



Wildlife and Countryside Link briefing Cetaceans Charting Progress 2: The State of UK Seas June 2011

Wildlife and Countryside Link (Link) brings together over 30 of the UK's leading voluntary organisations united by their common interest in the conservation and enjoyment of wildlife, the countryside and the marine environment. Taken together our members have the support of over 8 million people in the UK.

These briefings are supported by the following organisations:

- Buglife – The Invertebrate Conservation Trust
- The Mammal Society
- Marine Conservation Society
- Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
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- The Wildlife Trusts
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- WWF - UK

Overview

The Charting Progress 2 Report (CP2) is the result of a structured and co-ordinated approach to the second assessment of the status of UK seas. Published in July 2010, five years after the first assessment, it aims to illustrate the changes since 2005 and the advances made towards the UK vision of “*clean, healthy, safe, productive and biologically diverse oceans and seas*”. It consists of the main CP2 Report (which is also available in an online format), and two summary documents; an eight page CP2 Overview and a 16 page Government's Commentary on CP2; and is based on four supporting technical “Feeder Reports” covering:

- Healthy and Biologically Diverse Seas
- Clean and Safe Seas
- Ocean Processes
- Productive Seas

CP2 was prepared by the UK Marine Monitoring and Assessment Strategy community, which was established in response to the first Charting Progress Report. The assessment is structured around 11 regional seas covering all UK waters, some of which were subsequently merged to create the eight UK marine regions assessed.



The intention is that CP2 will be used to inform policy decisions on the future management of the UK's seas. It is also expected to form the foundation of the initial assessment required by the EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive, which is due in 2012, and is already informing the evidence base for marine planning in England.

In light of the importance of CP2 for future decision-making on the management of UK seas, Wildlife and Countryside Link (Link) is concerned that the current status of UK seas is accurately recorded, wherever that information is summarised. In a number of specific places, we are aware that the summarised information on CP2 does not accurately reflect the information in the CP2 report or the Feeder Reports.

Consequently, Link has produced this briefing on cetaceans to compare the findings and messages of the Healthy and Biologically Diverse Seas Feeder Report, with those used in the CP2 Report, the Overview and Government commentary.

In addition, Link has produced a further three separate briefings covering:

- Deepwater fish, sharks, rays, skates and diadromous fish
- Marine benthic habitats
- Waterbirds and seabirds

If you would like to receive a copy of any of these briefings, please contact Fiona Llewellyn at Link (fiona@wcl.org.uk or 02079208600).

Wildlife and Countryside Link Briefing: Charting Progress 2 - Cetaceans

The UK's seas support a high diversity of cetacean species. The CP2 Report and the Feeder Report state that of the 28 species recorded, 11 are observed regularly. Of these, harbour porpoise, bottlenose dolphin, white-beaked dolphin, fin whale and minke whale are highly abundant in UK waters.

A recent analysis by Clark *et al.* (2010)¹ on marine protected areas for cetaceans in Scotland, England and Wales identifies critical habitat in UK waters for six species - harbour porpoise, bottlenose dolphin, white-beaked dolphin, Risso's dolphin, minke whale, and short-beaked common dolphin. A further six species are identified by Clark *et al.* (2010) as having insufficient data, but critical habitat is still likely to exist for them in UK waters.

The areas of highest diversity are identified in the CP2 Report as the waters off the continental shelf to the north and west of Scotland and south-west of England. This broadly agrees with the analysis by Clark *et al.* (2010), but these authors identify other critical areas in addition.

Human activities have resulted in serious declines in global and regional populations of cetaceans, including some UK populations. This has led to all species being protected through a range of international and national regulations.

Summary

Both, the CP2 Report and the Feeder Report postulate that all cetaceans found in UK waters form part of much larger populations

which in some cases range over very large areas. As a result, any assessment of the status of cetaceans in UK waters is regarded as being within the context of the wider geographical area.

