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PRESS RELEASE

TUESDAY, 31 AUGUST 2021

FRANCE HOSTS WORLD CONSERVATION CONGRESS WHILE PERMITTING THE SLAUGHTER OF DOLPHINS

In early September, France will host the World Conservation Congress in Marseille. This major event brings to together the international community to discuss the most pressing issues in nature conservation. Yet France refuses to act on a tragedy that has been occurring for years in its own waters: the slaughter of dolphins and porpoises, caught by the thousands in fishing nets in the Bay of Biscay.

French government turns a deaf ear to the slaughter of dolphins in its waters

Since December 2020, more than 800 dolphins and porpoises¹ have been found stranded on the French Atlantic and Channel coasts, with an estimated total of around 8,000 dead, stranded or drowned animals. Over the past 30 years, more than 100,000 dolphins² have died in fishing nets in the Bay of Biscay.

“When these animals are trapped in fishermen’s nets, they die of asphyxiation, in long and painful agony. We are outraged by this suffering of animals, which has been going on for 30 years in the same places, at the same times and with the same fishing methods”, explains **Alain Bougrain-Dubourg, President of the French League for the Protection of Birds**. It should be added that many of the dolphins found on our beaches have been deliberately disembowelled, probably so that they would sink to the bottom of the ocean, far from the eyes of the public.

Nevertheless, the French government still refuses to stop France’s deadly fishing practices,³ even though such a suspension has been recommended by several European scientific bodies⁴ and the Scientific Committee of the International Whaling Commission.⁵ In fact, France has received a formal notice from the European Commission⁶ and risks being sanctioned by the Court of Justice of the European Union. Would

¹ Provisional data provided by the PELAGIS Observatory

² Etat des connaissances sur les captures accidentelles de dauphins communs dans le golfe de Gascogne – Synthèse 2019. Observatoire PELAGIS – UMS 3462, La Rochelle Université / CNRS, 23 pages.

³ Between 2015 and 2018, 97% of the mid-water trawls and gillnets (the two fishing methods involved in the catches) present in the Bay of Biscay were operated by French vessels. (Source: [Global Fishing Watch](#) and [Marine Protected Area boundary data](#)). These data are presented on our [“Guess where I’m going to fish”](#) map.

⁴ [“EU request on emergency measures to prevent bycatch of common dolphin \(Delphinus delphis\) and Baltic Proper harbour porpoise \(Phocoena phocoena\) in the Northeast Atlantic”](#), ICES Special Request Advice, Northeast Atlantic ecoregions, May 2020; [Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries. EUR 28359 EN](#), January 2021

⁵ Report of the Scientific Committee of the International Whaling Commission, SC/68C, June 2021

⁶ [Nature and fisheries: Commission urges FRANCE, SPAIN and SWEDEN to take action to reduce by-catch](#), June 2020



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the French government rather burden taxpayers with a fine than prevent the death of thousands of dolphins, year after year? Is France willing to take the risk of seeing these protected species disappear?⁷

The gap between France's international claims and its inaction at the national level

France tries to portray itself as a leader in nature protection on the international scene,⁸ while it does exactly the opposite on its own territory. *“Faced with an unprecedented loss of biodiversity, it is both incomprehensible and unbearable that France should host the World Conservation Congress even as it refuses to listen to scientists and allows the slaughter of dolphins in its own waters to continue”*, says **Elodie Martinie-Cousty**, head of France Nature Environnement's Oceans, Seas and Coastlines Network.

After taking [the case to the European Court of Justice](#) (together with the French League for the Protection of Birds and 24 other European NGOs), France Nature Environnement [sued the French government](#) for its refusal to take action last winter and its unwillingness to strengthen scientific monitoring measures. France Nature Environnement and the French League for the Protection of Birds are calling for an eight-week suspension of these harmful fishing methods during the winter of 2021-2022, as well as an annual reduction of at least 25% in the number of dolphins caught.

“France has repeatedly failed to introduce measures to prevent unnecessary deaths of dolphins in the Bay of Biscay, despite being legally obliged to do so by EU law. The European Commission cannot just stand by while thousands of killed dolphins are washed up on our beaches each winter.” said **Christine Adams**, Fisheries Policy Officer at Seas At Risk. “We need to see long overdue actions now to ensure that EU law is respected, and dolphins remain in our oceans and not on our beaches.”

France Nature Environnement and the French League for the Protection of Birds invite you to sign this [petition](#) to stop slaughter of dolphins:

⇒ Click [here](#) to sign the petition

France Nature Environnement invites you to visit its stand at the World Conservation Congress in Marseille on Sunday 5 September to watch the documentary “*Dauphins sous haute surveillance: une hécatombe silencieuse*” (Dolphins under close surveillance: a silent massacre):

⁷ Report of the Scientific Committee of the International Whaling Commission, Nairobi, Kenya, 10-23 May 2019.

⁸ At the international level, France co-chairs the High Ambition Coalition for Nature and People; in January 2021, at the One Planet Summit, President Emmanuel Macron pledged to protect terrestrial and marine ecosystems; in September 2020, at the UN Biodiversity Summit, Emmanuel Macron declared: “If 2020 is the year of awareness, 2021 must be the year of action”, and on the sidelines of this summit, France also endorsed a “Leaders’ Pledge for Nature”.



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⇒ See you at the France Nature Environnement stand at the World Conservation Congress (Exhibition Hall, Law and Governance section, Stand no. G15, Parc Chanot, Marseille)

⇒ Sunday, 5 September at 10.30 am

Find out more

[Dolphin slaughter: legal action against the state](#)

[Report on the issue of dolphins caught in fishing nets, including a video testimonial and a petition](#)

Article from the Cetacean Research Group: "[Mortalité par pêche en Gascogne: le vent tourné cet hiver?](#)" (Death by fishing in Gascony: Did the situation change this winter?)

Our experts

Elodie Martinie-Cousty, head of the Oceans, Seas and Coasts network of France Nature Environnement: +33 (0)6 08 07 14 16

Sophie Mjati, coordinator of the Oceans, Seas and Coasts network of France Nature Environnement: +33 (0)7 81 42 47 99

Contact for media enquiries

Alexis Vannier, Director of Communications and Advocacy: +33 (0)7 57 48 49 03 – alexis.vannier@fne.asso.fr

France Nature Environnement is the French federation of nature and environmental protection associations. It represents a network of 3,500 associations, divided into 53 member organisations from across the country, both in mainland France and the French overseas territories. You can find us at fne.asso.fr, and on **Facebook**, **Twitter** (@FNEasso) and **LinkedIn**.