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CONVENTION ON MIGRATORY SPECIES

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English

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CONCERTED ACTION FOR THE FRANCISCANA DOLPHIN (*Pontoporia blainvillei)* [1]

Adopted by the Conference of the Parties at its 15th Meeting (Campo Grande, March 2026)

Proponent(s)

Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay

Target species, lower taxon or population, or group of taxa with common needs

Class: Mammalia

Order: Cetartiodactyla

Infraorder: Cetacea

Family: Pontoporiidae

Genus: *Pontoporia*

Species: *Pontoporia blainvillei*

Subspecies: *Pontoporia blainvillei blainvillie* and *Pontoporia blainvillei pukusi*

Listed in Appendix I and II of the CMS.

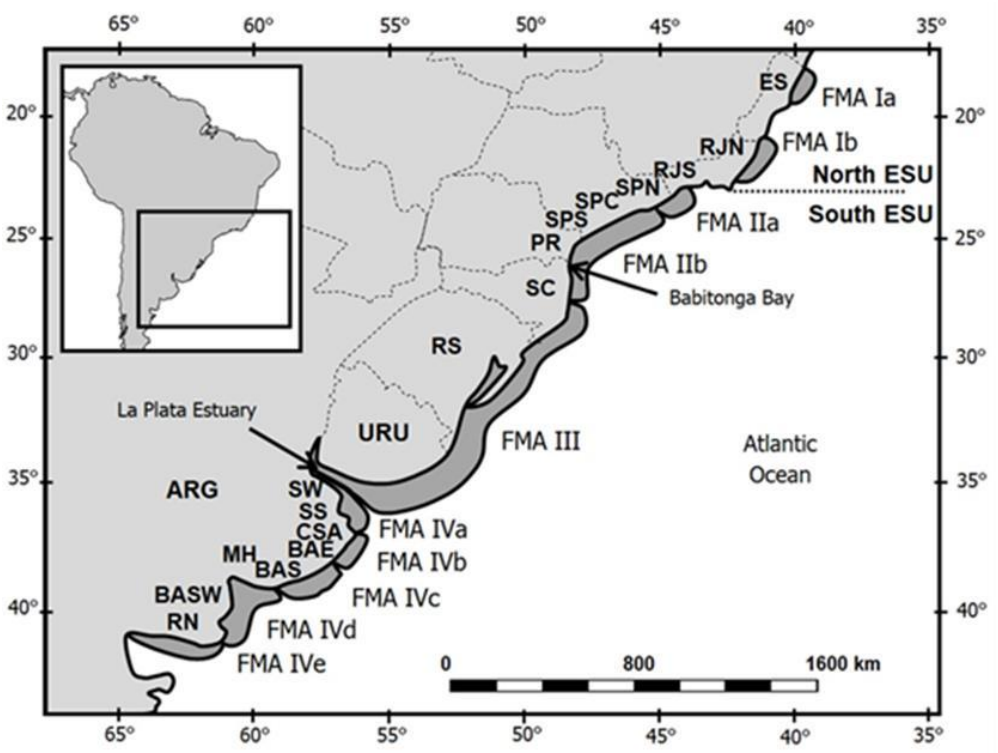
Geographical distribution area

The Franciscana dolphin is a small odontocete that inhabits the coastal waters of the South-West Atlantic Ocean from Itaúnas (18°25'S), State of Espírito Santo, Brazil, to the northern coast of the San Matías Gulf (42°10'S), Chubut, Argentina (Crespo et al. 1998, Siciliano et al. 2002, Crespo 2018).

Franciscana dolphins are mainly coastal, inhabiting up to the 50 m isobath (Danilewicz et al. 2009, Crespo et al. 2010, Amaral et al. 2018) with occurrences in some bays and estuaries (Cremer and Simões-Lopes 2008, Santos et al. 2009).

In order to guide conservation and management actions, 11 Franciscana dolphin management areas (FMAs – sensu Secchi et al. 2003) (Cunha et al. 2020, IWC 2023) (Fig. 1) have been proposed and recognized as appropriate units for the assessment of the species by the Scientific Committee (SC) of the International Whaling Commission (IWC) (IWC, 2023).

[1] The geographical designations employed in this document do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the CMS Secretariat (or the United Nations Environment Programme) concerning the legal status of any country, territory, or area, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries. The responsibility for the contents of the document rests exclusively with its author.



