

## Conservation and Protection of cetaceans

The proposed site encloses approximately 2000 km<sup>2</sup>, of which 90% is marine area. The geographical area starts 2 kms inshore along the west coast of the island of Tenerife, from the village of Las Galletas at the southern corner to the village of Buenavista at the northern corner; then the area extends west all the way to 7 nautical miles past the west coast of the island of La Gomera. The site excludes most of the land of La Gomera, and only encompasses a 2 km wide strip along the coast where whale watching tours depart from.

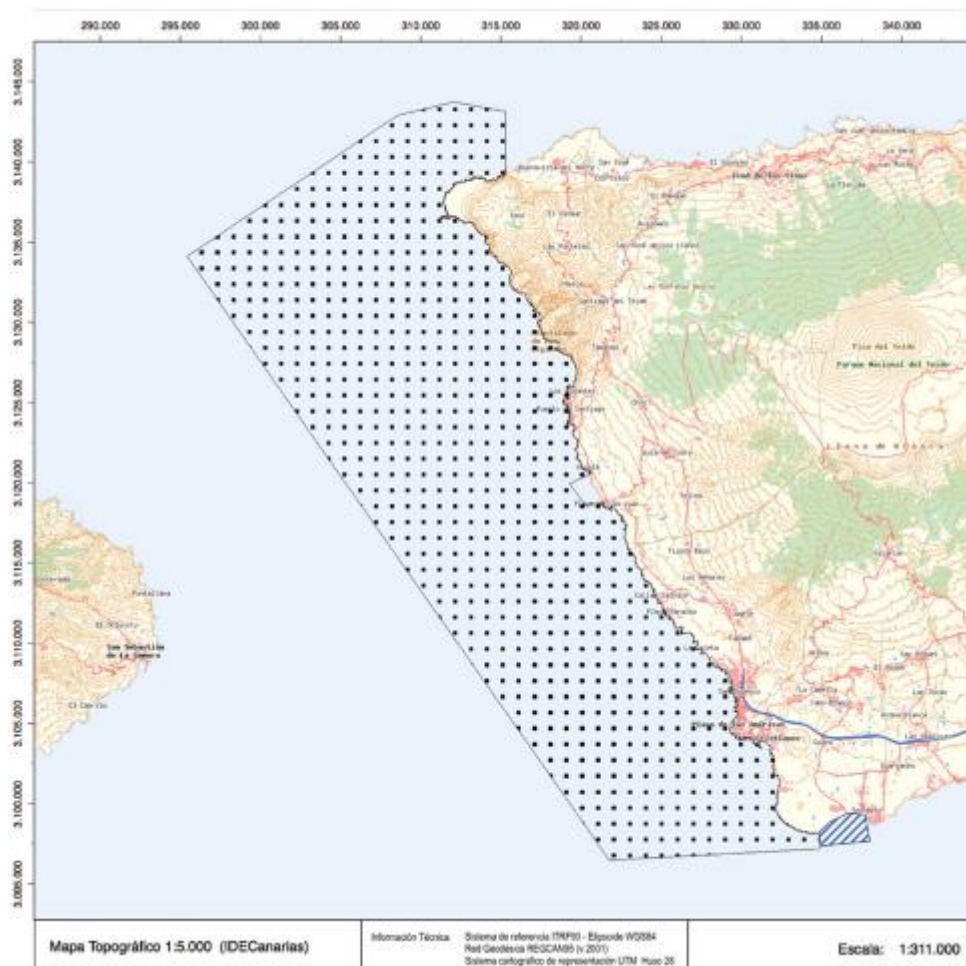
The area encompasses pelagic and benthic habitats, and provides suitable conditions to be home for 2 cetacean species: short finned pilot whales, and bottlenose dolphins; and to be an important migration stop for 19 other cetacean species.

The site comprises Marine Special Areas of Conservation (SAC, in Spanish ZEC) established by the Habitat Directive from the Natura 2000 Network by The European Union, due to among other fauna, the presence of bottlenose dolphins (*Tursiops truncatus*).

The site has been chosen to match the area defined by the initiative HOPE SPOT, by Mission Blue, which aims to create a big marine protected area comprising all the area proposed. If this is achieved, it is greatly beneficial that the Whale Heritage Site already encloses that same geographical area.

The site includes land, both in Tenerife and La Gomera Islands, where it is found whale watching activities, main touristic places, and where the community is highly involved with cetacean conservation.

(Evidence 1.1)



## Q6

List any Marine Protected Areas within the proposed site:

There are 5 protected areas within the proposed site. All of them from the Habitats Directive, of Natura 2000 Network established by the European Union.

- ZEC ES7020017 Franja marina de Teno-Rasca
- ZEC ES7020117 Cueva Marina de San Juan
- ZEC ES7020123 Franja Marina Santiago-Valle Gran Rey
- ZEC ES7020125 Costa de los Órganos
- ZEPA ES0000526 Espacio Marino de La Gomera-Teno

(Evidences: 1.4 – 1.11)

## Q7

Yes

Do you believe that there are adequate personnel and equipment available to patrol at-sea or freshwater areas in order to monitor activities within these protected areas?

### Marine protected areas within the Whale Heritage Site

The entire proposed area of the Whale Heritage Site is a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) within the Natura 2000 network designated by the European Environment Agency (EEA). *NATURA 2000 is the ecological network for the conservation of wild animals and plant species and natural habitats of Community importance within the European Union. It consists of sites classified under the Birds Directive and the Habitats Directive [the Nature Directives].* The Ministry of Ecological Transition of the Spanish Government has the legal competences of the SAC.

