

Abundance estimates for harbour porpoise (*Phocoena phocoena*) in the Spanish area of the Iberian Peninsula Management Unit

ALFREDO LÓPEZ¹, JOSÉ A. VÁZQUEZ², JOSÉ MARTÍNEZ-CEDEIRA¹, ANA CAÑADAS³, ENARA MARCOS⁴, IRANZU MAESTRE⁵, ARTURO RUANO⁶, LUIS LARIA⁷, ÁNGELA LLANOVA¹, KELLY MACLEOD⁸ AND PETER EVANS⁹

¹CEMMA, C/Camiño do Ceán 2, 36.350, Nigrán (Pontevedra), Spain.

²SEC, C/Cabeza de Manzaneda 3Algeciras, Pelayo, 11390 (Cadiz), Spain.

³ALNILAM Research and Conservation, C/ Cándamo 116, CP 28240, Hoyo de Manzanares (Madrid), Spain.

⁴EIBE, C/Baserritar etorbidea 6ºD 3º 20280 Hondarribia. (Gupuzcoa), Spain.

⁵AMBAR, C/ Blas de Otero, nº 18 5º izq.48014 Deusto (Bilbao), Spain.

⁶Arturo Ruano, La Piñera s/n. Villanueva. Eres. 33448. Gozon. (Asturias), Spain.

⁷CEPESMA, C/ Muelle 333700 Luarca, (Oviedo), Spain.

⁸ORCA, Organisation Cetacea, Brittany Centre, Wharf Road, Portsmouth. PO2 8RU. (United Kingdom).

⁹Sea Watch Foundation, Ewyn y Don, Bull Bay, Isle of Anglesey LL68 9SD. (United Kingdom).

Corresponding Authors Email: cemma@arrakis.es

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In 2010, the ICES WGMME (Working Group on Marine Mammal Ecology) endorsed the Management Units (MUs) for harbour porpoise in European North Atlantic waters proposed by the ASCOBANS-Helcom workshop (Evans and Teilmann, 2009). WGMME made two important recommendations that are included in the 2010 ICES Report of the Working Group on Marine Mammal Ecology:

1) WGMME strongly recommends that the Iberian harbour porpoise population should be given high priority for conservation, as a consequence of its presumed small population size, low genetic diversity and likely susceptibility to habitat degradation.

2) WGMME strongly recommends immediate action by the Spanish and Portuguese governments in monitoring and conserving the Iberian harbour porpoise population

Although still there are some uncertainties about the limits of these MUs, mainly in low densities areas (Afonso *et al.*, 2012), the currently updated scheme proposed by the ICES WGMME in 2013 for the implementation of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD) (2008/56/EC) comprises 5 different MUs (Fig. 1): 1.- North Sea (NS), 2.- Kattegat and Belt Seas (KBS), 3.- Western Scotland and Northern Ireland (WSNI), 4.- Celtic Sea and Irish Seas (CIS) and 5.- Iberian Peninsula (IB).

The only existing abundance estimate for the entire Iberian Peninsula MU was obtained SCANSII project (Hammond *et al.*, in press). The abundance estimate for area W (corresponding to Iberian Peninsula MU) was 2.357 (CV=0.92, n=14)

In this document we present the abundance estimate for harbour porpoises in the Spanish Galician and Cantabrian waters of Iberian Peninsula MU. This result was obtained from analysis of data compiled during 2003-2011 period in a conservation research project directed by CEMMA in collaboration with other NGOs from North Spain (AMBAR, EIBE, CEPESMA) and other European organizations (ORCA, SWF and St Andrews University), and funded by the Spanish Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Environment and the Biodiversity Foundation. The annual uncorrected abundance estimate obtained for harbour porpoise was 683

(CV=0.63, 95%CI: 345-951, n=40), with a density estimate of 0.0008 animals per square kilometre. This estimate is negatively biased. An estimate of the minimum number of harbour porpoises bycaught based on stranding data in Galician and Cantabrian fisheries is 233 (60-405) animals (López *et al*, 2012). This represents 34.11% (17.39%-42.58%) of the estimated total abundance in the area. This is an unsustainable level of bycatch and we urge the authorities to carry out research projects to assess precise estimates of abundance and to develop a monitoring program to assess bycatch, in order to adopt effective conservation actions in the Iberian Peninsula MU. Such actions are needed to meet obligations under the EU Habitats Directive and ASCOBANS; a requirement under EU regulation 812/2004 and will ultimately be integral to the assessment of Good Environmental Status under the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (Directive 2008/56/EC, of 17 June 2008).

