



# CALL FOR PROJECTS 2026

“Contribution to the protection and restoration of biodiversity and aquatic ecosystems: reducing bycatch of small cetaceans in the Bay of Biscay, France”

EMFAF Specific Objective 1.6 – action type 1

## SPECIFICATIONS

Call for projects launch date: 19 October 2026

Call for projects closing date: 19 January 2027 at 3:00 p.m. (Paris time)

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## **I. Objectives of the call for projects**

The EMFAF (European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund – FEAMPA in French; Regulation (EU) 2021/1139) is a European Union fund covering the period from 2021 to 2027. It allocates financial resources from the Union budget to support the EU's common fisheries policy (CFP), the European Union's (EU) maritime policy and the EU's international ocean governance agenda.

The EMFAF is the financial instrument of the common fisheries policy (CFP), with the protection of resources at the heart of its objectives and strengthened ambitions regarding the social dimension, adaptation to climate change and the cleanliness of the oceans.

The Fund contributes to:

- Achieving UN Sustainable Development Goal 14 ("conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources"), which the Union has committed to attaining;
- Achieving the objectives of the European Green Deal, namely the roadmap for the Union's environmental and climate policies;
- The sustainability of fishing and the conservation of marine biological resources for healthy, safe and sustainably managed seas and oceans; food security through the supply of seafood and the growth of a sustainable blue economy;
- Various plans at European level, such as the "Farm to Fork" strategy, the renewed biodiversity strategy for 2030, and the new guidelines for the sustainable development of EU aquaculture.

Specific Objective (SO) 1.6 "Contribution to the protection and restoration of biodiversity and aquatic ecosystems" (Article 25 of the Regulation) and its action type 1 (AT 1) "Operations for the protection and restoration of marine and coastal ecosystems, including by limiting the impacts of activities, in application of European directives" must meet French and European strategic priorities in accordance with the so-called "Nature" Directives and the common fisheries policy, such as the achievement of good environmental status of marine waters.

France has chosen to meet the obligations arising from the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (2008/56/EC – MSFD) and the Maritime Spatial Planning Directive (MSPD) through the Seafront Strategy Documents (DSF). SO 1.6 AT 1 makes it possible to fund the implementation of the European obligations arising from the MSFD, the Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC – HD) and the Birds Directive (2009/147/EC – BD) in order to limit the impact of fishing activities on marine ecosystems in mainland France. Although these three directives do not apply in the overseas territories, a similar ambition is pursued there through the maritime basin strategy documents (DSBM), which are the integrated planning tool under the MSPD in the overseas territories. The actions are detailed in section II.2 below.

AT 1, the subject of the call for projects described in these specifications, is co-led by the Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs, Fisheries and Aquaculture (DGAMPA) and the Directorate for Water and Biodiversity (DEB). The regions are responsible for implementing AT 2, 3 and 4.

This call for projects aims to contribute to the objectives of the national action plan to reduce bycatch of small cetaceans in the Bay of Biscay, France.

Indeed, since 2016, significant strandings of small cetaceans have occurred on the French coasts of the Bay of Biscay, particularly during the winter period (from December to March). To curb this phenomenon, work has been carried out with scientists and fishing professionals, making it possible to establish a

national action plan to reduce bycatch of small cetaceans in the Bay of Biscay. This plan is detailed on the page <https://www.mer.gouv.fr/cetaces>.

In this context, and following the injunction of the Council of State<sup>1</sup> to take closure measures while strengthening data collection, the Government decided to close the entire Bay of Biscay area to fishing gear at risk of bycatch of small cetaceans<sup>2</sup> for a period of 4 weeks in 2024, 2025 and 2026, between 22 January and 20 February inclusive.

Despite scientific research, and in the absence of sustainable alternatives found before the end of 2026, the fishing closure will be renewed during the at-risk period of winter 2026-2027. Shipowners will have to stop fishing for 30 consecutive days, on dates left to the shipowner's choice, between 15 January and 27 February 2027 inclusive. This measure concerns the gear identified as at risk: nets (GTR, GNS, GTN), pelagic trawls (OTM, PTM), paired demersal trawls (PTB) and purse seines (PS).

