CETACEAN BYCATCH - STATEMENT OF CONCERN

Proposed Council Regulation on
Incidental Catches of Cetaceans in Fisheries

Bycatch in fisheries represents the most acute threat to small cetaceans in European waters. While much is still unknown about the problem and many fisheries are yet to be monitored, enough cases of cetacean bycatch have been documented to establish the severity of the problem and the vulnerability of certain populations to warrant immediate action.

We broadly welcome the Commission's proposed Regulation as an important first step towards addressing this critical problem.   However, we are extremely concerned that important provisions are not yet included in the proposal and that attempts are being made to seriously weaken the existing text.

Therefore, we call on Member States to ensure that the Regulation includes the following:

- The current proposal to restrict the length of driftnets and to phase out their use completely in the Baltic Sea, implemented as soon as possible;
- A requirement for the deployment of pingers without delay in all areas currently proposed (including all of areas VII and VIId), accompanied by observer monitoring and impact assessment;
- A requirement for Member States to research and develop alternative mitigation and fishing methods with a view to phasing out reliance on pingers within a specified timeframe;
- A specified and short timeframe for the introduction of observer monitoring schemes based on a sampling strategy;
- A clear commitment to take emergency management measures, including fishery closures if necessary, to prevent the current unacceptable dolphin mortality in pelagic trawl fisheries in the north-east Atlantic:
- An undertaking to adopt a formal strategic management framework on cetacean bycatch as soon as possible; and
- A commitment to ensure that the measures under consideration for the monitoring and mitigation of cetacean bycatch within Community waters are formally reflected in the management of EU distant water fisheries.