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TABLES AND FIGURES

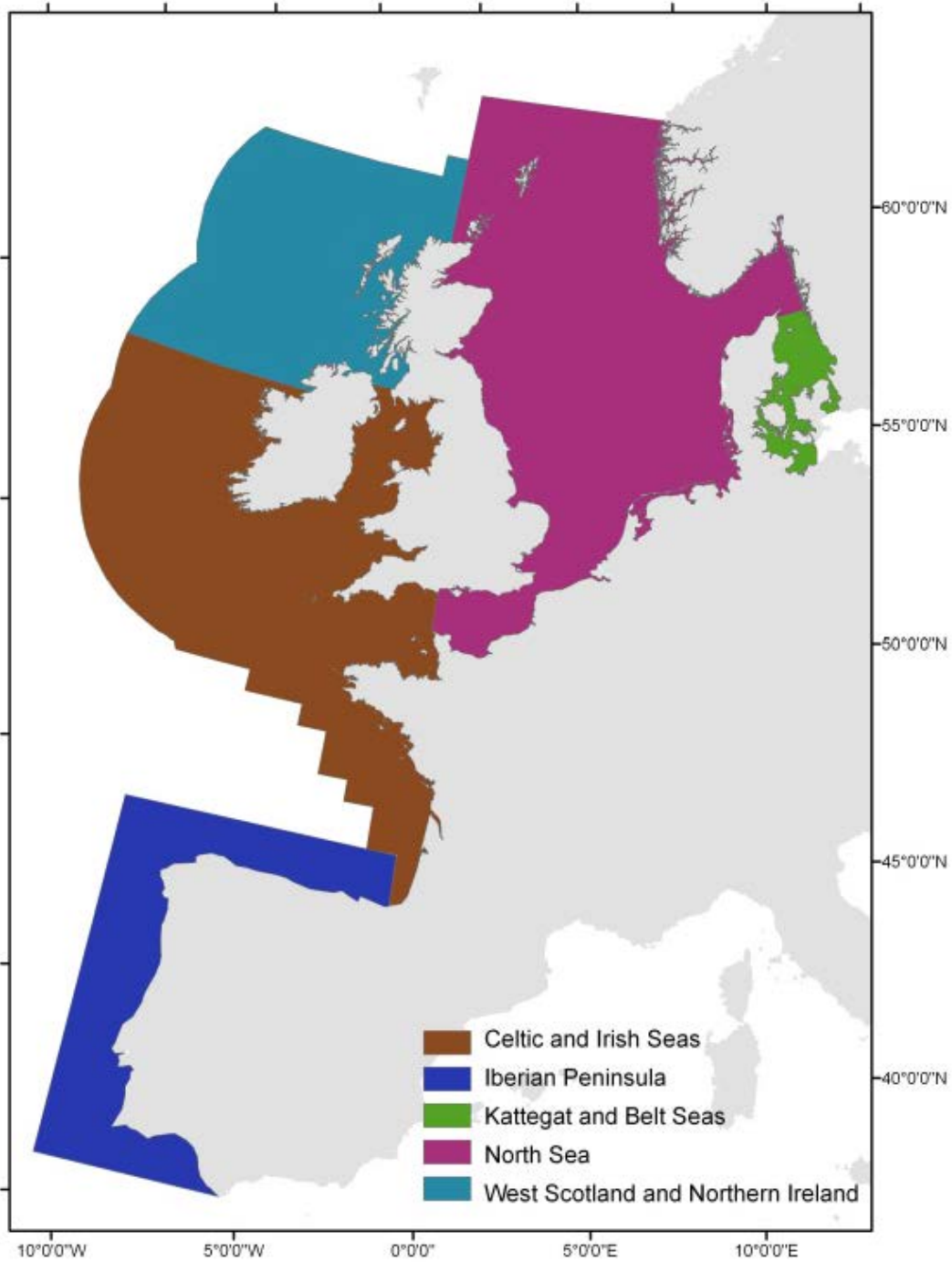


Figure 1. Harbour porpoise management units proposed by ICES WGMME in 2013.

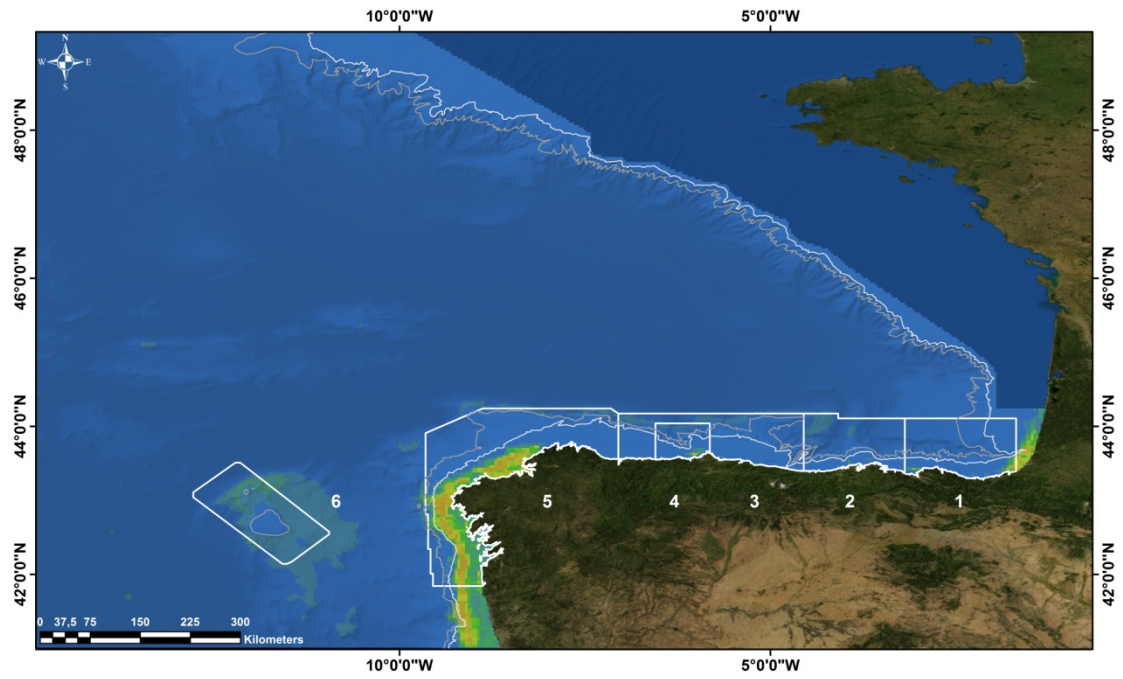


Figure 2. Predicted densities of harbour porpoise for 2003-2011 period in the Spanish area of the Iberian Peninsula Management Unit.