In parallel with this risk-reduction measure, experiments and scientific work are under way on two technical devices to reduce bycatch of common dolphins. A large-scale experiment was conducted on gillnetters in the Bay of Biscay to test the CETASAVR-PIFIL pinger and the CETASAVR-DOLPHINFREE bio-inspired beacon. The technical characteristics of these devices and the associated experimental protocols are detailed on the page <https://www.mer.gouv.fr/cetaces>.

117 cameras were installed on 103 gillnetters and 14 trawlers before the end of 2025 in order to better understand the bycatch phenomenon. Descriptive results are expected at the end of 2026 and may be useful for launching a new project.

Other voluntary-initiative projects (outside the regulatory framework), completed or ongoing, contribute to the search for sustainable alternatives to the fishing closure:

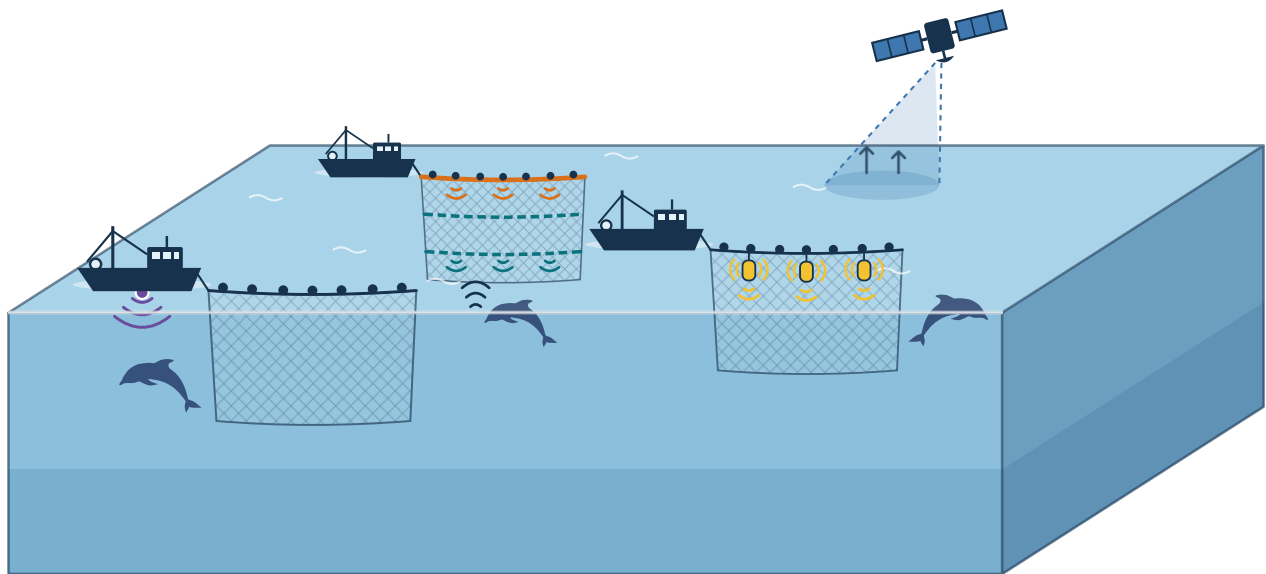
Summary table of the devices tested to reduce bycatch of small cetaceans, all projects combined