Summary of activities

Convene a new conservation policy meeting for the range states to finalize an action plan in line with the IWC Conservation Management Plan (CMP) for the species.

A key proposal would recommend assessing the optimization or strengthening of the effectiveness of existing marine protected areas (MPAs) and considering the creation of new MPAs.

The timing, location and duration of the meeting, as well as other parameters, will be decided in consultation with the range states and the CMS Secretariat in conjunction with the IWC Secretariat, under the coordination of the Organizing Committee. The proposed dates for the meeting will be decided by the three parties.

Funding for this meeting will need to be sought, and the CMS and IWC Secretariats will be asked to collaborate.

Discussion and formulation of a viable Plan of Action (PoA) for the 2026–2029 triennium, including the completion of a conservation status assessment of Franciscan dolphins in each of the FMAs.

Continue coordination with researchers from Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay to:

1.) Conduct new abundance estimates in FMAs IVa, b, c, d, and e (Argentina), particularly in areas not yet surveyed (e.g. Samborombón Bay and from Claromecó to Bahía Blanca) and FMAs IVd and e.

2.) Implement actions to mitigate threats, particularly incidental mortality in fisheries (bycatch), which is the main threat to the species. These efforts are the current priorities of the IWC's Franciscana Dolphin Management and Conservation Plan.

Associated benefits

It is essential to identify opportunities that generate collateral or synergistic benefits when implementing conservation actions in the concerted action. This includes:

Multi-functional actions: determine when measures targeting certain migratory species may have an incidental positive impact on other species, taxa, or populations that share habitat, seasonal movements, or other ecological needs.

Awareness and education: leveraging interventions to promote public awareness of the importance of migratory species conservation, which can strengthen social and political support for these initiatives.

Capacity building: identifying activities that strengthen technical, institutional or community capacities, both nationally and regionally, enabling more effective long-term management.

Promoting new memberships: explore how this concerted action can contribute to encouraging parties to reach an agreement or memorandum of understanding or a species-specific initiative, thereby expanding the scope of actions and international cooperation. This should be done while considering the synergy for this species, so as not to duplicate efforts. For example, joint action plans with the IWC.

Time frame

The implementation of this Concerted Action will take place over a period of **three years (2026–2029)**, with intermediate milestones to facilitate monitoring and evaluation of progress. The following time frames and key activities are proposed:

Proposed time frames and milestones in line with the IWC CMP (to avoid duplication of efforts)

Year 1 (April–December 2026)

Continuation of the updated diagnosis of the conservation status and threats in each country.

Identification of existing national initiatives and gaps.

Conducting aerial surveys to estimate abundance in FMA IVa, b, c, d and e (Argentina).

Development of a bycatch mitigation workshop in conjunction with the IWC.

Year 2 (2027)

Development of an action plan to mitigate bycatch.

Regional technical workshop on standardized monitoring and methodologies for assessing conservation status and threats.

Launch of awareness campaigns in key coastal communities.

Year 3 (2028 to March 2029)

Pilot implementation of bycatch mitigation measures in at least three priority sites.

Consolidation of stranding networks with common protocols.

Publication of preliminary results and evaluation of effectiveness.

Expansion of effective measures based on pilot results.

Review of the plan with the participation of experts and national authorities.

Strengthening of cooperation with multilateral organizations (IWC, CBD, regional agreements, NGOs).

Final assessment of the impact of the concerted action.

Publication of a consolidated regional report with long-term recommendations.

Proposal for integration of the action into permanent national strategies.

Elements of open participation

Several components of this action are designed to enable and encourage open participation by various actors:

Collaborative follow-up and monitoring, including universities, NGOs, and local communities, through open protocols and training.

Awareness-raising and environmental education campaigns, open to the participation of educational institutions, the media, and the general public.

Exchange of data and best practices through a common digital platform, promoting transparency and scientific cooperation.

Technical forums and open regional meetings, with invitations to observers, independent experts, and non-governmental actors.

Relationship with other CMS actions

The inclusion of the Franciscana dolphin in Appendices I and II demonstrates the broad consensus and awareness among parties and stakeholders in the range states that the precarious conservation status of this species warrants the utmost concern.

Furthermore, parties that are range states of a migratory species listed in Appendix I shall endeavour to protect it by reducing its capture, conserving it and, where appropriate, restoring its habitat; preventing, eliminating, or mitigating obstacles to its migration; and controlling other factors that may endanger it.

