

DRAFT RESOLUTION 8.4 (REV.MOP9):
CONSERVATION OF COMMON DOLPHINS

Conscious that the common dolphin is one of the most widespread cetacean species in the eastern North Atlantic and, like other cetacean species, plays a key functional role within the ecosystem as a top predator,

Concerned that the most recent assessment by Member States of the conservation status of common dolphins under Article 17 of the Habitats Directive in 2019 classified the species conservation status as either Unfavourable-inadequate or Unknown, with only one Member State reporting its status as Favourable,

Further concerned that the conservation status is impacted by bycatch, which is the greatest anthropogenic threat to this species, and that the common dolphin is also affected directly and indirectly by other pressures such as pollution and underwater noise, while the potential effects of prey depletion on the population requires further assessment,

Noting that in May 2020, ICES reported that the current bycatch probably exceeds limits beyond which the population may decrease and enhanced monitoring is required throughout the range of the species in the eastern North Atlantic (ICES subareas 6–9), to assess the effectiveness of management measures,

Further noting that in May 2020, ICES advised a series of fishery emergency measures for the common dolphin in the Bay of Biscay, which included a combination of temporal closures of all métiers of concern and application of pingers on pair trawlers to mitigate bycatch outside of the period of closure,

Noting that as fishery emergency measures have a maximum duration of 12 months ICES further advised that, considering the life history of small cetaceans, protection measures can only be effective when applied for a longer period of time,

Recognizing that in May 2020 ICES noted that population-level consequences of some of the major pressures and threats on the common dolphin, independently and in combination, are not fully understood,

Further recognizing that coordinated actions are required in order to improve the conservation status of the common dolphin in the eastern North Atlantic,

Noting other related resolutions, in particular Resolution 8.5 *Monitoring and Mitigation of Small Cetacean Bycatch*, Resolution 8.7 *Impacts of Polychlorinated Biphenyls (PCBs)*, Resolution 8.9 *Managing Cumulative Anthropogenic Impacts in the Marine Environment*, Resolution 8.11 (Rev.MOP9) *CMS Family Guidelines on Environmental Impact Assessments for Marine Noise-generating Activities*, and Resolution 9.[x] *Food Availability and Resource Depletion*,

Recognizing that, as mandated by the 8th Meeting of the Parties, the *Species Action Plan for North-East Atlantic Common Dolphins* was finalized and adopted in 2019.

The Meeting of the Parties to ASCOBANS

1. *Reminds* Parties of their commitment to the adopted *Species Action Plan for the North-East Atlantic Common Dolphin* (hereinafter the 'Common Dolphin SAP'), annexed to this Resolution, and *encourages* them, with the support of the appointed SAP Steering Group, to

undertake the following actions required for the conservation of common dolphins in the eastern North Atlantic:

- (a) identify the priority bycatch issues;
- (b) improve estimates of bycatch rates to support development of conservation strategy;
- (c) implement and assess gear modifications and other mitigation measures to reduce bycatch;
- (d) implement a wide-scale surveillance programme to monitor trends in distribution and abundance in the NE Atlantic;
- (e) improve understanding of causes of seasonal and annual variation in abundance and distribution, particularly in relation to human activities;
- (f) monitoring of health and nutritional status, diet, life history parameters, and causes of mortality in the NE Atlantic;
- (g) improve understanding of and develop mitigation for the risks of anthropogenic sound;
- (h) further our understanding on population structure by assessing and developing suitable techniques for these highly mobile small delphinids;
- (i) ensure screening and assessment of the occurrence and effects of hazardous substances; and
- (j) monitor for potential increases in anthropogenic activities that lead to incidences of death, injury or adverse health effects including cumulative effects;

2. *Recommends* Parties implement emergency measures in the Bay of Biscay taking full account of ICES advice;

3. *Encourages* Parties to continue working on the following points:

- (a) continue work towards establishing a management framework procedure for bycatch in order to enable specified conservation objectives to be met;
- (b) coordinate their monitoring programmes on other direct and indirect pressures, including chemical pollution and anthropogenic noise, to allow assessment of the effects on the population;
- (c) support the research necessary, using both genetic and ecological markers, for a thorough assessment of the range boundary and any subdivisions of the eastern North Atlantic population(s) in order to re-assess the management unit;
- (d) coordinate their bycatch monitoring programmes to allow assessment of the population bycatch rate;
- (e) apply appropriate bycatch mitigation strategies for all high- and medium-risk fisheries;
- (f) monitor population status through large- and small-scale surveys at appropriate intervals in order to estimate trends in abundance and detect changes in distribution;
- (g) monitor health and nutritional status, reproductive parameters, pollutant burdens, and causes of mortality using samples and data collected from stranding and bycatch monitoring programmes;
- (h) continue to review of the effects of anthropogenic noise and other threats and pressures on common dolphins, including an evaluation of the population level consequences of disturbance;
- (i) assess the independent, in-combination and cumulative effects of multiple stressors;
- (j) continue requesting overarching legislation for cetaceans in European waters that ensures the effective protection of cetaceans from all threats;
- (k) establish a coordinated and regionalized approach;

4. *Calls on Parties and invites* non-Party Range States of the species to implement the Common Dolphin SAP and to report back on progress to each meeting of the Steering Group;
5. *Invites* other relevant stakeholders such as the European Commission, intergovernmental bodies including ACCOBAMS, IWC, ICES, NAMMCO and OSPAR, Advisory Councils for European fisheries, other relevant bodies such as NGOs, universities and other institutes, and other appropriate stakeholder representatives, to support the implementation of the Common Dolphin SAP; and
6. *Requests* the Advisory Committee, supported by the Steering Group for the implementation of the SAP, continue reviewing new information on the conservation status of common dolphins in the Agreement Area and make recommendations to Parties as appropriate.