

(English version)

**Question for written answer E-001224/25
to the Commission
Siegbert Frank Droese (ESN)
(24 March 2025)**

Subject: Temporary fishing restriction in the Bay of Biscay

1. What is the scientific basis for the Commission's decision that a short-term fishing ban from 22 January to 20 February over the next few years will be enough to sustainably protect stocks of dolphin and other marine mammals in the Bay of Biscay?
2. Why is the Commission focusing on a temporary ban instead of on alternative measures such as more selective fishing methods or permanent protected areas?
3. How will it be ensured that this short-term restriction does not simply lead to increased fishing after the period ends?

Submitted: 24.3.2025

**Answer given by Mr Kadis on behalf of the European Commission
(26 May 2025)**

The closure ⁽¹⁾ is based on the scientific advice from the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) of 29 June 2023 ⁽²⁾. According to ICES, six of the scenarios proposed in the advice are likely to reduce incidental catches of dolphins below the potential biological removal (PBR) limit, but only for data from at-sea sampling.

Also, according to ICES none of the scenarios would result in a reduction in annual dolphin mortality below the PBR for data from both at-sea sampling and strandings.

It also advised that closures are likely to be the most effective short-term measure for reducing bycatches. The closure was adopted through regionalisation based on a joint recommendation submitted by the relevant Member States ⁽³⁾ and following consultations with the Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries (STECF) and the Expert Group on Fisheries and Aquaculture.

According to a report on the closure implemented in winter period 2023-2024 ⁽⁴⁾, bycatches decreased from an annual average of 6100 dolphins between 2017 and 2023 to 1450 in the winter period 2023/2024. This is the lowest bycatch estimate since 2015.

Ongoing research efforts on long-term mitigation measures should soon deliver results. These measures may include acoustic deterrent devices, modifications on the fishing gears, reduction of fishing effort and different types of closures. Any different approach has to be supported with scientific evidence.

The fishing activity in the Bay of Biscay is regulated by other measures such as fishing opportunities. Member States have adopted strategies to gradually consume their quota throughout the year and to adjust it to market prices and needs. The Commission is not aware of changes in the fishing pattern of the type suggested.

⁽¹⁾ Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) 2024/3089 of 30 September 2024 amending Regulation (EU) 2019/1241 as regards measures to reduce incidental catches of common dolphin (*Delphinus delphis*) and other small cetaceans in the Bay of Biscay: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg_del/2024/3089/oj/eng.

⁽²⁾ ICES(2023). EU request on mitigation measures to reduce bycatches of common dolphin (*Delphinus delphis*) in the Bay of Biscay (ICES Subarea 8). ICES Advice: https://www.ices-library.figshare.com/articles/report/EU_request_on_mitigation_measures_to_reduce_bycatches_of_common_dolphin_Delphinus_delphis_in_the_Bay_of_Biscay_ICES_Subarea_8_/23515176/1. Special Requests: <https://ices->

⁽³⁾ France, Spain, Portugal, The Netherlands and Belgium.

⁽⁴⁾ Bilan des mortalités par capture : hiver 2024 — https://www.observatoire-pelagis.cnrs.fr/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/2b-Bilan-des-mortalites_hiver2024_20241115_PeltieretAl.pdf.