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REPORT ON THE CONSERVATION STATUS OF CETACEANS AND RELEVANT ACTIVITIES IN WESTERN MEDITERRANEAN AND CONTIGUOUS ATLANTIC AREA

**REPORT ON THE CONSERVATION STATUS OF CETACEANS AND RELEVANT ACTIVITIES
IN WESTERN MEDITERRANEAN AND CONTIGUOUS ATLANTIC AREA**

Date of the last modification of the report *: 2019

Year of Start *: 2017

Year of End *: 2019

Introduction: *The aim of this report is to give a global vision of what occurred in the Region, regarding cetacean conservation, since the previous report, and what is important to address for the next period/in a near future. So the regional representative will synthesize the main studies (species, topics) led in the region, concerning research, monitoring and conservation, also the main "hot" topics or threats that need to be addressed and what is awaited from the Scientific Committee (and ACCOBAMS) for the next triennium as recommendations.*

Countries of Western Mediterranean and contiguous Atlantic area region:

Algeria,
France,
Italy (Western coast),
Monaco,
Morocco,
Portugal,
Spain,

Overview of activities in the Region since the previous report:

ALGERIA :

- Preliminary study on the extent of accidental catches and depredation events between cetaceans and fishing activities in Algeria. Main objective: identify the interactions between fishing and endangered marine species and to determine the parameters that can influence predation in fishermen's nets (mostly gill nets and trammel nets).

FRANCE :

- **PELAGOS PLASTIC FREE - Integrated actions to reduce plastic debris in the Pelagos Sanctuary.** Main objective: to propose actions to reduce plastic debris in the Pelagos Sanctuary through: i) improving the governance capacities of coastal municipalities; ii) increase scientific knowledge of the plastics sphere and of the origins and sources of plastic debris; iii) increase public awareness (tourists, fishermen, local communities, navigators).
- **Biological and toxicological contamination of cetaceans in the Pelagos Sanctuary: assessment, origin, monitoring and mitigation.** Main objectives: i) to examine the origins (sources and contamination) as well as the impacts of terrestrial pathogens and chemical pollutants on the cetaceans of the Pelagos Sanctuary; ii) develop a network to assess the state of health of stranded cetaceans in the Pelagos Sanctuary; iii) promote the mitigation of biological and toxicological contamination in the Pelagos Sanctuary
- **Proposal to develop and evaluate mitigation strategies to reduce the risk of ship strikes to n and sperm whales in the Pelagos Sanctuary.** Main objectives: i) update the risk assessment of collisions with large cetaceans in the Pelagos Sanctuary (in particular the fin whale and the sperm whale), based on strandings and examinations of injured whales; ii) examine the distribution of the fin whale population over the Sanctuary area, using satellite imagery; iii) create a "Collision network" associating the main shipping companies across the Pelagos Sanctuary.

ITALY :

- **Bottlenose dolphin conservation in the North West Sardinia.** Main objectives: i) monitoring population size and structure and modelling distribution of bottlenose dolphin in the North West Sardinia; ii) evaluating the effects of noise, boat traffic and dolphin watching on dolphins behaviour, distribution and acoustic.
- **Delfini Metropolitan.** Main objective: evaluation of habitat use, home range analysis, abundance estimate, social structure, interactions with human activity (fishing, trawling and sea traffic).
- **Marecamp - Dolphin watching and conservation in the Gulf of Catania.** Main objectives: i) monitoring the state of health of Gulf of Catania's cetofauna (seasonal and spatial distribution of the species, photo-identification of bottlenose dolphins) and other threatened marine species; ii) applying the citizen science in order to inform the community about the presence of cetaceans and to disseminate their conservation as species protected by international agreements and conventions.
- **CETYS Project.** Main objective: to provide consistent data on the ecology, habitat use and social structure, and on the interaction with fishing activities (mainly trawling), of bottlenose dolphin along the Roman coastal area (Tyrrhenian Sea, Italy)
- **TASM project.** Main objectives: to establish a baseline of information on cetaceans, and other apex predators, presence, distribution and habitat use over and around two poorly known seamounts (Tiberino and Albano) off the city of Rome (Tyrrhenian Sea) as case studies; ii) to verify the "attraction effect" of seamounts on the pelagic fauna and assess the reliance of individual species on specific structures.
- **Delfini Capitolin.** Main objective: regular monitoring of bottlenose dolphins in the area of Tiber Estuary, Central Tyrrhenian Sea.
- **Ischia Dolphin Project.** Main objective: cetacean monitoring in the area of the Archipelagos Pontino and Campano, Tyrrhenian Sea.
- **FA.RE.MARE 2018.** Main objective: to evaluate the presence of bottlenose dolphins in the Pelagos area, (Versilia area).
- **Dolphin without borders.** Main objectives: i) to support the conservation of bottlenose dolphins in the Pelagos Sanctuary; ii) raise awareness within the wider public on the conservation of the marine environment; iii) to strength the links among Pelagos and the many MPAs and National Parks existing within the Sanctuary boundaries by promoting a sustained coordination and systematic implementation of dolphin monitoring and conservation action in the area.
- **FLT Monitoring network.** Main objective: to establish a fixed Line Transect Monitoring Network through sighting activities carried at several passenger ferries in the seas around Italy.
- **Cetacean Sanctuary Research Project.** Main objective: to conduct cetacean surveys in the Pelagos sanctuary