By including the species in Appendix II, CMS parties have already agreed that the species would benefit from an international agreement. As such, the species is included in the IWC's Conservation and Management Plan (CMP). This concerted action would allow for shorter-term action involving the range states of this particular species.

The CMS COP has adopted resolutions and decisions addressing the main threats to the species:

Resolution 14.1[2]	*Samarkand Strategic Plan for migratory species 2024 - 2032*
Resolution 14.3	*Engagement in CBD processes including the Global Biodiversity Framework*
Resolution 14.4	*State of the World's Migratory Species*
Resolution 14.5	*Reducing the risk of vessel strikes for marine megafauna*
Resolution 14.6	*Deep-seabed mineral exploitation activities and migratory specie*
Resolution 14.9[3]	*Conservation priorities for cetaceans*
Resolution 14.16[4]	*Ecological Connectivity*
Resolution 12.22[5]	*Bycatch*
Resolution 10.04[6]/12.20	*Management of Marine Debris*
Resolution 11.30[7]	*Management of Marine Debris*
Resolution 12.14	*Adverse Impacts of Anthropogenic Noise on Cetaceans and Other Migratory Species*
Resolution 10.14[8]	*Bycatch of CMS-listed Species in Gillnet Fisheries*
Resolution 10.15[9]	*Global Programme of Work for Cetaceans*
Resolution 10.19[10]	*Migratory Species Conservation in the Light of Climate Change*
Resolution 11.26[11]	*Programme of Work on Climate Change and Migratory Species*
Resolution 10.24	*Further Steps to Abate Underwater Noise Pollution for the Protection of Cetaceans and Other Migratory Species*
Resolution 11.10[12]	*Synergies and Partnerships*.

The implementation of this concerted action would serve to implement these resolutions.

The same applies to the Concerted Action for Lahille's bottlenose dolphin (*Tursiops truncatus gephyreus*), if approved, as their habitats overlap in many areas of the range of both species.

Conservation priority

The Franciscana dolphin is considered to be the most endangered small cetacean in the western South Atlantic (Pérez Macri and Crespo, 1989; Praderi et al., 1989; Crespo, 2018; Secchi et al., 2003b; 2021). This species is classified as 'Vulnerable' on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species (Zerbini et al., 2017). Some populations are small, with fewer than 1,000 animals (Zerbini et al., 2022; Sucunza et al., 2023). Its low reproduction and survival rates make it particularly vulnerable to high levels of anthropogenic mortality (Danilewicz et al., 2002; Secchi and Fletcher, 2004; Cáceres et al., 2020). Bycatch in fisheries is its main threat (Secchi et al., 2021) and can occasionally occur in trawl fisheries (Cappozzo et al., 2007; Montealegre-Quijano and Neves-Ferreira, 2010; Franco-Trecu et al., 2019), in gillnets, both active nets (Secchi et al., 1997) and small-scale drift nets (Bertozzi and Zerbini, 2002) and

[2] *Editorial note from the Secretariat: The Resolution was revised at COP15.*
[3] *Editorial note from the Secretariat: The Resolution was revised at COP15.*
[4] *Editorial note from the Secretariat: The Resolution was revised at COP15.*
[5] *Editorial note from the Secretariat: The Resolution was revised at COP15.*
[6] *Editorial note from the Secretariat: The Resolution was repealed at COP12.*
[7] *Editorial note from the Secretariat: The Resolution was repealed at COP12.*
[8] *Editorial note from the Secretariat: The Resolution was repealed at COP12.*
[9] *Editorial note from the Secretariat: The Resolution was repealed at COP14.*
[10] *Editorial note from the Secretariat: The Resolution was repealed at COP12.*
[11] *Editorial note from the Secretariat: The Resolution was repealed at COP12.*
[12] *Editorial note from the Secretariat: The Resolution was revised at COP14.*

fixed bottom and surface nets (Ott et al. 2002). This threat occurs in both small-scale artisanal and large-scale industrial fisheries throughout its range (Corcuera, 1994; Praderi, 1997; Secchi et al., 1997; Di Beneditto et al., 1998; Bertozzi and Zerbini, 2002; Ott et al. 2002; Pinheiro and Cremer, 2006; Franco-Trecu et al., 2009; Frizzera et al., 2012; Marcondes et al., 2018; Sucunza et al. 2024).