| Devices tested                                                                                       | Test framework                                               | Number of vessels involved                                              | Implementation of the device studied                                                | Results obtained and/or planned end date of tests                                                                                                                                                                             |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Acoustic reflectors</b><br>(rope placed on the fishing net to improve its visibility to dolphins) | Project <a href="#">LICADO</a> / <a href="#">PECHDAUPHIR</a> |                                                                         | Reflectors placed in two longitudinal rows on the net panels                        | Inconclusive results: risk of snagging, difficult passage through the net haulers.<br><br>Potential commercial losses without an in-depth analysis of the impact of the reflector on the efficiency of the fishing operation. |
|                                                                                                      | EMFAF ARP project                                            | 4 gillnetters                                                           | Reflectors attached to the net panels                                               | Results expected from mid-2027                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| <b>Upper headropes</b><br>(upper rope of the net, chosen to better return dolphin echoes)            | Ifremer Brest research programme                             | Acoustic tests carried out in a tank on the headropes of 13 gillnetters | Acoustic analysis of the composition and diameter of the upper headropes of vessels | First acoustic analyses on the ropes of 13 vessels in 2024: headropes with a strong acoustic                                                                                                                                  |

<sup>1</sup> The [French Conseil d'État \(Council of State\)](#) is the highest court of the administrative order and the legal adviser to the Government. It plays a fundamental dual role: it gives opinions on laws and judges disputes between citizens and the administration.

<sup>2</sup> French waters of ICES area 8

|                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                            |                                                          |                                                                                                                                        |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                            | that catch many dolphins or none                         | signature do not catch dolphins.<br><br>Additional sample analyses during summer 2025: same results.                                   |
|                                                                                 | Additional action carried out on the basis of information collected under the Cetacean action plan ( <a href="#">Order of 13 December 2024</a> ) | Acoustic analysis of the headropes of vessels with a very low or very high catch rate, following the at-risk winter period | Upper rope of the net                                    | Cross-referencing of data on the headrope characteristics of vessels covered by the Cetacean action plan with catch data – Autumn 2026 |
|                                                                                 | EMFAF ARP project                                                                                                                                | 2 gillnetters                                                                                                              | Headrope attached to the upper rope of the net           | Results expected from mid-2027                                                                                                         |
|                                                                                 | Project <a href="#">LIFE EMM</a>                                                                                                                 | 1 gillnetter                                                                                                               | Headrope attached to the upper rope of the net           | First trends expected in 2027                                                                                                          |
| Pinger <a href="#">PIFIL</a><br>(Pinger attached to the hull)                   | Cetacean action plan ( <a href="#">Order of 13 December 2024</a> )                                                                               | 106                                                                                                                        | Pinger attached to the hulls of the vessels              | First significant trends expected at the end of 2026.                                                                                  |
| Beacon <a href="#">DOLPHINFREE</a><br>(Bio-inspired beacon attached to the net) | Cetacean action plan ( <a href="#">Order of 13 December 2024</a> )                                                                               | 16                                                                                                                         | Bio-inspired acoustic beacons placed on the fishing nets | First trends expected at the end of 2026                                                                                               |

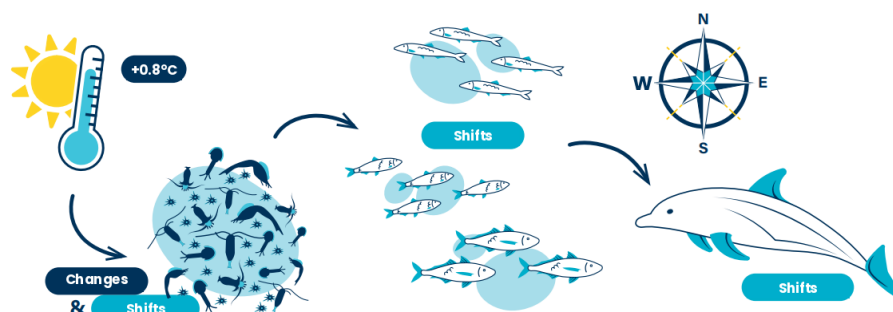


However, scientific work has provided preliminary answers to the question of common dolphin bycatch. The DELMOGES project<sup>3</sup> was conducted between 2022 and 2025 and aimed to understand the causes and mechanisms of dolphin bycatch, to quantify risk factors and to explore catch-reduction options. The work identified a complex phenomenon resulting from the interaction of ecological, climatic, fisheries-related

