



Sarah Dolman
Ocean Campaigner, EIA

The role of setting cetacean bycatch thresholds to achieve European legal obligations



Poster no.
CO-39



*Dolman, S.J.*¹ EIA UK

¹Environmental Investigation Agency, 62-63 Upper Street, London N1 0NY; College of Medical, Veterinary & Life Sciences, University of Glasgow, Bearsden Road, G61 1QH, UK

Understanding cetacean bycatch rates

Cetacean populations are at risk from high levels of fisheries bycatch in every European ocean basin. There is an increasing focus on setting bycatch thresholds with various regional and global policy requirements.¹ Where cetacean bycatch thresholds have been calculated, for example the OSPAR assessments for harbour porpoise and common dolphin, they are exceeded.² EU expert advisors, ICES, have stated that thresholds cannot be determined for most populations due to lack of monitoring and inability to calculate bycatch rates.³

Meeting the legal challenge

Whilst it is important for governments and fisheries bodies to focus on setting a threshold limit not to be exceeded, focused efforts are required to minimise or eliminate bycatch before reaching this level. There is a legal requirement under the Technical Measures Regulation⁴ to 'minimise and where possible eliminate' the incidental catches of sensitive marine species,⁵ as well as in some national laws and a commitment made by Parties to the regional conservation body, ASCOBANS, towards zero bycatch.⁶ A focus towards 'zero bycatch' will require progressive implementation of measures that reduce bycatch. Focus is also required where evidence of bycatch is rare but may still impact small populations (e.g. Iberian porpoise, bottlenose dolphin, Risso's dolphin).



Positive action to prevent bycatch

Such effort is in the interest of all parties, particularly fishers, where early implementation of effective and practical measures could prevent the dire situation where population level impacts occur and fisheries closures are required to reduce bycatch below a threshold level.

Efforts to understand and act upon bycatch is a consumer expectation and is an increasing focus for retailers and ecolabels. Whilst solutions to reduce cetacean bycatch exist, with a number of EU Member States currently facing infringement procedures due to lack of adequate action on monitoring and preventing bycatch, it seems the political will does not.

Photo: Harbour porpoise, beached in Wales, covered in gill net ©Ceri Wyn Morris

References: 1. EU COM Action Plan; EU MSFD; US MMPA Import Provisions Rule; 2. OSPAR, 2023; 3. ICES Advice, 2022; 4. EU Technical Measures Regulation; 5. UK Fisheries Act; 6. ASCOBANS Bycatch Resolution, 2020

Find more information at: eia-international.org/ocean