



**CONVENTION ON
MIGRATORY
SPECIES**

UNEP/CMS/Concerted Action 14.5

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

Adopted by the Conference of the Parties at its 14th Meeting
(Samarkand, Uzbekistan, February 2024)

(i). Proponents

Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay

(ii). Target species, taxon or lower population, or group of taxa with common needs

Class: Mammalia

Order: Cetartiodactyla

Infra-Order: Cetacea

Family: Pontoporiidae

Genus: Pontoporia

Species: *Pontoporia blainvillei*

Listed in Appendices I and II of CMS

(iii). Area of distribution:

The franciscana dolphin is a small odontoceti that inhabits the coastal waters of the southwestern Atlantic Ocean from Itaúnas (18°25'S), in the state of Espírito Santo, Brazil, to the north coast of the San Matias Gulf (42°10'S), Chubut, Argentina (Crespo et al. 1998; Siciliano et al. 2002, Crespo, 2018).

The franciscanas are mainly coastal, inhabiting waters beyond the surf zone down to a depth of 50 m (Danilewicz et al. 2009, Crespo et al. 2010, Amaral et al. 2018) while also appearing in some bays and estuaries (Cremer and Simões-Lopes 2008, Santos et al. 2009).

In order to direct conservation and management actions, 11 Franciscana Management Areas have been proposed (FMAs - sensu Secchi et al. 2003) (Cunha et al. 2020) (Fig.1) and have been recognized as units appropriate for the evaluation of the species by the IWC Scientific Committee (SC) (Anonymous 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.

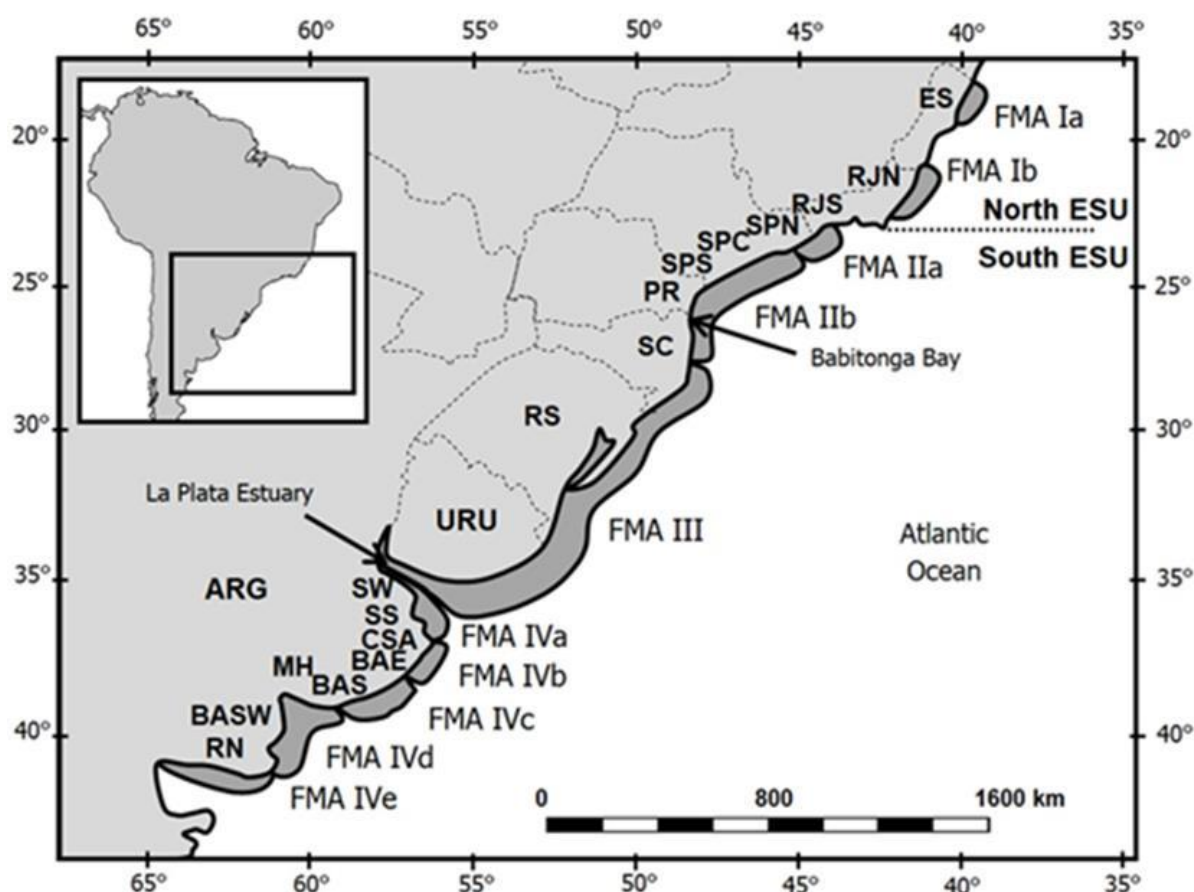


Figure 1 – Map showing the 11 management units proposed for the franciscana, including the ten subdivisions of the FMAs labeled and the Babitonga Bay as a differentiated management unit (Cunha et al., 2020b; Cunha et al., 2020c).