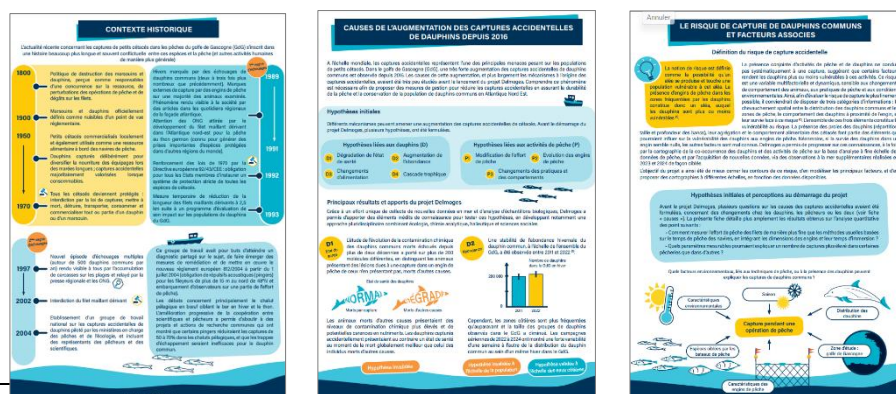
<sup>3</sup> Led by [La Rochelle University/CNRS](#) and [Ifremer](#) in partnership with [University of Western Brittany](#) (UBO) and the [National Committee for Marine Fisheries and Marine Aquaculture](#) (CNPMM), and in collaboration with the [French Biodiversity Agency](#) (OFB).

and socio-economic factors. DELMOGES provides a systemic and integrated view of bycatch, identifying levers for action and proposing tools to consolidate in order to reduce risk while reconciling species conservation and fishing activities. The findings converge on the identification of a trophic cascade<sup>4</sup> linked to climate change rather than focusing on a single factor. Overall, the warming of the Bay of Biscay and the decrease in river inflows have changed the distribution and energy quality<sup>5</sup> of small pelagic fish (sardines, anchovies), concentrating this prey on the continental shelf. Dolphins follow these resources and move closer to fishing areas, notably those exploited by gillnetters, particularly in winter, which partly explains the rise in bycatch since 2016. This trend occurs without a significant increase in the overall fishing effort of gillnetters, but with an evolution in practices and gear that is not always easy to detect. The project identifies major risk factors that influence the increase in catches: winter season, depth of the fishing nets, type of gear used, soak time, net length, and proximity to the coast. The conclusions of the report characterise the physical and behavioural mechanisms at play during captures, in particular during the phase in which the fishing net is submerged on the seabed.

Diagram taken from the summary sheet "Causes of the increase in dolphin bycatch since 2016" of the Delmoges project

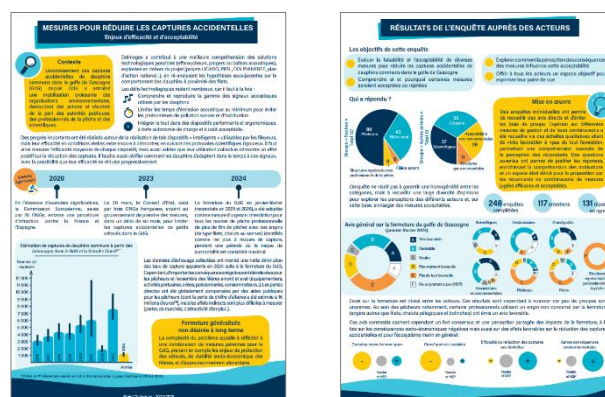


The final report, summary sheets of the results and video clips relating to the DELMOGES project are available at the following link: <https://delmoges.recherche.univ-lr.fr/syntheses/>



<sup>4</sup> A trophic cascade is an ecological phenomenon triggered by the introduction or removal of top predators. It involves reciprocal changes in the relative populations of predators and prey within a food chain. This process frequently causes significant alterations in the structure of ecosystems as well as in the biogeochemical cycles of nutrients.

