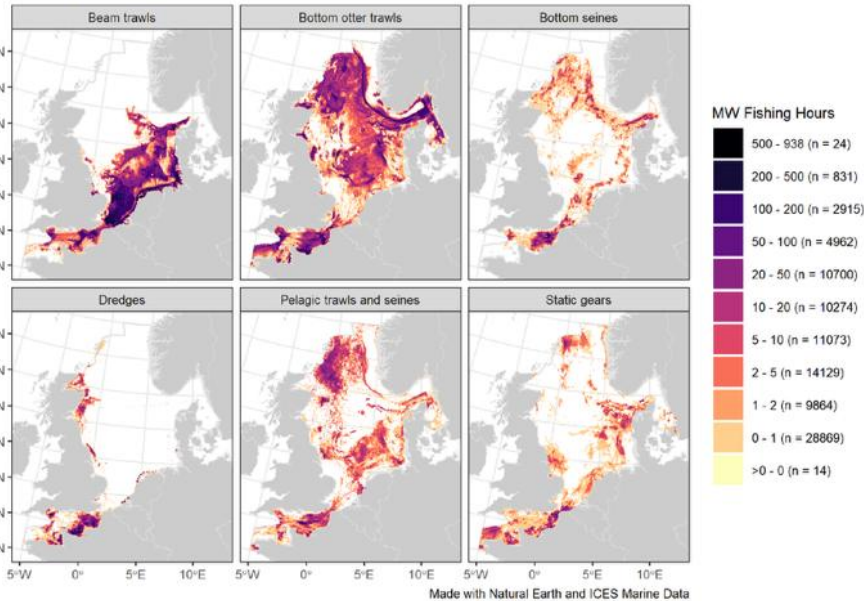
Fishing Effort Trends in the Greater North Sea

2015-18

2019-22

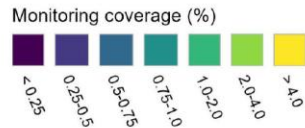
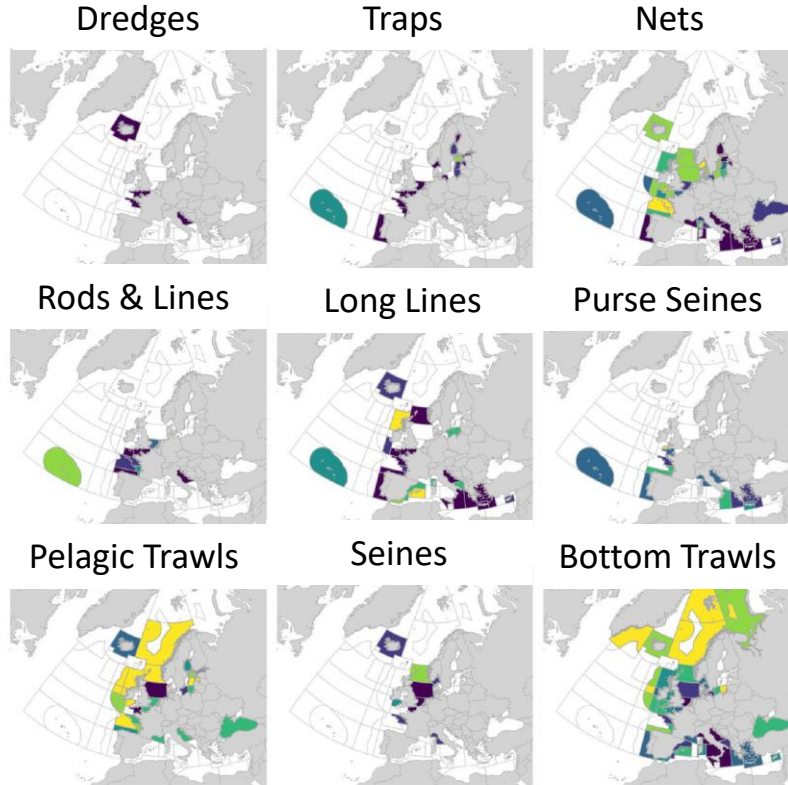
Average MW Fishing hours 2015-2018

Average MW Fishing hours 2019-2022



Source: ICES (2025)