(iv). Actions and expected outcomes

Actions

1. Setting up a Scientific Committee (SC) comprising interested parties (government, NGOs, CMS Secretariat, IWC Secretariat) among the States in the area of distribution of the franciscana with a view to organizing the proposed Meeting (see below). The SC will be in charge of practical preparations for the meeting, including the search for funding, the selection of the venue and the date, the drawing up of the agenda, invitations to participants, and all other practical and logistical aspects..
2. Call a States Conservation Policy Meeting for the distribution area to define an Action Plan in line with the IWC CMP for the species.

A key proposal was to recommend evaluating the setting up, optimization or strengthening of the efficacy of new or existing protected marine areas (PMA) that cross borders.

The schedule, venue and duration of the meeting, in addition to other parameters, will be decided in consultation with the States within the distribution area and the CMS Secretariat, under the coordination of the Scientific Committee. The dates proposed for the meeting will be decided by the three parties.

3. Debate and formulation of a viable five-year Plan of Action (PoA) for 2023- 2028 which includes the carrying out of an evaluation of the status of the franciscanas in each one of the States within the area of distribution.
4. Examples of possible points for the agenda:
 - (1) Introduction;
 - (2) Overview of the known conservation challenges;
 - (3) Debate on viable conservation measures, especially ways of reducing deaths due to fishing; the status of population estimations and death rates throughout the region;
 - (4) Debate on the feasibility of introducing new cross-border MPAs and improving the effectiveness of existing ones;
 - (5) Formulation of a new Plan of Action related to the IWC CMP.

(v). Expected results

Immediate (after the meeting):

- Renew the broad agreement on the Plan of Action in order to mitigate the various pressing conservation problems regarding the franciscana.
- Coordination with researchers from Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay, and the development of aerial studies to estimate the abundance of the populations in those regions where necessary (for example, the Samborombon Bay, to the south of the province of Buenos Aires, and to the north of the Gulf of San Matias, Rio Negro).
- Increase the research efforts and monitoring of bycatch.
- Identify critical habitats (for example, high use areas with or without high levels of bycatch) which could be candidates for converting into reserves for the franciscana;
- Design a mosaic of conservation units (which could have different degrees of restriction) to protect a significant part of the franciscana populations. Must take into account the human dimension;
- Develop a project to: 1.) complete the population abundance in Argentina, in those areas not covered by the IWC (i.e. Samborombon Bay, from Claromeco to Blanca Bay, Anegada Bay) 2.) identify those areas where additional studies are necessary (i.e. estuary of Bahia Blanca, Rio Negro estuary in Argentina) 3) develop studies of estimations of human removals of franciscanas in all FMAs (estimations of bycatch are necessary)

Mid-term:

- If the focal points for the States in the area of distribution consider them to be pertinent: Improve conservation through greater attention to the Protected Marine Areas.
- Recommend the setting up of new cross-border Protected Marine Areas (PMA)
- (bi-national).
- The necessary commitment of the national, regional and intergovernmental players, in addition to commitment from local communities, will require broad consultation in a multidisciplinary forum.
- Develop projects: 1.) Studies estimating trends in abundance, 2) Develop monitoring methods for abundance and trends (for example: acoustic)

Long term:

- Demonstrably improve the conservation status of the franciscana dolphin throughout its area of distribution.

(vi). Associated Benefits

(vii). Time periods and Schedule

It is recommended that the meeting of the States within the area of distribution take place at the beginning of 2024. The Scientific Committee would be responsible for defining all the specific actions in consultation with the States within the area of distribution and the CMS Secretariat and IWC Secretariat, and the IWC CMP Coordinator, before the end of 2023. It is suggested there be a PoA proposed for five years, to cover the period 2023-2028. However, funding for its application would be sought independently of the meeting.

(viii). Connection with other CMS actions

The inclusion of the franciscana in Appendices I and II shows the broad consensus and awareness between the Parties and interested parties from the States within the area of distribution that the precarious state of conservation regarding this species is of great concern.

