



Interaction between cetaceans and small-scale fishers in the Mediterranean

Concept note

Context

The **Low Impact Fishers of Europe** Platform (LIFE) (www.lifeplatform.eu) is an organization of organizations, run by fishers for fishers. The primary aim of LIFE is to **provide service, support and specific and dedicated voice** for the European fishers, both men and women, who are **smaller scale and who use low impact fishing gears and methods**.

LIFE functions as a professional, member based, organization supporting its members on a broad range of issues. In the last few years there has been an increasing interest to solve the problem of cetaceans interactions (especially dolphins) with the fishing activities carried out by the small-scale fishers. In some cases seemed to be causing worrying physical and economic damage to fishers. Therefore, LIFE took up this issue as a priority to try see what could be done, consulting with expert scientists and dedicated NGOs in several formal and informal meetings. Those stakeholders explained that existing data about cetaceans' interaction is not sufficient to understand the intensity of the problem, and further work was needed in this respect. Thanks to the support of the MAVA Foundation, LIFE has been able to include this issue in its current programme of work in the Mediterranean.

The aims of this study

The study will be carried out in order to demonstrate the existence of dolphin-fisheries interaction in the area of investigation and to produce documentation about how different modalities of interaction (especially "depredation") happen. Collected data will help to investigate the occurrence/incidence of cases of interaction of cetaceans with the SSF fishing fleets, to estimate the economic damage that fishers endure, and any potential risk to safety at sea. The study should be also useful to explore the issue of by-catch of vulnerable species. Finally, the study will support better understanding on gear depredation dynamics in order to provide further information on possible mitigation measures to be used, hopefully moving beyond the use of pingers, and to raise awareness among the administrations and decision-makers on the issue and to favor practical solutions.

Study Area

The study area will include three Mediterranean countries: Andalucía (Spain), the Maltese islands and Sicily (Italy), where the study includes survey data collection. In parallel, in-depth research at sea will be performed in Sicily, where close collaboration with small-scale fishers will be key, as their vessels will be used as "floating laboratories" for data collection purposes.

Activities of the project

LIFE has contracted the necessary expertise in each subarea of work to carry out the following activities:

- **Territorial surveys:** field work to collect information through sample surveys at fishing harbors in Andalucía (Spain), Sicily (Italy) and Malta, to understand the incidence of the



interaction, the type of damage in case of depredation, quantification of losses and costs incurred and opinions of the small scale fishers.

- **Monitoring surveys at sea** (Sicily): field-work at sea, collecting further information to understand the depredation dynamics including fishing effort and the extent of the damage, recording bio-acoustics and underwater filming. This exercise will be conducted through a direct collaboration between fishermen and scientists in what we refer to as a “**floating laboratories programme**”, in which the SSF actively contribute during their fishing operations to the collection of data collection and participate with scientists through joint work.
- **Implement and disseminate a voluntary online survey publicly available for fishers** to report SSF-Cetaceans interactions and cost-damages incurred. This will serve as a pilot test methodology for future wider implementation.
- Data analysis in each subarea of work and reporting
- Analytical overview of results and reporting

Collaborations

LIFE is promoting and coordinating the study in partnership with the following organizations in the different subareas: Asociación Herpetológica Española (AHE) in Spain, the MareCamp Association in Italy and the Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST) in Malta.

Timeline

The fieldwork will start this summer and will finish in October 2019, with the aim of having the preliminary results and area reports by October 2019 and the final overview report by December 2019.

What happens at the end of this study? Next planned steps

- Appropriate delivery of the results and conclusions of the study to the fishers involved and other interested SSF organisations will be carried out, organizing dedicated meetings in each studied areas and by sending the report to the main organisations and contacts.
- Participation in scientific fora will be promoted to share the results.
- A Press release with the results will be available for the wider public.
- The pilot voluntary online survey would remain publicly available for fishers to report SSF-Cetaceans interactions and cost-damages incurred. If interested to contribute to that please contact us at med@lifeplatform.eu
- A meeting with the European Commission Officials and Parliament MEPs will be organized to disseminate the results, conclusions of the study with the aim to discuss and promote specific actions to resolve the situation.
- Further advocacy work will be studied in depth once the results are available.

For more information

To receive or get informed with further information about the project and results, LIFE's mission and work, please contact Marta Cavallé (med@lifeplatform.eu); www.lifeplatform.eu