<sup>5</sup> Due to a decline in primary production and in the energy value of plankton.



Research is also under way on the creation of management tools to reduce the phenomenon in the long term. Modelling work was initiated as part of the DELMOGES project (iTRAS, Pelarrp) and makes it possible to map risk according to the co-occurrence of dolphins and fishing effort, and to identify predictive variables: net length and soak time, latitude, primary productivity, distance to the coast and season. Subsequently, a predictive risk demonstrator at the scale of the Bay of Biscay shelf was developed: the continuation of the project aims to create an operational tool estimating the risk of capture by combining spatial and behavioural data on dolphins, prey and nets.

Other ongoing projects will help refine understanding of the phenomenon. Two ongoing projects aim to better understand the behaviour of the common dolphin around the net during capture (DOLPHINSOUND project<sup>6</sup>, TCHACADO project<sup>7</sup>). Finally, the Pelagis observatory leads the PLOUF project, which consists of placing hydrophones on dolphin carcasses in order to refine mortality estimates by improving the figures on carcass buoyancy rates.

To further broaden the range of potential solutions for reducing the risk of bycatch, this call for projects aims to diversify remediation solutions for bycatch of small cetaceans, in particular the common dolphin.

It is open to all operators meeting the eligibility conditions detailed below, whether based in France or abroad.

The budget of the call for projects is limited to €1,000,000 including VAT in total, with no ceiling defined per project.

## II. Eligibility conditions

### 1) Eligibility conditions relating to beneficiaries

The beneficiaries of SO 1.6, action type 1.6.1:

“Operations for the protection and restoration of marine and coastal ecosystems, including by limiting the impacts of activities, in application of European directives” may include all operators of the fishing sectors whose activities are strongly linked to the quality and preservation of the environment and to the

<sup>6</sup> Project led by the fishing producer organisation of Aquitaine and funded by France Filière Pêche.

<sup>7</sup> Project led by Ifremer to characterise the diving profiles of common dolphins.

availability of the resource, but also stakeholders working for the protection of marine biodiversity, such as: State actors, environmental agencies and associated operators, public establishments and scientific and technical institutes with responsibilities relating to the marine environment, local authorities, non-profit organisations, managers of the marine protected areas network, local businesses and socio-economic actors.

## 2) Eligibility conditions relating to projects

To be eligible for funding under this SO 1.6 call for projects, priority will be given to projects that respond to the French government's priorities as defined in the operations programme. They concern the themes summarised below and detailed in the selection criteria sheet:

### **Application of the European environmental directives and of the common fisheries policy**

- Actions to protect species and habitats of Community interest, under the implementation of the HD and the BD and of the common fisheries policy;

### **Habitats and species**

- Actions to reduce bycatch of sensitive species, including strictly protected species and species of Community interest, and to reduce pressure on habitats of Community interest.

This call for projects will give priority funding to projects that make it possible to:

- Actions contributing to the reduction of bycatch of small cetaceans, and in particular the common dolphin, in the Bay of Biscay, France.

### **More specifically, the call for projects covers the following expectations:**

The call for projects aims to operationalise the use of the knowledge acquired through research projects and the development of solutions to reduce bycatch of common dolphins in the Bay of Biscay, for vessels engaged in at-risk fishing activity<sup>8</sup>. It aims to improve bycatch reduction devices as well as management measures, with the objective of reaching a level of bycatch consistent with the species' conservation objectives.

