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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**

Presented by Marina Sequeira, Regional Representative for Western Mediterranean and contiguous Atlantic area

Issue: Report on the conservation status of cetaceans and relevant activities in Western Mediterranean and contiguous Atlantic area

1. Action requested

The Scientific Committee is invited to:

a) **note** the information provided in this Report.

2. Background

Pursuant to the Rules on the Scientific Committee, each Regional Representative will be invited to present a report on the conservation status of cetaceans and relevant activities in the region under his/her competence.

Taking into account «Recommendation 12.1- Guidelines for Regional Representatives regarding the preparation of their regional reports» adopted by the 12th Meeting of the ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee, the 2nd Regional report - to be presented at the second Meeting of the Scientific Committee after the MOP - shall constitute an update to the 1st Regional Report and provide guidance to National Focal Points on their future national reports.

**REPORT ON THE CONSERVATION STATUS OF CETACEANS AND RELEVANT ACTIVITIES
IN WESTERN MEDITERRANEAN AND CONTIGUOUS ATLANTIC AREA (2020-2021)**

Date of the last modification of the report *: 18 November 2021

Year of Start *: 2020

Year of End *: 2021

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 synthetize 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

- Participation of Mrs. LAMOUTI Souad, research officer at CNRDPA and member of the Scientific Council of ACCOBAMS in the following meetings / workshops:
 - on-line meeting of the Scientific Committee of the MAVA Med Bycatch project: "Understanding bycatch of vulnerable species in the Mediterranean and testing mitigation measures: a collaborative approach";
 - on-line workshop "MAVA Depredation Phase 2 /First exchange";
 - Quietmed2 workshop (underwater noise);

- Project "Review of available data on cetacean bycatch in standing databases" (report to be presented at SC14);
- ASCOBANS-ACCOBAMS joint Bycatch workshop;
- 5th Conference on the Conservation of Cetaceans in the Southern Mediterranean Countries (CSMC5) (April 2021) with the following presentations: 1) Assessing knowledge on cetaceans in Algeria, 2) *Prise en compte de la problématique du bruit sous-marin en Algérie* (Consideration of the problem of underwater noise in Algeria), 3) *Activités et progrès en matière d'évaluation et d'atténuation des interactions avec les pêches* (Activities and progress in assessing and mitigating fisheries interactions);
- "MedBycatch - mitigation measures sections";
- Signature between the CNRDPA and the Executive Secretariat of ACCOBAMS of the financing agreement for the project "Setting up a new operational network for monitoring cetacean strandings on the Algerian coast".
- Participation of national experts (veterinary doctors) in the training on necropsies (July 2021).
- Meeting of national representatives for the validation of the 2023-2025 work programme (July 2021)
- Meeting to launch the Algerian PAN for the conservation of cetaceans (July 2021).
- Transmission to the ACCOBAMS Secretariat of the "Draft National Monitoring Plan for Cetaceans along the Algerian coast" adopted at the national level.

FRANCE

- **FLT Monitoring network.** (implemented by EcoOcéan Institut). Main objective: to monitor cetaceans and human activities at the scale of the French EEZ and within the Pelagos Sanctuary from ferries.
- **Monitor bottlenose dolphin and its habitat in the Gulf of Lion in relation to anthropogenic activities (vessels and noise)** (implemented by EcoOcéan Institut).
- **MARKER - Assessment of the pressure of whale watching activities on cetaceans and the ecological and socio-economic effectiveness of the "High Quality Whale Watching®"hallmark in the French Mediterranean** (implemented by MIRACETI NGO, in partnership with the research company VertigoLab and supported by the Interregional Directorate for the Mediterranean Sea). Main objective: Provide concrete and standardized assessment tools to: (i) monitor the evolution of pressure on cetacean populations from whale-watching activity; (ii) evaluate the effectiveness of the HQWW® hallmark as a management tool.
- **TURSMED2 - Promote the implementation of an integrated and sustainable management of the Bottlenose dolphin on the French Mediterranean through the enhancement of the AMPs network** (implemented by MIRACETI NGO under an R&D contract with the OFB). Main objectives: to pursue,

