



BYCATCH IN THE BLUE:

Cetacean Susceptibility and Fishing Practices in the North-East Atlantic



BACKGROUND

Bycatch = the incidental capture of non-targeted species in fishing operations (Butterworth, 2017).

It is estimated that globally, **300 000 cetaceans are killed as bycatch each year (IWC).**

However, **not much is known about specific bycatch patterns for regions, methods and species.**

Publicly available ICES data was analyzed to find these trends. Our analyzed data consisted of **bycatch data from 7 North-East Atlantic countries**, namely: **Azores, Denmark, France, Iceland, Norway, Mainland-Portugal, Spain, and the United Kingdom.**

Key:
Darker colors indicate **higher bycatch** numbers in our data set.

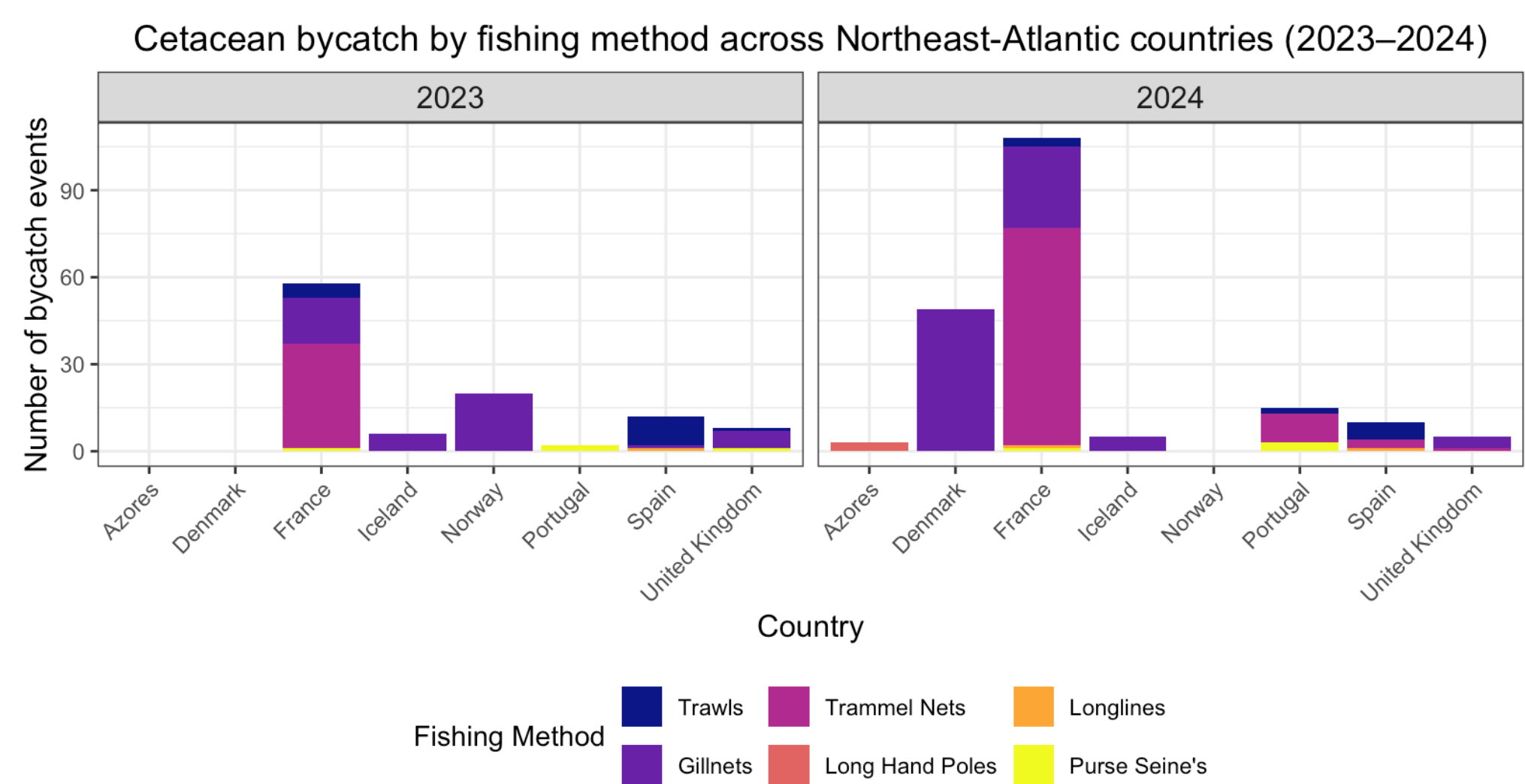


Fig 1. Number of cetacean bycatch events for 7 Northeast-Atlantic countries in 2023 and 2024. The bars represent the number of bycatch events per species. The colours indicate the fishing method. These include: trawls, gillnets, trammel nets, long hand poles, longlines, and purse seine's.