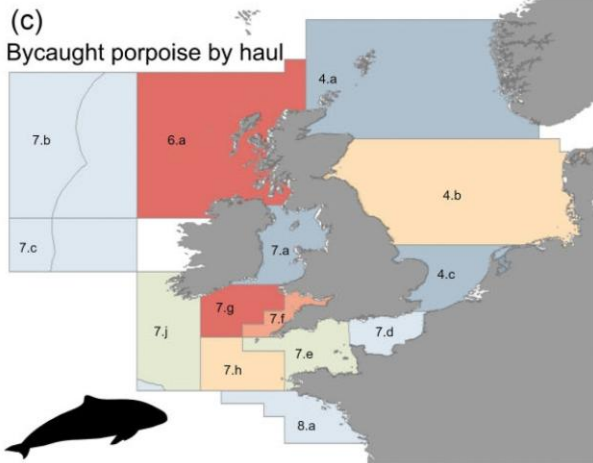
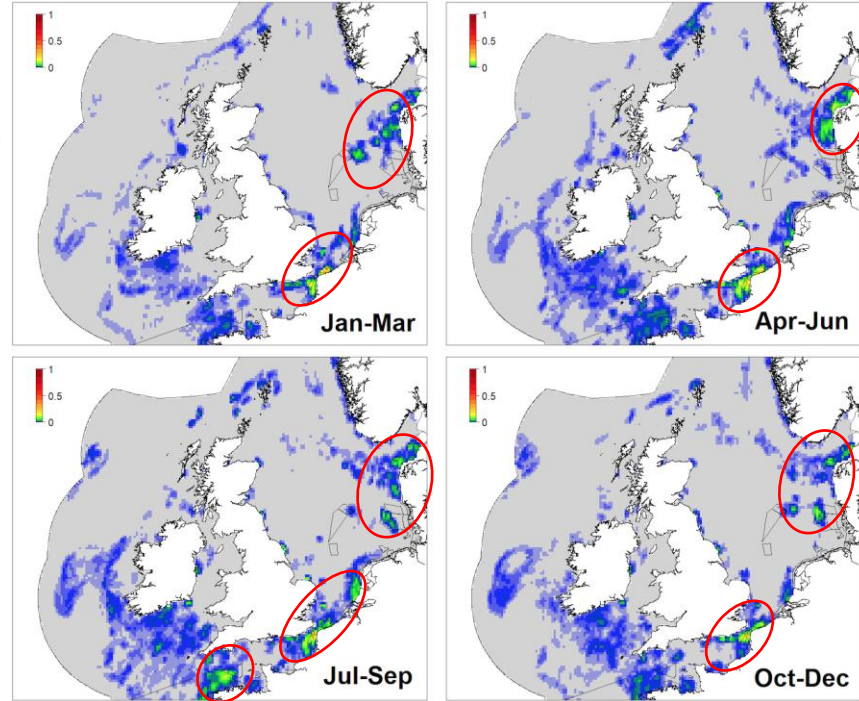
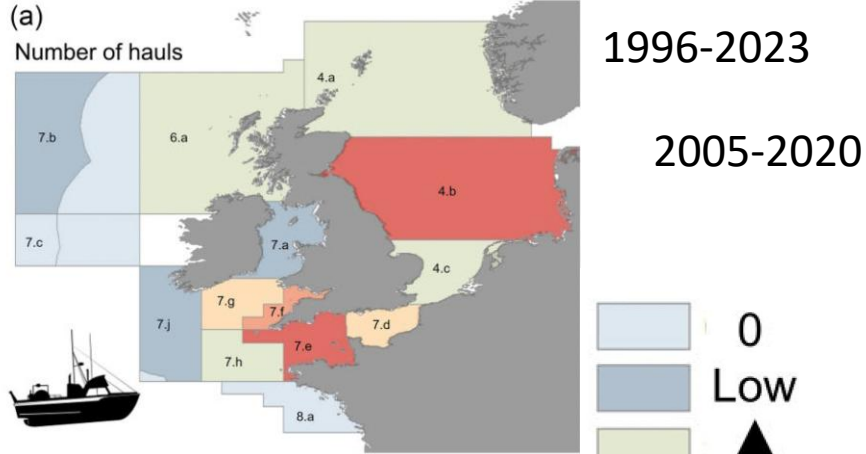
Improve estimates of bycatch rates to support development of conservation strategy (RES-02)



**Metier Level 3
Monitoring
Coverage
of 2024 data**

**Source:
ICES WGBYC (2025)**

Improve estimates of bycatch rates to support development of conservation strategy (RES-02)