By including the species in Appendix I, the CMS Parties have already determined that the species is endangered throughout or in a significant part of its area of distribution. Furthermore, it shows that the State Parties within the area of distribution of a migratory species included in Appendix I have made efforts to protect them, prohibiting their capture, with very few exceptions; conserving and when possible, restoring its habitat; preventing, eliminating or mitigating the obstacles to its migration, and monitoring other factors that may endanger it.

By including the species in Appendix II, the CMS Parties have already agreed that the species would benefit from an international agreement. As such, the species is included in the IWC Conservation Management Plan (CMP). This concerted action would enable actions in the shorter term in which the States within the area of distribution for this species in particular would participate.

The CMS COP has adopted Resolutions and Decisions that address the main threats to the species:

Strategic Plan for Migratory Species 2015-2023

Resolution 12.22 (bycatch),

Resolution 12.15 (meat from aquatic wildlife) Resolution 10.04 and 12.20 (marine debris)

Resolution 11.30 (marine debris management) Resolution 12.14 (marine noise)

Resolution 10.14 (Bycatch of species included in CMS in fishing using gillnets)

Resolution 10.15 (Global Work Program for cetaceans)

Resolution 10.19 (Conservation of migratory species in the light of climate change) Resolution 11.26 (Work Program on climate change and migratory species)

Resolution 10.24 (New measures to reduce marine noise pollution for the protection of the cetaceans and other migratory species)

Resolution 11.10 (Synergies and associations).

The putting into practice of this concerted action would serve to apply these Resolutions.

The IWC is finalizing a review of the franciscana which would enable the actions identified to be updated in the CMP for the period 2022-2026 (Anonymous, 2023).

Actions	Region
RES-1. Continue researching the population structure	
RES-1.1. Redefine the structure and limits of the population	FMA IIb
	FMA III, mostly in the Rio de la Plata estuary.
	FMA IV
RES-1.2. Redefine the population structure and stock limits.	All FMAs except FMAs Ia and Ib
RES-2. Cooperation	
RES 2.1. Generate memoranda of understanding between universities and research institutes from Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay within the framework of the applicable agreements, in order to establish common research programs.	All FMAs
MON-1. Monitor abundance, trends and bycatch	
MON 1.1. Continue to monitor fisheries for the probable bycatch of franciscanas, including the characteristics of the fishing (for example, type of nets, season of operation, fishing zones), including fishery-related efforts.	All FMAs
MON 1.2. Estimate bycatch in all fisheries using on-board observer programs, whenever possible.	All FMAs
MON 1.3. Monitoring of beaches to quantify beached franciscanas and estimate bycatch.	All FMAs
MON 1.4. Strengthen virtual monitoring (VM) of the industrial fishing fleet and the technological development and implementation of VM for the artisan fishing fleet, in order to enhance understanding of the fishing areas and efforts.	All FMAs
MON 1.5. Provide access to VM data for research and handling.	All FMAs
MON 1.6. Estimations of the abundance and population trends	FMA Ia and Ib
	FMA IIa, IIb and FMA II Babitonga.
	FMA III
	FMA Iva, IVb, IVc, IVd and IVe.
MON 1.7. Evaluation of the use of alternative methods for the calculation of abundance and population trends	All FMAs
MON 1.8. Define the maximum permitted deaths related to fishing (for example, PBR, MALFIRM)	All FMAs

Actions	Region
MON 1.9. Model for population viability analysis (PVA).	All FMAs
MON-2. Other Threats	
MON 2.1. Monitoring of the beaches in search of beached franciscanas to estimate biological parameters.	All FMAs
MON 2.2. Continuity of health and pollution load assessment	All FMAs
MIT-1. Mitigate bycatch	
MIT 1.1. Develop strategies to evaluate and/or implement a reduction in bycatch and organize meetings with decision makers to evaluate the most practical ways for the implementation/adjustment of monitoring and mitigation actions.	FMA Ia and Ib
	FMA IIa, IIb and FMA II Babitonga.
	FMA III
	FMA IVa, IVb, IVc, IVd, IVe.
MIT 1.2. Increase the applied measures to reduce bycatch of franciscanas in priority areas and non-capture zones.	All FMAs
MIT-Development and implementation of protected areas	
MIT 2.1. Strengthen the need to set up conservation areas for Rio Doce, Baia Babitonga, Albardão and the Rio Negro Estuary.	FMA Ia, FMA II Babitonga, FMA III and FMA IVe.
MIT 2.2. Set up and implement management plans for pre-existing marine areas within the entire area of distribution for the franciscana, including actions to improve conservation of the franciscana.	All FMAs
MIT 2.3. Explore and encourage the creation of new protection areas throughout the franciscana area of distribution. Explore and encourage the creation of new protection areas throughout the franciscana area of distribution.	All FMAs
MIT 2.4. Evaluate the socio-economic impact on fisheries through the implementation of mitigation measures to reduce bycatch	All FMAs
MIT-3 Implementation of mitigation measures	
MIT 3.1. Evaluate and monitor the replacement of nets by modern alternative fishing apparatus which produces less impact.	All FMAs
MIT 3.2. Evaluate the socio-economic impact of the implementation of the mitigation measures.	All FMAs
PAC-1. Develop a strategy to raise public awareness regarding the franciscana	

