Bottlenose Dolphin distribution in North Atlantic

Main range where species regularly occurs

- Common bottlenose dolphin *Tursiops truncatus* has a worldwide distribution estimated to number c. 600,000 indivs

- Occupies temperate & tropical regions, mainly in SSTs of 10-32°C

- Coastal ecotype usually in depths of 50 m or less and within 20 km of land

- Offshore ecotype favours the shelf edge and offshore shelf seas between 50-500 m depth
• Coastal populations not easily surveyed by line transect methods
• Offshore populations show greatest densities along the shelf edge particularly from west of Ireland southwards
• In the Bay of Biscay and around the Iberian coast, the shelf edge comes close to the coast and so do bottlenose dolphins. In those areas, offshore and coastal ecotypes may overlap spatially
• Some evidence for inshore movements in summer months, and northward movements along shelf edge in winter

Source: Waggitt et al. (2020), Evans et al. (2021)
Population Structure & Management Units
POPULATION STRUCTURE IN NORTH ATLANTIC BOTTLENOSE DOLPHINS

- Genetic studies (using microsatellites & mtDNA) indicate coastal and pelagic populations to be highly differentiated in NE Atlantic with finer-scale population structure within the two ecotypes.

- Three distinct populations identified around Ireland: Shannon Estuary (low diversity), Connemara-Mayo region (low diversity), and strandings of unknown origin (high diversity).

- Distinct differences observed between animals from northern Galicia, southern Galicia, and Portugal.

- Animals from offshore Atlantic show much higher genetic diversity and greater gene flow.

A group of individuals for which there are different lines of complementary evidence suggesting reduced exchange (migration / dispersal) rates over an extended period (low tens of years)

Definition of a Management Unit:

“...”

Lines of Evidence:

- Distributions
- Photo-ID matches
- DNA analyses
- Stable isotope signatures
- Contaminant levels
- Morphometrics

Source: IAMMWG (2020)
BOTTLENOSE DOLPHIN SIGHTINGS: 2020-21

Source: Sea Watch Foundation Sightings Database
HOME RANGES OF BOTTLENOSE DOLPHINS

- 64% (141/221) of individuals recorded in both Cardigan Bay SAC and North Wales
- 78% (172/221) of individuals recorded in one or both SACs also occurred in North Wales
- 15% (33/221) of individuals recorded only in Cardigan Bay SAC

ABUNDANCE ESTIMATES FOR BOTTLENOSE DOLPHIN IN NW EUROPE

SCANS-III (July 2016)

- 33,123 individuals
  (95% CI: 20,305-54,033)

Source: Hammond et al. (2021)

Irish ObSERVE Survey
  (Summer 2016)

- 87,330 individuals
  (95% CI: 58,029-131,426)

Source: Rogan et al. (2017)

Irish ObSERVE Survey
  (Winter 2016)

- 212,646 individuals
  (95% CI: 157,026-287,967)
Coastal populations all small, between c. 10 and 400 individuals

Off-shelf population appears to be an open one, and is much larger, numbering in the thousands or tens of thousands

Where the shelf edge comes close to the coast, as around the Iberian Peninsula, it becomes difficult to differentiate offshore from coastal populations except in estuarine habitats such as Sado Estuary and South Galician Rias
COASTAL BOTTLENOSE DOLPHIN POPULATION TRENDS

a) East Scotland

b) Cardigan Bay SAC

c) Shannon Estuary

d) St Malo

e) Seine

f) Sado Estuary

Source: ICES (2016)
Life History Parameters
ANNUAL CYCLE OF THE BOTTLENOSE DOLPHIN

Gestation Period: 12-13 months
Lactation Period: 18-24 months
Calving Interval: 2-10 years (av. 4)
Bottlenose Dolphin Life History Parameters

Growth & Reproduction

• Length at birth is 120-130 cm and up to 30 kg weight

• Adult lengths 3.0-3.8 m, weighing up to 650 kg

• Males become sexually mature at 9-15 years; females at 5-13 years of age

• Level of sexual dimorphism unknown, but adult males in western North Atlantic 10% longer than females

Life Span

• Males 40-45 (52) years

• Females c. 50 (>67) years

• Calf survival (0-1 yr): 0.83-0.90; juvenile survival (1-9 yr): 0.94; adult survival (>9 yr): 0.95-0.99

Sources: Gaspar (2003), Wilson (2008), Silva et al. (2009), Lohrengel et al. (2017), Robinson et al. (2017), Arso Civil et al. (2017, 2019), Cheney et al. (2019)
Bottlenose Dolphin Social Behaviour
**BOTTLENOSE DOLPHIN BEHAVIOUR AND SOCIAL STRUCTURE**

- Typical group size of coastal ecotype: 2-20 (100) individuals, and of offshore ecotype: 10-100 (500) individuals

- Studies of social structure undertaken on bottlenose dolphin populations in the Moray Firth (Scotland), Cardigan Bay (Wales), Shannon Estuary (Ireland), Normandy/Brittany (France), Galicia (NW Spain), and Sado Estuary (Portugal)

- Diverse, non random social bonds; temporal associations best fit a model of preferred companions and casual acquaintances against standardised lagged association rates

