

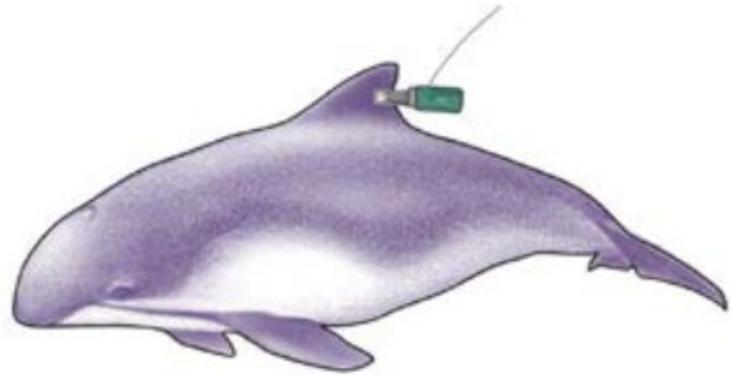
Pilot study - tagging harbour porpoises in the Dutch North Sea

ASCOBANS North Sea Group – 14-15 February 2023

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Photo: Steve Geelhoed



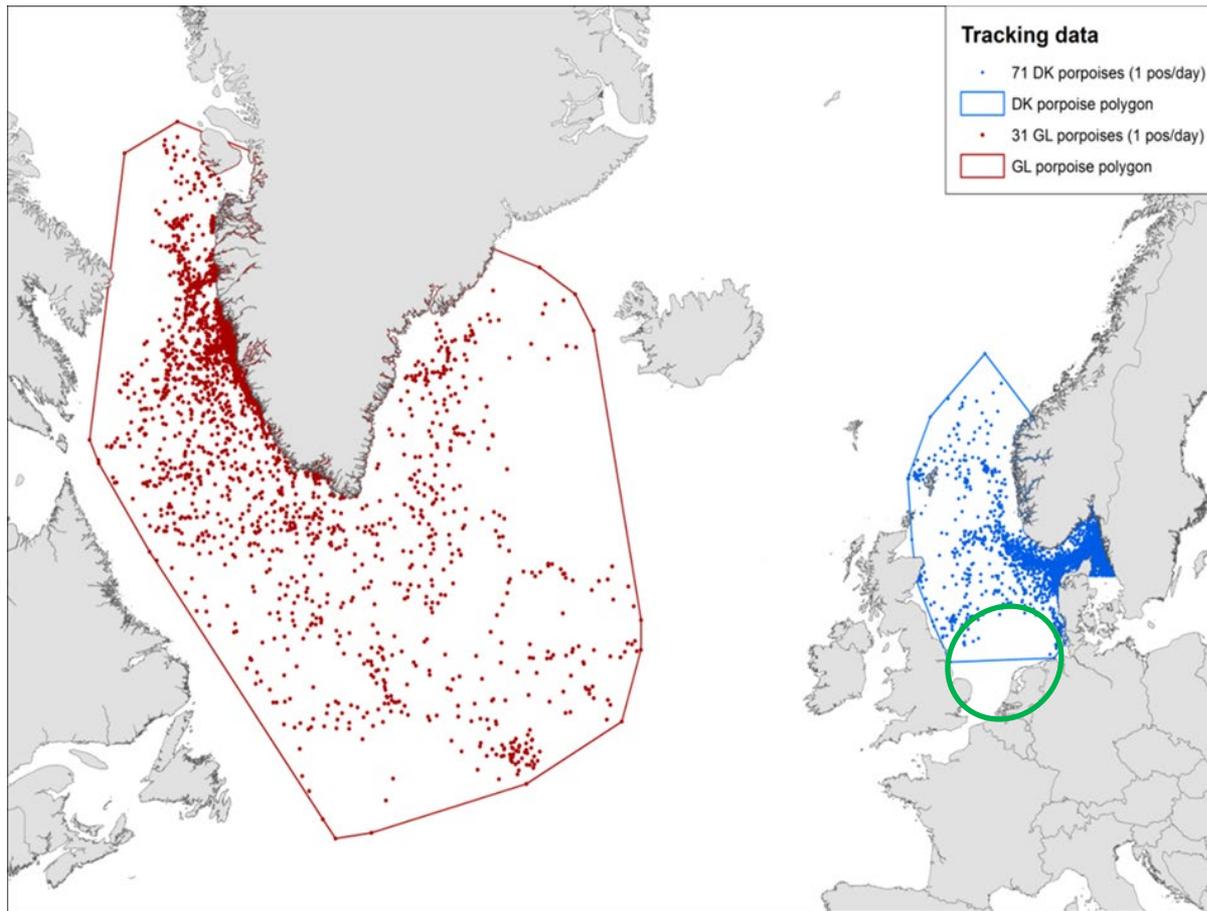
Motivation

- The updated Dutch Harbour Porpoise Conservation Plan recommends starting an investigation with the tagging of harbour porpoises in the Netherlands.
- Main question: “How do harbour porpoises use the southern North Sea, and to what extent is this influenced by (anthropogenic) pressures?”
- Priorities from a policy perspective: *large-scale movements, habitat preferences and habitat use, responses to human activities and feeding ecology.*

Updated Conservation Plan for the Harbour Porpoise *Phocoena phocoena* in the Netherlands

Maintaining a Favourable Conservation Status





Recorded satellite positions of 71 harbour porpoises tagged in Denmark (blue dots) and 31 in West Greenland (red dots). Black contour: southern North Sea. Adapted from Nielsen et al. (2018).