Actions	Region
PAC 1.1. Continue with the development of awareness-raising campaigns regarding the franciscana and its conservation problems	All FMAs
PAC-2. Include the franciscana in bilateral and multilateral discussions.	
PAC 2.1. Generate discussions within the CMS framework and the joint technical commission for the maritime border between Argentina and Uruguay.	All FMAs

(ix). Conservation Priorities

(x). Relevance

It is believed that the franciscana is the most endangered cetacean in the southwestern Atlantic ocean (Porez Macri and Crespo, 1989; Praderi et al., 1989; Crespo, 2018; Secchi et al., 2003b; 2021). Its low reproduction and survival rates make it vulnerable to the high rates of non-natural death (for example, Danilewicz et al., 2002; Secchi and Fletcher, 2004; Caceres et al., 2020). The species is very vulnerable to fishery bycatch. Although occasional bycatch deaths occur in dragnet fishing (for example, Cappozzo et al., 2007; Montealegre-Quijano and Neves-Ferreira, 2010; Franco-Trecu et al., 2019), death through active gillnet fishing (Secchi et al., 1997) and small-scale drift net fishing (for example, Bertozzi and Zerbini, 2002), deep gillnets are currently, by far, the greatest threat to the species (Secchi et al., 2021) and this happens both in small-scale artisan and industrial scale fishing throughout its area of distribution (for example, Corcuera, 1994; Praderi, 1997; Secchi et al., 1997; Di Benedetto et al., 1998; Bertozzi and Zerbini, 2002; Pinheiro and Cremer, 2006; Franco-Trecu et al., 2009; Frizzera et al., 2012; Marcondes et al., 2018). There are no reports of intentional deaths. The dead bodies of bycatch franciscanas are usually discarded at sea, although occasionally these may be used for human consumption and for other purposes. There are a few reports of use of the fatty tissue being used as bait in longline fishing near Atafona, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (Di Benedetto and Ramos, 2001). In the states of Rio Grande do Sul and Paraná there have been some records of the meat being used for human consumption and for feeding dogs (Secchi et al., 1997; Zanellato, 1997). In the former case, some fishermen declared having extracted the oil from the fat for waterproofing vessels. In Uruguay, the informal trade in franciscana oil was reported for the treatment of horses' hair (PNUMA/CMS 2000). In Argentina, sun-dried salted franciscana meat, known locally as "mushame", has been consumed by the community of General Lavalle and San Clemente del Tuyú (Praderi et al., 1989; Carman and Carman, 2016).

(xi). Absence of better solutions

Until now, the dedicated actions and meetings at a regional level to improve the state of conservation of the franciscana dolphin have been carried out at the international level, chiefly under the umbrella of CMS and the International Whaling Commission (IWC). Given that this action will be focused on the conservation of habitats, in addition to the conservation of the species, this will also benefit a broader group of aquatic flora and fauna - giving them an additional comparative advantage.

(xii). Probability of success

Through the implementation of various methodologies, the aim is to chiefly reduce the bycatch of franciscanas, along with other threats. The main advantage is the existence since 2016 of the IWC CMP for the franciscana. The joint efforts by the CMS and the IWC will enable

conservation objectives to be achieved. The three countries carried out studies comparing different fisheries for the rates of bycatch of franciscanas. For example, it was also shown that the ultrasound emitters could be used as a way of reducing bycatch of franciscana and have been found to be effective, as they have low maintenance costs and are easy to use by the fishermen.

Furthermore, the ultrasound emitters were shown to not affect the rate of fish capture, but continue to be an expensive alternative due to import costs and the number of ultrasound emitters necessary for the extended gillnets. They were tested by artisan fishermen in all coastal surveys, and were found to be of variable effectiveness from one fishermen and another. The researchers from the three countries are already exploring several alternatives to mitigate bycatch.

The main potential obstacle is considered to be a lack of funding.

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