Source:
Evans et al. (2021)

Improve estimates of bycatch rates to support development of conservation strategy (RES-02)



Bycatch Rate Estimates

2020: 5,974 (95% CI: 3,176-10,739) porpoises, all countries except Norway. Majority of bycatch was in static gillnets (GNS, GND, GTR) (ICES WKMOMA, 2021)

This represents 1.73% of an estimated North Sea population size of 345,000 (from SCANS-III, July 2016), and exceeds the RLA threshold value of 1,622 porpoise anthropogenic removals (OSPAR OMMEG Assessment: Taylor *et al.*, 2023)

Greater North Sea Harbour Porpoise GTR



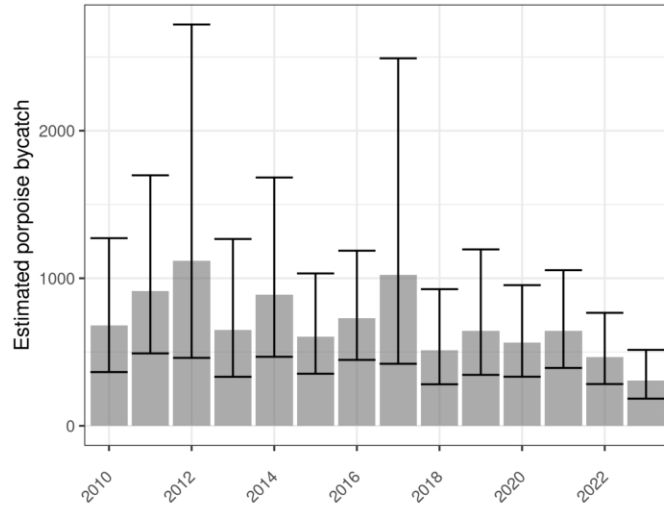
(ICES WGBYC, 2025)

Implement and assess pinger and other mitigation measures to reduce bycatch (MIT-01)



Harbour Porpoise Bycatch: Trends in Bycatch Rates

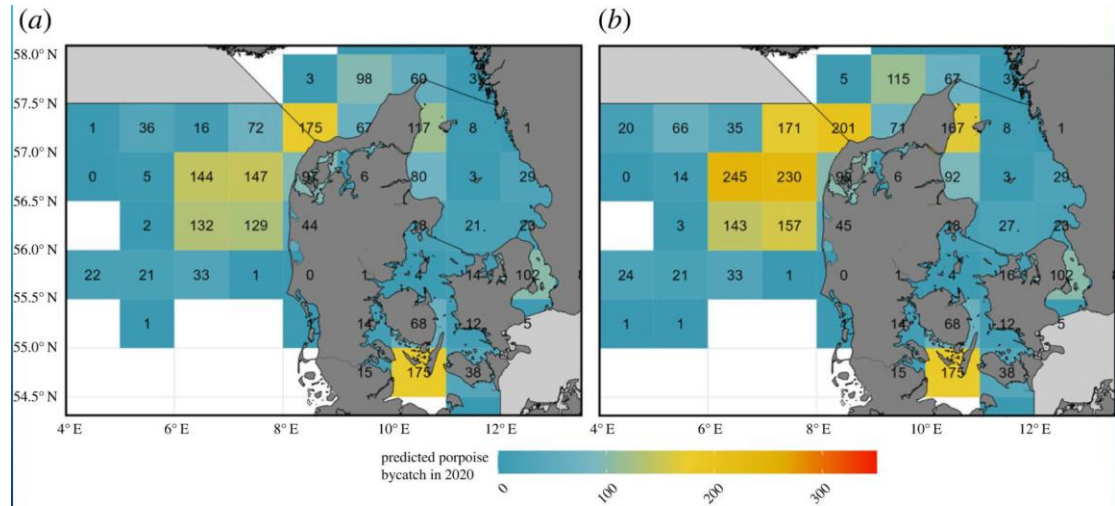
Greater North Sea



Source:

Kindt-Larsen *et al.* (unpublished)

Harbour Porpoise Bycatch: a) with Pingers, and b) without Pingers



Source:

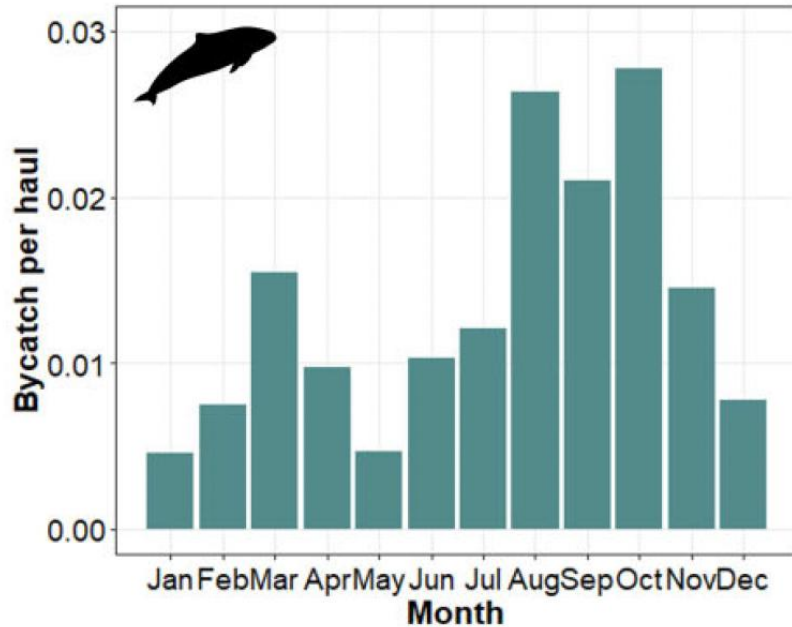
Kindt-Larsen *et al.* (2023)

Implement and assess pinger and other mitigation measures to reduce bycatch (MIT-01)

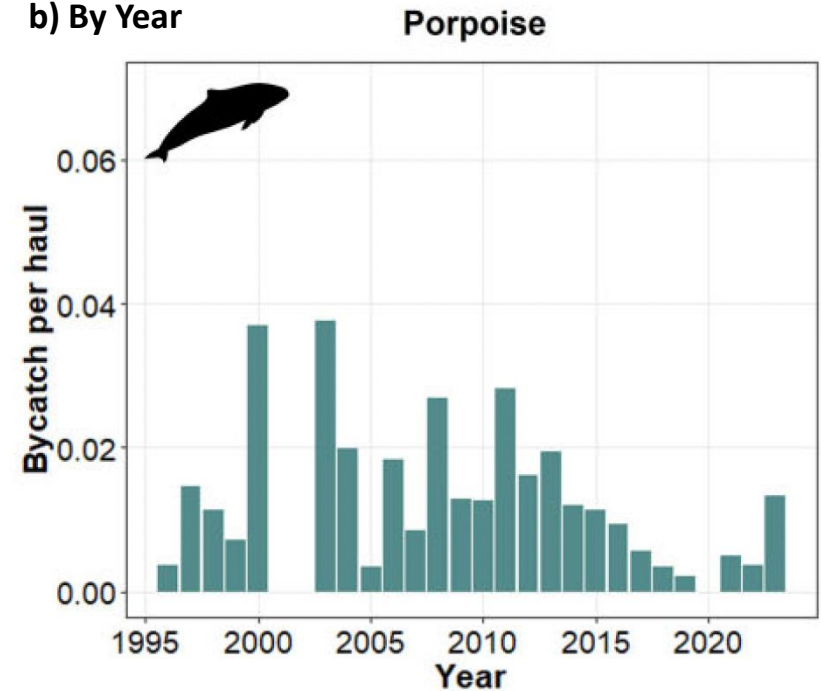


Harbour Porpoise Bycatch Per Haul across UK waters:

a) By Month



b) By Year



Source:

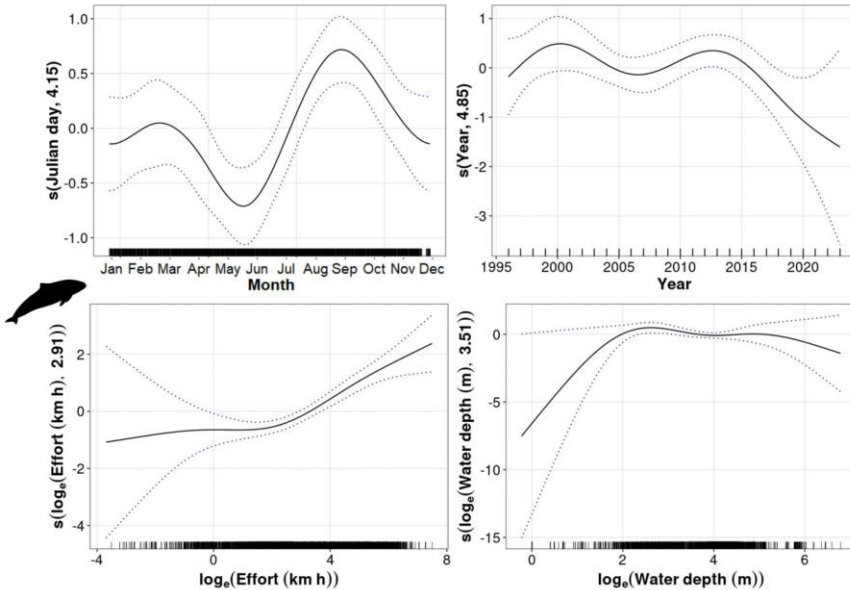
Moyes *et al.* (2025)

Implement and assess pinger and other mitigation measures to reduce bycatch (MIT-01)

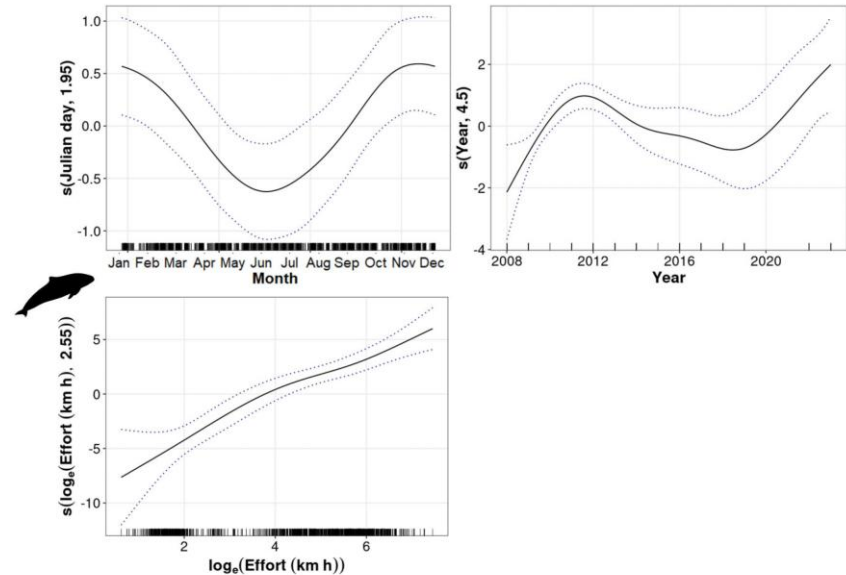


Harbour Porpoise Bycatch Per Haul across UK waters: a) no Pingers, and b) some Pingers

a)



b)



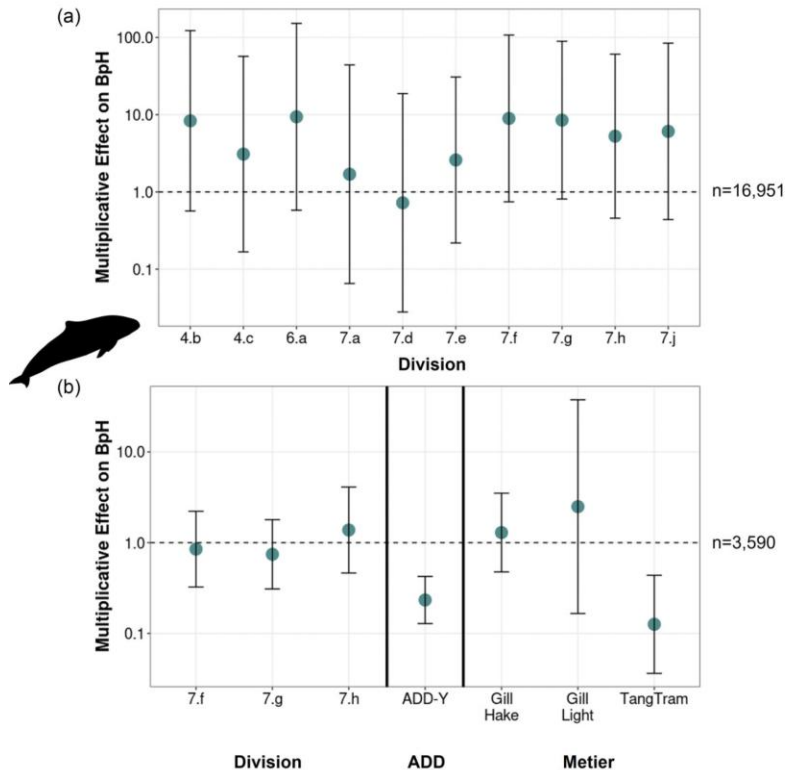
Source:

Moyes *et al.* (2025)

Implement and assess pinger and other mitigation measures to reduce bycatch (MIT-01)

Multiplicative Effect on Harbour Porpoise Bycatch Per Haul

a) no Pingers, and b) some Pingers



- 75% reduction with ADD

Source:
Moyes *et al.* (2025)

Implement a wide-scale surveillance programme to monitor trends in distribution and abundance in the Greater North Sea (MON-01)



Improve understanding of causes of seasonal and annual variation in abundance and distribution, in relation to human activities & environmental change



Further our understanding of population structure (RES-04)



Monitoring of health and nutritional status, diet, life history parameters, and causes of mortality (MON-02)



Improve understanding of and develop mitigation for the risks of anthropogenic sound (MIT-02)



Ensure screening and assessment of the occurrence and effects of hazardous substances (MON-03)



Monitor for potential increases in anthropogenic activities that lead to incidences of death, injury or adverse health effects (MON-04)



Monitor habitat quality, including protected sites, to ensure management is effective and that the ecological functions are maintained (MON-05)



Recommendations from NSG13



NSG13 /Rec #	Recommendation	Long-/short-term + Deadline if possible	Priority (High / Medium / Low)
Evaluation on fisheries with respect to extent of porpoise bycatch			
1.	Parties and Non-Party Range States to focus monitoring and mitigation effort on suspected high-risk fisheries and areas, bearing in mind that the latest bycatch estimates for porpoises in the North Sea indicate the annual numbers bycaught likely exceed thresholds from RLA analysis. There still remains great uncertainty around all bycatch estimates in the region due to a stratified random sampling approach not yet having been implemented, where appropriate. (NSG10/Rec1*)	Ongoing, review annually	High
2.	Parties are encouraged to share training resources with each other to automate bycatch detection in electronic monitoring.	Ongoing, review annually	High
3.	Parties are encouraged to further develop and implement fishing effort monitoring such as inshore VMS for small vessel fisheries (less than 12 metres), following the example of the UK.	Ongoing, review annually	High
4.	Parties are encouraged to incorporate metrics such as soak time, net length, mesh size in fishing effort reporting	Ongoing, review annually	High
5.	Given that the OSPAR threshold for bycatch has already been exceeded, Parties and Non-Party Range States are urged to take mitigation action (e.g. fisheries restrictions, ADDs, etc.) to reduce bycatch levels.	Ongoing, review annually	High

Recommendations from NSG13



Finalise a management procedure approach for determining target limits of anthropogenic removals including bycatch in the region			
6.	Attention is needed to revise the current ASCOBANS conservation objectives to i) take account of the long-term objective to drive anthropogenic removals (i.e., including all pressures) towards zero (NSG10/Rec2*); ii) appraise their effectiveness, and iii) to operationalize the objective with a timeframe and agreed-upon risks of failing as in all management procedure approaches. (NSG11/Rec5)	NSG14	High
7.	Parties, Non-Party Range States, and relevant national bodies to engage and take into regard stakeholder interests, in addition to the fishing industry, to reach common solutions to fulfil conservation aims. (NSG10/Rec3*)	Long-term, review annually	High
Development of alternative mitigation measures to reduce bycatch			
8.	Parties to support further investigations of approaches to mitigate harbour porpoise bycatch taking into account potential adverse impacts on other taxa such as birds and seals. (NSG10/Rec4)	Ongoing, review annually	High
9.	Parties to support the testing of bycatch mitigation actions at a fleet level and implement those that have proved to be effective and practical. (NSG10/Rec5)	Ongoing, review annually	High