- Most associations are between pairs of individuals which may be long-lasting but forming a society governed by fission-fusion dynamics

Feeding Ecology
BOTTLENOSE DOLPHIN FEEDING

- Atlantic salmon
- Garfish
- Sea bass
- Sand eel
BOTTLENOSE DOLPHIN DIET IN NW EUROPE (BY NUMBER)

Geographic Variation in Bottlenose Dolphin Diet

Sources: Santos et al. (2001, 2007), De Pierrepont et al. (2005), Spitz et al. (2006), Hernandez-Milian et al. (2015), Lohrengel et al. (2017)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trait</th>
<th>Offshore</th>
<th>Coastal</th>
<th>Estuarine</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Home Range</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>Medium - Large</td>
<td>Small</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prey resources</td>
<td>Mobile pelagic/semi-pelagic fish, e.g. blue whiting, hake, horse mackerel, mackerel, saithe</td>
<td>Benthic/demersal fish, e.g. sole, dab, haddock, whiting + Pelagic fish, e.g. herring, sea bass</td>
<td>Benthic/demersal fish, e.g. sole, dab, + Riverine species, e.g. eel, salmon, trout</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movements</td>
<td>Migratory</td>
<td>Semi-Resident</td>
<td>Resident</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Typical group size</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>Variable</td>
<td>Small</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carrying capacity</td>
<td>Large, in thousands</td>
<td>Medium, in hundreds</td>
<td>Small, in tens</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Human Pressures
# Bottlenose Dolphin Threats Matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Threats Matrix</th>
<th>Coastal</th>
<th>Offshore</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Greater North Sea</td>
<td>Celtic Seas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pollution &amp; Other Chemical Changes</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contaminants</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nutrient enrichment</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Physical Loss</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Habitat loss</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Physical Damage</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Habitat degradation</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other Physical Pressures</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Litter (inc. microplastics and discarded fishing gear)</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Military Sonar</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Underwater noise changes</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seismic surveys</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pile-driving</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explosions</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Barrier to species movement (offshore windfarm, wave or tidal device arrays)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shipping</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Death or injury by collision</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introductions of microbial pathogens</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Removal of target and non-target species (prey depletion)</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Removal of non-target species (marine mammal bycatch)</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disturbance (e.g. wildlife watching)</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deliberate killing + hunting</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>L</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ICES WGMME (2019)
Localities where bottlenose dolphins formerly occurred regularly

Derived from: Evans & Scanlan (1990)

PCB CONTAMINANT BURDENS

Source: Jepson et al. (2016)

HISTORICAL BOTTLENOSE DOLPHIN DISTRIBUTIONS IN THE UK

★ = Localities where bottlenose dolphins formerly occurred regularly
BOTTLENOSE DOLPHIN BYCATCH SEASONAL RISK MAPS

Gillnets

Pelagic Trawls

Demersal Trawls

Source: Evans et al. (2021)
Effects of Recreational Activities on Bottlenose Dolphins

**Short-term**
- avoidance
- increased dive times
- increased swim speeds
- frequency shifts in vocalisations
- changes in social cohesion
- disruption of social groups

**Long-term**
- movement out of the affected area
- decline in relative abundance
- disruption of association patterns

**Sources:** Bejder and Samuels (2003), Hastie et al. (2003), Mattson et al. (2005), Bejder et al. (2006a, b), Lusseau (2006), Lusseau et al. (2006, 2009), New et al. (2013), Hudson (2014), Pirotta et al. (2014, 2015), Koroza (2018), Vergara-Peña (2019)
Natura 2000 sites hosting Bottlenose Dolphin *Tursiops truncatus*

321 sites in twelve Member States:

A: 10 (4 Atlantic)  
B: 43 (8)  
C: 162 (37)  
D: 89 (23)  
Unspecified: 17 (1)

**Source:**  
*European Commission (2020)*
SAC Conservation Objectives

To maintain (or restore) the habitat and species features, as a whole, at (or to) Favourable Conservation Status within the site

For species such as bottlenose dolphin:

- **Ensure a Viable Population**
  - Population Size
  - Reproductive Success
  - Population Structure
  - Physiological Health

- **Ensure Range is not reduced**

- **Ensure Habitat is sufficient to maintain or increase Population**
  - Distribution and Extent
  - Structure, Function and Quality
  - Prey Availability

- **Management of Activities and Operations to achieve above**
RECOMMENDATIONS

Research & Monitoring

• Support long-term photo-ID studies of coastal bottlenose dolphins at key sites in the ASCOBANS Agreement Area to determine abundance trends, survival rates, home ranges, and habitat preferences

• Further investigate population structure of both coastal and offshore ecotypes

• Coordinate material from strandings for analysis to better address studies on growth rates and life history parameters, diet, and health status including further investigations of contaminant levels and their impact

• Better monitor coastal fishing effort and bycatch rates in high risk areas such as around the Iberian Peninsula

Conservation Action

• Work towards cleaning up major watersheds reducing/removing harmful chemical inputs

• Identify contexts in which bottlenose dolphin bycatch occurs and introduce appropriate mitigation measures

• Ensure management is fully effective within Marine Protected Areas

• Consider restoration of natural habitats in coastal area, for example by planting seagrass beds in appropriate habitats
Thank You for Listening