sustain and enhance the actions implemented in TURSMED1 and initiate new actions, in order to contribute to the assessment, characterization and achievement of the good ecological state concerning cetaceans and in particular the Bottlenose dolphin (*Tursiops truncatus*) in the context of the implementation of the DCSMM in the French Mediterranean: (i) Characterization and monitoring of the population of Bottlenose Dolphin frequenting the continental shelf of the French Mediterranean (ii) Assessment of cetacean conservation issues within the MPAs.

- **ECOSYSM-EOF Project - Prefiguration of an observatory of marine ecosystems in interaction with floating offshore wind farms in the Gulf of Lion** (implemented by Pôle Mer Méditerranée, in partnership with Ifremer, France Energies Marines, Observatoire Océanologique de Banyuls-sur-Mer, MIRACETI and the Mediterranean Institute of Oceanography. Supported by the French Agency for Energy Transition). Main objective: To propose a high-frequency observatory architecture that can rely on the underwater cable network of the Gulf of Lion to determine the state and evolution of marine ecosystems in interaction with high-power floating wind farms.
- **Commercial shipping and cetaceans - Limiting ship strike in Mediterranean Sea** (implemented by MIRACETI NGO, with the support of the French ministry of ecology). Main objective: Limit ship strikes between commercial vessels and large cetaceans: (i) develop and create awareness documents about ship strikes and train officers in cetacean recognition to give to officers all the tools needed to avoid ship strikes with cetaceans; (ii) provide scientific knowledge about ship strikes to companies and analysis of the cetacean data collected through the REPCET® system; (iv) encourage the integration of courses on environmental issues and cetacean conservation in maritime training schools; (iii) improve the "Vessel-Cetacean collision strategy" with the various actors working on the issue in France.

ITALY (Western coast)

- **Investments in eco-sustainable tourism to stimulate and promote competitiveness and innovation in maritime cross-border cooperation activities – EcoSTRIM** (implemented by CIMA Foundation). Main objective: 1) To establish guidelines for the labelling of tourist activities tourism and 2) Implementation of the High Quality Whale-Watching® label in Italy.

MONACO

(no data provided)

MOROCCO

(no data provided)

PORTUGAL

- **Monitoring of cetaceans in the south coast of Portugal.** (implemented by Marine Environment Research Association – AIMM). Main objective: Constant monitoring survey of cetaceans in the South coast of Portugal. Consistent data on the abundance, distribution, occurrence, habitat use and behaviour of all species of cetaceans that inhabit the Algarve region.
- **Surveillance and monitoring of marine megafauna in coastal waters off the Algarve, Portugal.** (implemented by Marine Environment Research Association – AIMM). Main objective: Constant monitoring survey of marine megafauna in the South coast of Portugal. Consistent data on the abundance, distribution and occurrence of several megafauna' species including cetaceans, sharks and marine turtles that inhabit the Algarve region. Data is also used to support the implementation of a MPA in the region.
- **Characterization, monitoring and assessment of the whale watching activity along the South coast of Portugal and potential impacts on cetaceans.** (implemented by Marine Environment Research Association – AIMM). Main objective: To evaluate the touristic activities of whale and dolphin watching in the south of Portugal and the potential impacts of these eco-tourism activities for the cetacean's populations that occur in the area. Studies on the impacts of whale watching are focus more on the following species: common dolphins, bottlenose dolphins harbour porpoises and minke whales.
- **Functional ecology of marine megafauna and potential effects of climate change.** (implemented by Marine Environment Research Association – AIMM). Main objective: Spatial and seasonal characterization of the trophic network of the southern coast of mainland Portugal, from the perspective of top predators (mainly cetaceans), as well as the advantage of the effects of climate change on the dynamics of trophic ecology in the study region.
- **Common dolphin project.** (implemented by Marine Environment Research Association – AIMM). Main objective: Overcome the lack of knowledge regarding the short-beaked common dolphin species (*Delphinus delphis*) by advancing on understanding of its social behaviour and ecology.
- **Bottlenose dolphin project.** (implemented by Marine Environment Research Association – AIMM). Main objective: Monitoring population occurrence, size and modelling distribution of bottlenose dolphins (*Tursiops truncatus*) in the South coast of Portugal.
- **Risso's dolphin project.** (implemented by Marine Environment Research Association – AIMM). Main objective: Modelling the distribution of Risso's dolphins (*Grampus griseus*) in the South coast of Portugal.
- **Social organization and behaviour among large brained mammals: Maternal strategies as an evolution factor.** (implemented by Marine Environment Research Association – AIMM). Main objective: Contribute to the better understanding of the maternal strategies adopted by the different species of dolphins and an ultimate comparison between large brained mammals from different *taxa*. Additionally, knowledge gained about the nature of social relationships in large-