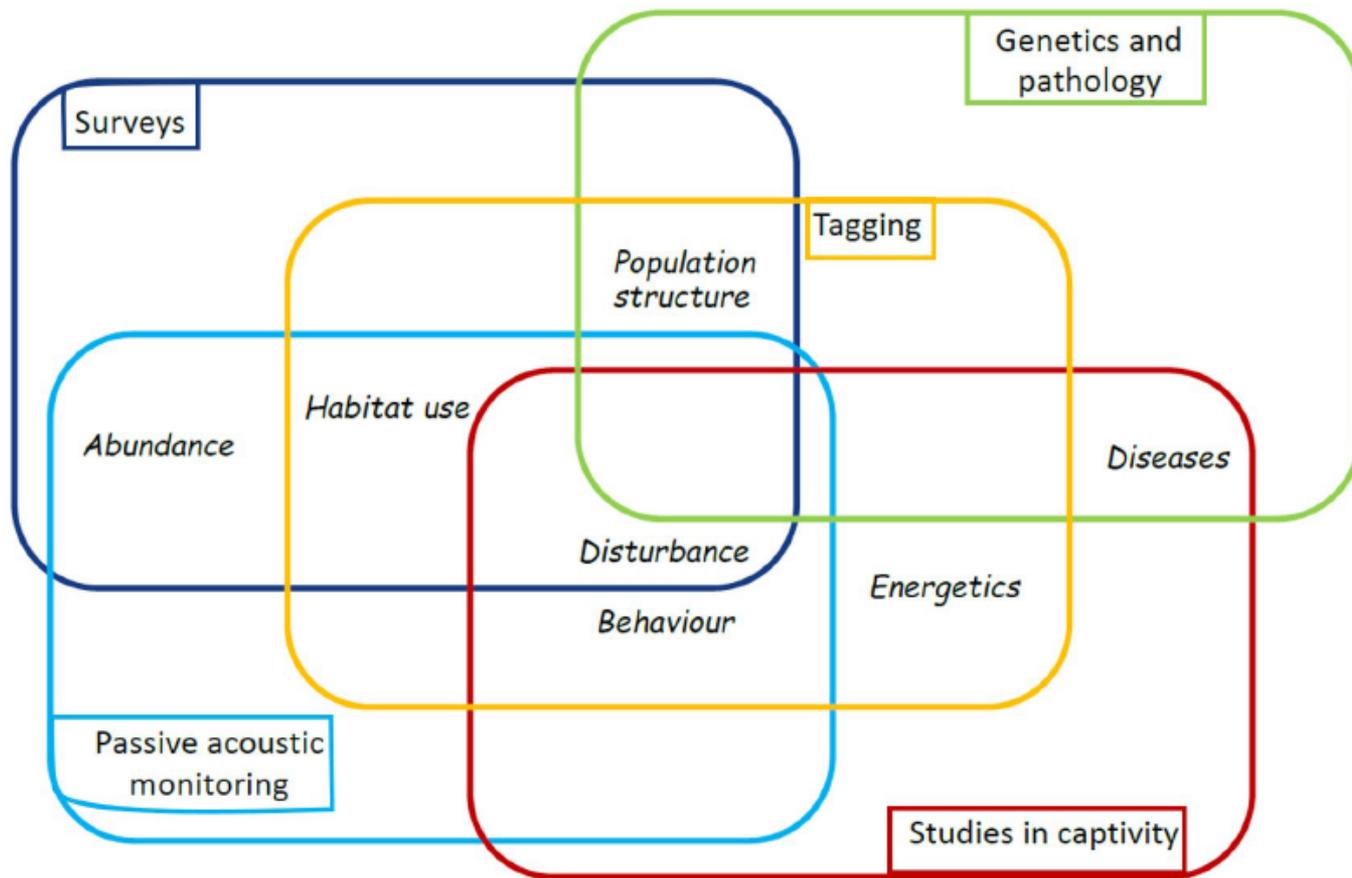


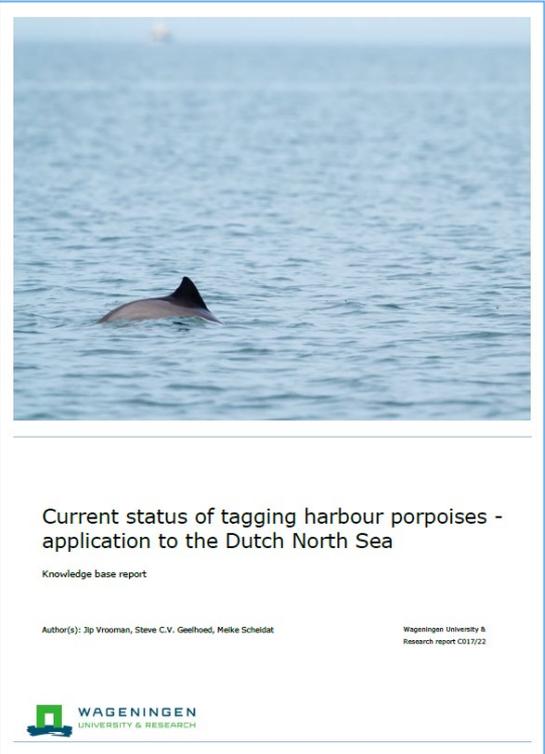
Figure on various type of studies and what kind of information they can provide/collate, adapted from Jakob Tougaard (Tougaard, 2021). Tagging, in combination with other surveys, can provide information on various aspects, such as habitat use, disturbance, behaviour, energetics and population structure.

Process

- Report Scheidat et al., 2016 on feasibility of tagging harbour porpoises in NL
- International expert workshop: 14 Apr 2021
- Stakeholder workshop NL: 27 May 2021
- Formation of project team: Jun 2021
- International expert workshop: 28 Feb 2022
- Knowledge base report: Vrooman *et al.*, 2022 (*next slide*)
- Stakeholder workshop NL: 7 Apr 2022
- Development of work plan: Nov 2021 – Dec 2022
- Exploration of assignment: 2022
- 2023: definite assignment and start project
 - Commissioners: Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality & Rijkswaterstaat. Potentially KBIN Belgium
 - Contractors: WMR, TNO, Aarhus University (Denmark), veterinarian

Report Vrooman et al., 2022

- Research questions (from the policy perspective) that tagging could help answer
- Current tag types, components and use
- Representative sampling
- Collected data and link to research questions (what kind of answers can tagging provide?)
- Welfare and ethics
- Recommendations



Phased approach

- Phase 1: preparation and pre-study, developing protocols, **go/no-go**
- Phase 2 (*depending on phase 1*): tagging harbour porpoises in the Dutch North Sea, **go/no-go**
- Phase 3 (*depending on phases 1 and 2*): analysing data, reporting and advising on potential next steps/continuation

→ **Close collaboration with Danish experts & veterinarian**

Objectives

1. (Further) exploring the feasibility of tagging harbour porpoises in the Netherlands
2. Developing a method for, and gaining experience with, catching, tagging and releasing harbour porpoises in their natural environment.
3. Obtaining initial insight in large-scale movements, (variation in) time spent at specific locations and preferred habitats of tagged harbour porpoises, as well as and seasonal variation therein.
4. Depending on the success of objectives 1 to 3, laying the foundation for a large-scale tagging program with the aim of answering the research questions as prioritized by the commissioners.

Thank you



Photo: Jip Vrooman