Generally, incidentally caught specimens are discarded overboard, although in some cases their use for human consumption or other purposes has been reported in the past. In Brazil, off Atafona (Rio de Janeiro), the occasional use of their fat as bait in longline fishing for sharks has been recorded (Di Beneditto and Ramos, 2001). In the states of Rio Grande do Sul and Paraná, there are records of its meat being used both for human consumption and to feed dogs (Secchi et al., 1997; Zanellato, 1997); in addition, some fishermen claimed to extract oil from its fat to waterproof boats. In Uruguay, there have been reports of an informal trade in Franciscana dolphin oil used to treat horse coats (UNEP/CMS, 2000). In Argentina, in the towns of General Lavalle and San Clemente del Tuyú, sun-dried and salted Franciscana dolphin meat, known locally as *mushame*, was traditionally consumed (Praderi et al., 1989; Carman and Carman, 2016).

Furthermore, conservation actions targeting this species would have collateral benefits for other migratory marine taxa that share the same ecosystem, therefore promoting an ecosystem approach in line with CMS resolutions.

In summary, the urgency of its population status, its ecological value, and its transboundary nature make this initiative a clear conservation priority under the CMS framework.

Importance

The proposed action **responds directly to Article IV of the CMS**, which establishes mechanisms for **international cooperation in the conservation of migratory species included in Appendix II**, such as the Franciscana dolphin.

In addition:

- **It complies with the mandate of Resolution 12.5** (concerted actions) and its annex on the need to implement specific actions for species with limited ranges but shared among several parties.
- It aligns with the strategic objectives of the **CMS Work Programme for Cetaceans 2021–2030**, particularly in terms of promoting **coordinated research, bycatch mitigation**, and **habitat protection.**

The concerted action for the Franciscana dolphin **is essential to ensure the long-term viability of the species**, which is vulnerable and faces multiple threats that, together with the IWC Management and Conservation Plan, will be addressed regionally. Its implementation will **establish a coordinated institutional, scientific and operational framework**, maximizing the effectiveness of the measures adopted by each country and complying with the fundamental principles of CMS.

Absence of better solutions

Until now, activities and meetings at the regional level dedicated to improving the conservation status of the Franciscana dolphin have been carried out at the international level, mainly under the umbrella of CMS and the IWC. Given that this action will focus on the conservation of the species and its habitat, it would also benefit other aquatic fauna and flora taxa, adding value to this concerted action.

Preparation and feasibility

The implementation of the concerted action has a solid foundation in terms of technical preparation, institutional support, and operational feasibility. There are significant prospects for funding through multilateral funds linked to the CMS and IWC, as well as through strategic partnerships with government agencies, regional marine conservation programmes, and international NGOs. In addition, opportunities have been identified to channel resources from international technical cooperation and the responsible private fishing sector.

The concerted action would be led by a consortium coordinated by environmental authorities from the countries within the Franciscana dolphin's range states (Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay), with technical support from specialized research institutions such as universities, oceanographic institutes, and networks of scientists already committed to the conservation of the species. This multinational leadership, with previous experience in similar initiatives, ensures the governance and coordination capacity necessary to effectively implement the proposed activities.

In terms of practical feasibility, logistical, regulatory, and social challenges have been assessed and considered. The actions are designed to integrate with existing legal frameworks, avoiding duplication and maximizing synergies with national and regional fisheries and biodiversity policies. In addition, the participation of local fishing communities is envisaged from the early stages in order to ensure social acceptance of the measures and their long-term sustainability.

Probability of success

The implementation of different methodologies aims to reduce the incidental capture of Franciscan dolphins in particular, as well as other threats. The main advantage is the existence since 2016 of the IWC's CMP for the Franciscana dolphin. Joint efforts between the CMS and IWC will enable the conservation objective to be achieved. The three countries are conducting studies to determine the current bycatch rates for the species in different fisheries. For example, acoustic alarms or pingers were also tested as a means of mitigating bycatch. Although they were found to be effective, their main drawbacks are the costs of acquisition and importation, the high number of pingers required, their monitoring, and particularly the fact that they generate more underwater noise. Acoustic alarms do not affect fish catch rates. They were tested with artisanal fishermen, mainly in coastal trawling, and their effectiveness was found to vary from one fisherman to another. Researchers in the three countries are already exploring different alternatives to mitigate bycatch. The main potential obstacle to developing and implementing mitigation efforts is considered to be the lack of funding.