Recommendations from NSG13



NSG13 /Rec #	Recommendation	Long-/short-term + Deadline if possible	Priority (High / Medium / Low)
10.	Parties to support more research on the behaviour of harbour porpoises in the wild around fishing gear, especially static nets, including their sensory capabilities and auditory health, for a better understanding of factors leading to bycatch. (NSG10/Rec6*)	Ongoing, review annually	High
Monitoring trends in distribution and abundance			
11.	In addition to SCANS surveys, Parties are encouraged to collaborate on conducting surveys and analyses of regional trends by season (at least two) and year in porpoise distribution and abundance at a North Sea-wide scale, and examine potential explanations for any observed changes. (NSG10/Rec7*)	Long-term, review annually	High
12.	The North Sea Group to note any information on trends in abundance and distribution from the most recent intermediate assessments and QSRs by OSPAR, Habitats Directive etc., and consider the implications of the findings. (NSG10/Rec.8*)	Ongoing, review annually	Medium

Recommendations from NSG13



Investigation of the health, nutritional status and diet			
13.	Parties are encouraged to do collaborative research on the extent and seasonality of grey seal predation on harbour porpoises. (NSG10/Rec9*)	Ongoing, review annually	Medium (in some regions)
14.	Parties to facilitate rapid collaboration with stranding networks in the event of an unusual mortality event to identify potential causes of death. These should also include new potential sources such as bacterial infections, e.g. <i>Erysipelothrix rhusiopathiae</i> , and other pathogens such as avian influenza. (NSG10/Rec10*)	Ongoing, review annually	High
15.	Parties are strongly encouraged to further support North Sea-wide monitoring of life history parameters and nutritional status (diet, body condition) through the collection and analysis of stranded and bycaught animals in order to assess evidence of temporal changes in those parameters and explore links to anthropogenic drivers. (NSG10/Rec11*)	Ongoing, review annually	High
16.	Parties are encouraged to collect and analyse a sufficient number of stranded and/or bycaught harbour porpoises for assessing trends and status of persistent chemicals and other pollutants, with particular attention to emerging chemicals in the Greater North Sea. (NSG11/Rec15)	Ongoing, review annually	High
17.	Parties and Non-Party Range States to encourage research investigating the impacts of chemical contaminants from discarded munition material and unexploded ordnance on harbour porpoises and their prey. (NSG12/Rec18)	Ongoing	Medium

Recommendations from NSG13



Investigation of the effects of anthropogenic sounds on harbour porpoises			
18.	Parties to make every effort to monitor and mitigate the effects on porpoises of activities involving explosions (including ordinance clearance in preparation for offshore wind developments). (NSG10/Rec13*)	Ongoing, review annually	High
19.	Collaborative studies are encouraged to quantify the impact of impulsive, continuous, and other noise sources on individual harbour porpoises, considering their different sound characteristics. (NSG10/Rec14*)	Ongoing, review annually	High
20.	Parties and Non-Party Range States to encourage research to establish the population level impacts of noise levels and exposure duration. (NSG10/Rec15)	Ongoing, review annually	Medium

Recommendations from NSG13



NSG13 /Rec #	Recommendation	Long-/short-term + Deadline if possible	Priority (High / Medium / Low)
21.	Parties and Non-Party Range States to encourage international harmonisation of noise exposure criteria for regulatory purposes. (NSG10/Rec16*)	Ongoing, review annually	High
22.	In the light of projected wide-scale developments of offshore renewable energy, Parties and Non-Party Range States are urged to better understand and mitigate, where appropriate, short-term, long-term, and cumulative impacts upon porpoises during all phases at the sites and at broader basin-wide scales. (NSG12/Rec25*)	Ongoing, review annually	High
23.	Parties and Non-Party Range States are encouraged to take mitigating action to minimise impacts to porpoises from continuous, impulsive and other sources of noise. (NSG12/Rec6*)	Ongoing, review annually	High
Other			
24.	Parties and Non-Party Range States are urged to consider the cumulative effects upon porpoises of human activities including offshore industrial development so that they are incorporated into spatial planning.	Ongoing, review annually	High
25.	The ASCOBANS Marine Spatial Planning Working Group is requested to focus on the Greater North Sea as their first case study. The work should collate MSPs within the region, and review consistencies in approaches for their development and whether they have incorporated plans and decisions made by neighbouring Parties, taking account of porpoise movements, MPAs and IMMAs.	AC29	High
26.	Parties and Non-Party Range States are encouraged to work with international fora to establish a joint industry programme to pool and make publicly available relevant data collated during EIAs and continuous monitoring of sites.	Ongoing, review annually	High