MONACO :

- **Ban on straws and drink sticks**

MOROCCO :

- **Whale watching / Pescatourisme project.** Main objective: to promote the development of ecotourism activities allowing to reconcile conservation of endangered marine species and fishing activities.
- **Implementation of the National Emergency Plan for the Fight against Accidental Marine Pollution.** Under this plan an exercise - "SIMULEX 2018" - was conducted on June 2018 in Agadir, to simulate the fight against accidental marine pollution by hydrocarbons.
- **Production of information sheets on stranding operations.** Main objective: to strengthen the stranding network in Morocco amongst stakeholders and the general public.

PORTUGAL :

- **LIFE+ MarPro - Conservation of marine protected species in mainland Portugal.** Main objectives: ii) to provide means for the implementation of the Habitats and Birds Directive with respect to cetaceans and seabirds; ii) to elaborate the proposal of new Natura 2000 network offshore areas and their management plans with reference to harbor porpoises and bottlenose dolphins; iii) to reduce the conflicts between fisheries and cetacean species by implementing solutions concerning by-catch and fish depredation; iv) to create bridges of understanding through the awareness campaigns and the creation of the stakeholders commission, among relevant authorities, scientists, fishermen, new marine industries and the general public in order to promote a higher consensus in the implementation of the marine Natura 2000 Network; v) to bring all stakeholders and economical interested parties into the process of designing, managing and monitoring future marine SACs; vi) to ensure the long-term socio-economic viability of the management, surveillance and monitoring activities of the target species and their habitats, together with the promotion of a sustainable exploitation of marine resource. As a result of the LIFE+ MarPro project 4 new SCI (Sites of Community Importance) were identified and proposed, along with the corresponding management plans. One of the SCI (Costa Sudoeste) is located within the ACCOBAMS geographical area.
- **Project iNOVPESCA.** Main objective: to develop mitigation strategies to reduce interactions of cetaceans and Algarve coastal fisheries, especially purse seining (PS) and set nets (GNS+GTR).

Major issue(s) or main threats or “hot” topics that have emerged during the said period for the Region:**ALGERIA:**

The absence of an official national stranding network does not allow for the implementation of appropriate and standardized actions related to cetacean strandings. Usually emergency measures are taken by the municipality concerned by the stranding which takes care of the burial of stranded cetaceans. A project for setting up the stranding network is currently being developed jointly by the ACCOBAMS Executive Secretariat and the CNRDPA.

MOROCCO:

Morocco does not have the expertise to assess the impact of marine traffic noise on cetaceans in the Strait of Gibraltar. Therefore, assistance from ACCOBAMS would be highly desirable, in particular through the development of training and support of projects relating to capacity building for INRH scientists in the field of certification as Marine Mammal Observers (MMOs) and Passive Acoustic Monitoring (PAM).

Recommendations / suggestions for improvement of the conservation:**FRANCE:**

The harmonization of practices in terms of stranding monitoring and the correct storage of data and biological samples is an essential element in the development of any action related to the monitoring of health status and biological parameters based on sets of samples at the scale of the Mediterranean basin. This harmonization must take into account the specific geographic, administrative or other specificities of the countries concerned. Member countries of the Agreement and EU members are strongly encouraged to harmonize their practice for the implementation of MSFD surveillance plans.

MOROCCO:

Cetacean conservation in Morocco could benefit from: i) capacity building in photo identification; ii) capacity building in necropsy techniques; iii) management of whale watching and pesca-tourism projects; iv) training on "High Quality Whale-Watching" label; v) training for ship captains aiming at predicting and mitigating the harmful effects of collisions with cetaceans.