The following projects will be given priority:

- Evaluation and operationalisation of devices for reducing bycatch of small cetaceans, taking into account all the technical difficulties identified during past experiments (technical installation difficulties, ergonomics, noise impact, etc.), in connection with the national action plan to reduce bycatch of small cetaceans;
- Implementation of operational tools to refine the management measures for at-risk fishing practices (spatialisation, real-time monitoring, etc.).
- Submitted projects must benefit, at a minimum, the whole Atlantic seafront of the Bay of Biscay

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<sup>8</sup> The gear identified as at risk is as follows: set gillnets (code GNS), trammel nets (code GTR), combinations of trammel nets and set gillnets (GTN), midwater otter trawls (code OTM) and midwater pair trawls (code PTM), bottom pair trawls (code PTB) and the purse seine (code PS).

- Fit between the skills of the project leader(s) and all the skills required by the proposed project (e.g. technical research and development, but also project management, operational implementation, exchanges with the stakeholders involved, etc.). To cover all the required skills at a high standard, partnerships are encouraged.

It will be particularly appreciated if the proposed projects build on studies already under way and on available scientific data, in order to promote the pooling of knowledge.

Projects must be submitted within the deadlines set by the call for projects (see VI. Indicative timetable).

The nature of eligible expenditure is listed in the "Selection criteria" sheet for SO 1.6, available on the Europe en France website: [Validated selection criteria sheets | Europe in France \(L'Europe s'engage en France\), the portal of European Funds](#).

### **III. Selection criteria**

Any eligible action carried out by an eligible beneficiary may receive EMFAF support under SO 1.6 AT 1 "Operations for the protection and restoration of marine and coastal ecosystems, including by limiting the impacts of activities, in application of European directives".

Projects will be selected on the basis of the following selection criteria:

- Scientific and/or technical quality of the project;
- Quality of the project leader (and of the partnership, where applicable);
- Organisation and feasibility of the project;
- Level of involvement of the fishing professionals concerned in the project, where the project concerns these activities;
- Relevance of the project in meeting the objectives of the call for projects.

The project end date must not exceed 30 June 2029.

### **IV. Public aid intensity and EMFAF co-financing rateA**

#### **1) Public aid intensity**

The intensity of public aid applied to the measure is defined in the table below:

| Type of operation:                                                                                                                                                                                 | Share of public aid (EMFAF + national contributions): |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|
| Operations linked to the implementation of fisheries risk analyses in Natura 2000 sites, the reduction of bycatch of protected species by fishing gear, in support of fisheries conservation zones | 80%                                                   |

#### **2) EMFAF co-financing rateA**

The EMFAF co-financing rate is set at 70% of the public aid intensity.

## V. Indicative timetable

The call for projects will follow the timetable below:

**19 October 2026:** Launch of the call for projects.

**19 January 2027 – 3:00 p.m. (Paris time):** Closing of the call for projects. Complete application files in response to the call for projects must be submitted on the Synergie platform ([https://synergie-europe.fr/e\\_synergie/portail/FAM](https://synergie-europe.fr/e_synergie/portail/FAM)) before this date. Any file submitted after this date will be considered ineligible.

**1<sup>st</sup> half of 2027:** Review of the applications and selection of projects by the EMFAF Programming Committee.

**Mid-2027:** Signature of the grant decisions for the accounting and legal commitment of the projects.

## VI. Composition of application files

Applications in response to the call for projects submitted **must include all of the following documents:**

- The duly completed application form on the submission portal;
- The financial annex to the application, duly completed, indicating the forecast expenditure;
- The technical file detailing the whole project, duly completed;
- If in partnership: the partnership agreement signed by all the partners.

The outputs associated with the projects must include, at a minimum an annual technical and financial report summarising the actions carried out against the objectives set in the grant application and specifying, where applicable, the reasons why these objectives were not met.

The financial annex to the grant application, the technical file and the list of supporting documents can be downloaded from the FranceAgriMer website: <https://www.franceagrimer.fr/filiere-pecche-et-aquaculture/Accompagner/FEAMPA>.

The application form and all the documents in the file must be completed and submitted on the Synergie platform: [https://synergie-europe.fr/e\\_synergie/portail/FAM](https://synergie-europe.fr/e_synergie/portail/FAM).