brained, non-human species may yield insights into the evolution of cognitive and social complexity in humans.

- **Eyes in the Sky Project.** (implemented by Marine Environment Research Association – AIMM). Main objective: To test the use of drone devices as a potential methodology for cetacean studies, mainly behavioural studies and collection of biological samples.
- **Whale-Watching Network.** (implemented by Marine Environment Research Association – AIMM). A whale-watching network is in place since 2010, as a cooperative effort between whale-watching companies and AIMM. Each company of the network is provided every year with cetaceans' workshop including theoretical and practical components. Main objective: educate all the skippers and guides on board the whale watching companies as well as the awareness for the good practices on board and at sea. Reinforcement of the whale watching guidelines for the activity.
- **Project iNOVPESCA (2017-2021).** (implemented by Algarve University). Main objectives:
 - 1) To evaluate the level of interactions of coastal artisanal fisheries and cetaceans along the Algarve coast and detect problematic gears and areas;
 - 2) To reduce the conflicts between Algarve artisanal fisheries and cetacean species by implementing solutions (e.g. promoting pilot trials using acoustic alarms) concerning by-catch and fish depredation, especially in purse seining (PS) and bottom set nets (GNS+GTR);
 - 3) To promote “cooperative research” and strengthen relationships among stakeholders or resource users (fishers, associations, scientists, governmental authorities) through participatory.
- **Project CetAMBICion (2021-2023).** (implemented by Algarve University). Main objectives:
 - 1) Propose coordinated measures to address cetacean bycatch and depredation. Several pilot projects will be developed along the Algarve coast to assess the efficacy of bycatch reduction devices and procedures, including the use of pingers in purse seining (PS) and bottom set nets (GNS+GTR);
 - 2) Collect information and share experience from previous pilot projects and relevant projects, and propose common measures including space-time management measures.
- **Regional stranding network implemented and financed through Fundo Ambiental.** (implemented by Algarve University under the coordination of Institute for Nature Conservation and Forests). Main objective: to collect data on stranded animals (marine mammals and marine turtles), to evaluate the causes of death and conduct biological sampling.
- **META (Marine mammal and Ecosystem: anthropogenic Threat Assessment)** is a two year project funded by the Portuguese Republic through Fundo Azul, coordinated by the Madeira Whale Museum (MWM), and with partners in the Azores (Institute of Marine Research (IMAR)), Lisbon (Instituto Gulbenkian de Ciência (IGC)) and Sagres (Mar Ilimitado). Main objective: to study how human threats affect populations of resident cetaceans, so that proper management measures can

be applied. Also an evaluation of the the socio-economic impact and the establishment of a carrying capacity for the whale watching activity (WW), will be addressed.