Of the 28 cetacean species identified in UK waters, only the five most abundant species are assessed as having a favourable conservation status by the CP2 Report and the Feeder Report. For the other species, the status is either unknown or impossible to assess. However, this assessment is at odds with the European Environment Agency's assessment of cetacean populations in north-west European waters, in which only the bottlenose dolphin is considered to have a favourable status.

A major discrepancy exists between the tone and content of the Government's Commentary and the CP2 Report. The Commentary is remarkably upbeat, referring to only three of the eight regions; two, Northern and Southern North Sea, in which populations are 'good' and the third, the Eastern Channel, in which the population is 'recovering'. There is however, no suggestion in the CP2 Report or in the Feeder Report that the Eastern Channel population of cetaceans is starting to recover from decline. In commenting on only three of the eight regions, it fails to reflect the Feeder Report assessment for four of the six regions (for which an assessment was possible), in which there are considered to be many or some problems. Cetaceans in the Eastern Channel are considered to be in a poor condition, and only in a moderate condition in the Western Channel and Celtic Sea, the Irish Sea and the Minches and Western Scotland. For the other two regions (Scottish Continental Shelf and offshore waters north and west of Scotland) the status of cetaceans is unknown, this is particularly disappointing since one of these regions (offshore waters north and west of

¹ <http://www.iucn-uk.org/Portals/0//WDCS%20UK%20MPA%20Report%20ow%20res.pdf>

Scotland) is recognised as one of the most important regions for cetaceans. Furthermore, the CP2 Report recognises that the assessment does not have a high degree of certainty – and the Feeder Report states that the confidence in the expert judgement was low, moderate or unknown.

There are significant differences between the CP2 Report and the evidence and weight of concern in the Feeder Report. In particular, the CP2 Report fails to recognise the threats beyond UK waters which could have an impact on populations spending time in UK waters. For example, whaling and drive fishing in the Faroes, or bycatch in other European fisheries which could be cumulatively adding to the impact of bycatch in UK waters. In addition, although the assessments identify cetacean populations as being in a good condition in the Northern and Southern North Sea, the Feeder Report concludes that current bycatch remains a particular concern in the Southern North Sea, particularly as this has not been fully documented in recent years.

Other issues in the Feeder Report which received little or no attention in the CP2 Report include entanglement, marine litter, prey availability, and pollution. While the CP2 Report identifies that concentrations of pollutants seem to be declining in cetaceans from UK waters, the Clean and Safe Seas chapter identifies that concentrations of chlorinated biphenyls in harbour porpoise blubber have declined only slowly despite controls on the use of PCBs for 30 years. Chlorinated biphenyls can affect neurological, immunological and reproductive processes.

Most important however is the lack of recognition in the CP2 Report given to the potential for cumulative impacts on cetacean populations. It is this cumulative impact that the Feeder Report recognises is of greater concern than any individual pressure and

could affect the long term viability of some species. A further omission in the CP2 Report is the fact that the Feeder Report suggests no future trend predictions are possible due to uncertainties in the relationship and influence of pressures on population dynamics.

Finally, limitations in the use of the Favourable Conservation Status (FCS) 2007 report as the basis for assessment are not accurately portrayed. The European Commission recognised that the lack of, or limits to, information and data on marine habitats and species, meant that the FCS assessment would likely have low confidence levels associated with the assessment. This is not accurately reflected in the CP2 Report or the Feeder report and leads to a misleading confidence in the CP2 Report conclusions.

Conclusions

In light of these findings, Link is of the opinion that the CP2 Report, CP2 Overview and the Government's Commentary seriously mis-report the status of cetacean populations in UK waters. The Government's Commentary is misleading and there are significant differences between the CP2 Report and the evidence and weight of concern in the Feeder Report. In addition, it is Link's view that the basis of the assessment is flawed because the approach of treating UK cetaceans as part of much wider NE Atlantic populations is inappropriate and the basis for the assessments should only be considered "preliminary".

Link is concerned that the urgent need for further action to provide adequate protection for cetaceans and improve the management of activities which have a direct impact on them will not be addressed in the future.