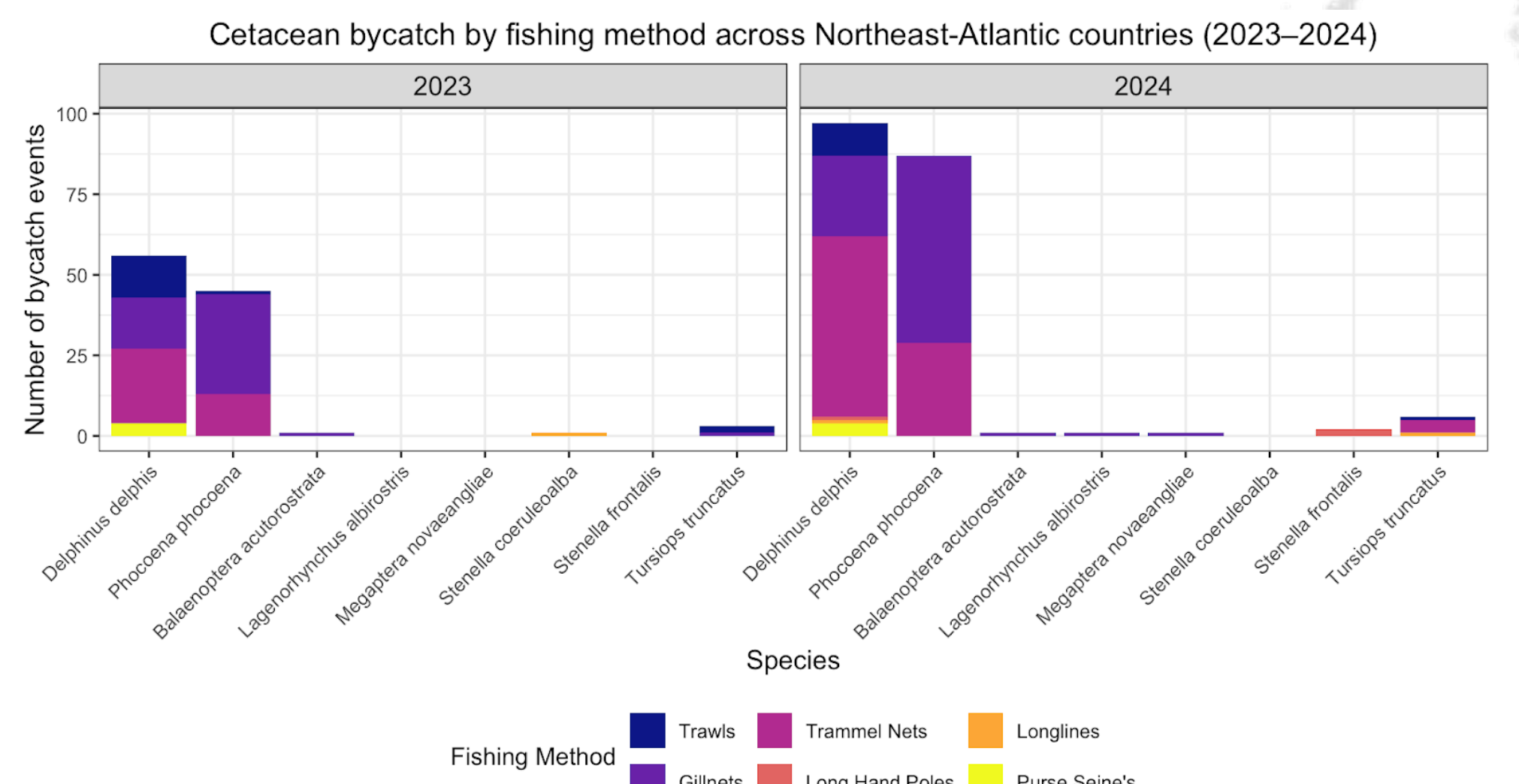


Fig 2. Number of cetacean bycatch events sorted by species across 7 Northeast Atlantic countries in 2023 and 2024. Bars show the total number of recorded bycatch events for each species, separated by fishing method.

MAIN FINDINGS

Gillnets and trammel nets were the main sources of cetacean bycatch across the North-East Atlantic and **posed the highest risk to small cetaceans**, especially *D. delphis* and *P. phocoena*. Reflecting their coastal ranges and tendency to approach vessels.

Larger species were occasionally **caught in trawl operations**, reflecting the greater risk of trawl-like nets to slow swimming and surface feeding whales.

These findings highlight strong gear-specific and region-specific trends, emphasizing the need for improved monitoring and targeted mitigation measures in high-risk fisheries.



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References

- Butterworth, A. (ed.) (2017) Marine Mammal Welfare: Human Induced Change in the Marine Environment and its Impacts on Marine Mammal Welfare. Cham: Springer International Publishing (Animal Welfare). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-46994-2>.
- International Whaling Commission: <https://iwc.int/management-and-conservation/bycatch-and-entanglement-of-cetaceans-in-fishing/bycatch>
- AI generated whale in net: "image of a whale stuck in a white net, surrounded by fish"