SPAIN

- **Assessment of main threats of cetacean populations in the south of the Mediterranean Cetacean Migration Corridor (COMICET SUR).** University of Valencia and Fundación Biodiversidad, Ministerio para la Transición Ecológica (2020-2021). Main objective: to gather information about the distribution and abundance of cetacean population in the Southern Mediterranean Corridor for Cetaceans, and the anthropic threats (by-catch and marine traffic) that can affect these populations.
- **Marine animal strandings network of the Valencian community.** University of Valencia, Generalitat Valenciana and Fundación Oceanogràfic. Main objective: Rehabilitation when possible and information about cause of death and biological information of stranded animals.
- **Conservation of cetaceans and sea turtles of the Valencian coasts.** University of Valencia, Generalitat Valenciana. Main objective: to monitor strandings and abundance of cetaceans and turtles in waters of Valencian Community in order to analyse trends.
- **Developing Mediterranean-specific protocols to protect biodiversity from litter impact at basin & local MPA scales (MEDSEALITTER EU project: finished in 2019).** Main objective: improving protection measures in order to maintain the biodiversity of natural coastal and marine ecosystems, thanks to a better cooperation and networking between Mediterranean Protected Areas in monitoring and managing the marine litter issue.
- **“Mediterranean Database of Cetaceans Strandings” (MEDACES)** Main objective: centralising the information of cetacean strandings on the Mediterranean coast with the aim of co-ordinate all national and regional efforts for riparian countries.

SPAIN and PORTUGAL

- **Monitoring of the interactions between killer whales and sailing boats**
Several individuals from an endangered subpopulation of killer whales in the Iberian Peninsula started to show a disruptive behaviour in 2020: the animals engaged in interactions with boats. Most of the interactions occurred with sailing boats, but interactions with fishing boats, semi-rigid and motorboats were also recorded. The animals bumped, pushed and turned the boats. In some cases, these interactions caused damage to the stern of the vessel, mainly to its fragile parts. A total of 239 interactions have been recorded until October 2021 mainly between the waters of the Strait of Gibraltar and Galicia, including the coast of Portugal. A few interactions were also recorded in Morocco and France. A total of 14 individuals have been identified as been involved in the

interactions, the vast majority of which are juveniles and are distributed in up to 4 interacting groups.

Most of the vessels targeted are medium-sized sailboats (<15m), with a paddle rudder, sailing at an average speed of 6 knots, both under sail and motor. Interactions occur throughout the year, with a higher concentration in the spring and summer months and at all times of the day and night, (higher concentration of interactions in the midday hours).

The behaviour of killer whales when interacting with boats was not identified as aggressive. One of their main motivations has been identified as competition with boats for speed. The origin of these interactions is unknown, but it is suspected that it could be a curious and playful behaviour, which could be self-induced or, on the other hand, it could be a behaviour induced by an aversive incident and therefore a precautionary behaviour.

The different groups of interacting killer whales have moved independently, and their movements are suspected to be more related to the presence of their main prey (tuna) than to the presence of boats. The migratory movements of tuna are very dynamic and predicting exactly where interactions will take place is very difficult. The clearest pattern is the well-known distribution of killer whales between spring and summer in the waters of the Strait of Gibraltar-Gulf of Cadiz due to the presence of migrating tuna. Once this period is over, the groups disperse (although not at the same time) between August and September into Portuguese waters, normally without staying in a specific area. Nevertheless interactions recorded in Portuguese waters indicate that in the areas of the Algarve (southern coast) and Sines and Setúbal (western coast) the animals may remain for several days before reaching Galicia (northern Spain) by the end of August to mid-September. From there the distribution pattern is not so clear, with groups dispersing to different areas and directions in a fan-like pattern.

Some mitigation measures, such as a temporary ban on sailing vessels, were implemented when interactions intensified in certain areas of Galicia and in the Strait of Gibraltar.

Monitoring of the interactions will continue in 2022.

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

FRANCE:

- 1) Awareness raising and training of professionals has been made very complicated with COVID-19.

Recommendations / suggestions for improvement of the conservation:

FRANCE:

- 1) Encourage and improve regional and cross-border cooperation on the issue of collisions and whale-watching in order to adopt a global and common strategy on the development of mitigation measures.
- 2) Encourage the sharing of experience and the capitalisation of existing tools at regional level.