Magnitude of likely impact

The proposed concerted action will directly benefit a highly endangered species endemic to the South-West Atlantic: the Franciscana dolphin. Its range covers coastal waters of **at least three countries** (Argentina, Uruguay and Brazil), making this initiative a **regional action**. Indirectly, other marine species that share habitats or face similar pressures from fisheries (e.g. other cetaceans, seabirds, sea turtles, and chondrichthyans) will also benefit from the adoption of mitigation measures such as more selective fishing technologies and improved monitoring.

The action has **high catalytic potential**, as it can serve as a **replicable model** for addressing bycatch in other regions and for other species of small coastal cetaceans. In addition, it can act as a **flagship case** of successful implementation of CMS commitments in contexts where the interaction between fisheries and marine wildlife is critical. It can also generate **synergies**

with international instruments such as the CMP, the marine biodiversity convention, and national action plans against bycatch.

Cost-effectiveness

The implementation of a concerted action for the Franciscana dolphin can be considered **highly cost-effective**, as the resources required are relatively modest compared to **the magnitude of the expected positive impact at the regional level**. Despite this, fundraising is necessary to ensure compliance with the concerted action once it is approved.

Total estimated cost for the first three years: USD 500,000–800,000 (depending on the scope and scale of initial implementation).

The concerted action for the Franciscana dolphin represents a **low- to moderate-cost strategic intervention** with **high potential for ecological, political, and social impact**, making it one of the most effective and cost-beneficial conservation actions under the CMS framework.

Consultations planned/conducted

Preliminary consultations have been held with technical and scientific representatives from the **three range states** (Argentina, Uruguay and Brazil), who expressed **interest and initial support** for the proposal, in line with their commitments under the IWC CMP and their own national legislation. Discussions have also been held with representatives of the **CMS Secretariat**, who welcomed the alignment of this action with priorities identified in previous technical reports (e.g. UNEP/CMS/COP14/Inf.27.5.1b).

In all cases, emphasis was placed on the importance of ensuring the participation of local fishing stakeholders and ensuring that actions are compatible with national cetacean conservation and fisheries management plans. In subsequent stages, consultations are expected to be extended to non-governmental organizations with local experience, research institutes, and technical cooperation agencies.

Activities and expected results

Activity	Results	Time frame	Responsibility	Funding
Bycatch mitigation workshop	Guidelines for using mitigation devices and good fishing practices.	8 months	Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay	CBI, CMS
Action plan to mitigate bycatch	Identification of locations for pilot implementation of mitigation measures; definition of local coordinators and measures to be tested; definition of work schedule.	3 months	Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay	Funds needed
Methodologies and monitoring workshop	Guidelines for using standardized monitoring and data analysis practices throughout species distribution.	8 months	Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay	Funds needed
Aerial surveys to estimate abundance in FMAs IVa, b, c, d and e (Argentina)	Estimated abundance for FMAs IVa, b, c, d and e	1 year	Argentina,	Funds needed
Awareness campaigns	Dissemination of information on the Franciscana dolphin, its conservation status, and good practices that can contribute to the conservation of the species; production of printed and audiovisual materials.	3 years	Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay	Funds needed
Pilot implementation of bycatch mitigation measures	Effectiveness and feasibility of using evaluated bycatch mitigation measures; proposal for expanding use to other locations formulated.	2 years	Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay	Funds needed
Publication of results and evaluation of effectiveness of mitigation measures	Reports presented at the IWC and CMS scientific meeting	1 year	Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay	

Activity	Results	Time frame	Responsibility	Funding
Review of action plan to mitigate bycatch	Plan updated based on the results obtained in the pilot implementation of mitigation measures.	1 year	Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay	Funds needed
Strengthening of cooperation with multi-lateral organizations	Network established and joint work actions defined.	3 years	Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay	Funds needed
Evaluation of final impact of concerted action	Integrated analysis of all actions carried out; identification of problems and definition of solutions; formulation of new concerted action if necessary.	3 years	Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay	Funds needed
Publication of consolidated regional report	Guidelines for long-term actions to be implemented in the three countries (ARG, BR, UY).	3 years	Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay	Funds needed
Integration of the action in permanent national strategies	Guidelines for the integration of the results of the concerted action into national conservation plans for the Franciscana dolphin.	3 years	Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay	Funds needed