The proposed site also borders another SAC in the south: [Sebadales del Sur de Tenerife \(ES-7020116\)<sup>9</sup>](#). Within the SAC and proposed Whale Heritage Site is another SAC and priority conservation habitat, an underwater volcanic cave called [Cueva marina de San Juan \(ES-7020117\)<sup>9</sup>](#).

## Q8

List any local authorities or organisations responsible for monitoring protected areas:

Authorities:

- Canary Islands Government (Department of Ecological Transition, Climate Change and Territorial Planning, Consejería de Transición Ecológica, Lucha contra el Cambio Climático y Planificación Territorial).
- Spanish Government (Ministry for Ecological Transition and Demographic Challenge, Ministerio para la Transición Ecológica y el Reto Demográfico).

University and other research groups:

- University of La Laguna (Grupo de investigación de Biodiversidad, Ecología marina y Conservación, BIOECOMAC).
- CIMA Canarias (Centro de Investigaciones Medioambientales del Atlántico).
- Tonina Association (Asociación para la investigación y divulgación del medio marino).
- SECAC (Sociedad para el Estudio de los Cetáceos en el Archipiélago Canario).
- CEAMAR (Cetaceans and Marine Research Institute of the Canary Islands).
- Canarias Conservación (Cetaceans & Sea Turtle Research Society).
- Whale Wise Eco Tours & Research.

Are any cetacean species occurring within the site given specific protected status or have any been identified as of conservation concern, and if so, why?200 word limit

Yes, in Spain all cetaceans are protected by law by the Real Decreto, 1727, de 6 de diciembre. Each species has a protected status which is specified below according to the national and regional catalogues of threatened species.

## Cetacean species, protected status and culture

### Species recorded

Table 2: Table of all cetacean species recorded off Tenerife, with their conservation and protection status. (Data from: <https://www.boe.es/buscar/pdf/2011/BOE-A-2011-3582-consolidado.pdf>)

Latin Name	Common Name	Spanish Government Protection Status	Canary Islands Government Protection Status
<i>Tursiops truncatus</i>	<b>Common bottlenose dolphin</b>	Vulnerable [BOE. N°46 de 23 de febrero de 2011]	Special protection [B.O.C. n° 112, junio de 2010]
<i>Globicephala macrorhynchus</i>	<b>Short-finned pilot whale</b>	Vulnerable	Special protection
<i>Grampus griseus</i>	<b>Rosso's dolphin</b>	Not categorised	Special interest
<i>Physeter microcephalus</i>	<b>Sperm whale</b>	Vulnerable	Vulnerable
<i>Orcinus orca</i>	<b>Killer whale</b>	Not categorised	Special interest
<i>Pseudorca crassidens</i>	<b>False killer whale</b>	Not categorised	Special protection
<i>Delphinus delphis</i>	<b>Short-beaked common dolphin</b>	Not categorised	Special interest
<i>Stenella coeruleoalba</i>	<b>Striped dolphin</b>	Not categorised	Special interest
<i>Stenella frontalis</i>	<b>Atlantic spotted dolphin</b>	Not categorised	Special protection
<i>Steno bredanensis</i>	<b>Rough-toothed dolphin</b>	Not categorised	Special protection
<i>Lagenodelphis hosei</i>	<b>Fraser's dolphin</b>	Not categorised	Special protection
<i>Ziphius cavirostris</i>	<b>Cuvier's beaked whale</b>	Vulnerable	Vulnerable
<i>Mesoplodon densirostris</i>	<b>Blainville's beaked whale</b>	Not categorised	Special protection
<i>Mesoplodon europaeus</i>	<b>Gervais' beaked whale</b>	Special protection	Special protection
<i>Megaptera novaeangliae</i>	<b>Humpback whale</b>	Vulnerable	Special interest
<i>Balaenoptera physalus</i>	<b>Fin whale</b>	Vulnerable	Special protection
<i>Balaenoptera borealis</i>	<b>Sei whale</b>	Vulnerable	Special protection
<i>Balaenoptera musculus</i>	<b>Blue whale</b>	Vulnerable	Special protection
<i>Balaenoptera edeni</i>	<b>Bryde's whale</b>	Not categorised	Special protection
<i>Eubalaena glacialis</i>	<b>North Atlantic right whale</b>	Critically endangered	
<i>Kogia breviceps</i>	<b>Pygmy sperm whale</b>	Not categorised	Special protection

## Q70

List any current threats relevant to primary cetacean habitat.

Pilot whales and Bottlenose dolphins are the most vulnerable species in the area because they are a resident population. This fact is the main reason for local scientists to focus their research on these two species. It has been estimated a population of 390 pilot whales with 70 of them habitually residents. Recent studies have observed significant decreases in the resting time of the groups of pilot whales in presence of jet skis (illegals) and recreational vessels (both, illegal and legal). They have also observed increased levels of accumulated cortisol in subcutaneous tissue. All the evidence suggests that all impacts are due to an excessive nautical activity in the area.

### IMPACTS

- Collisions, with special attention to fast ferries. The channel between Tenerife-La Gomera is an area with boat traffic, mainly by: touristic charter vessels, including whale watching, fast ferries, professional fishing boats, sport fishing boats, private boaters, fast boats for water sports, and jet skis. The model proposed by scientists 10 years ago, predicted that every pilot whale within the resident population has 1,7 annual possibility of collision with one of these boats. This reflects a high collision risk between fast boat and cetaceans (Stephanis et al, 2000). There is no recent study for this, but there is evidence that the number of boats has increased. A sad example occurred last year, where a calf of pilot whale had to be euthanized because of a lethal wound in his caudal fin.
- Acoustic Impact. Science have proven that boats navigating at speeds higher than 10 knots, create high frequency sounds originated by the cavitation of propeller's blades. The higher the speed the louder the sound impact. Other studies show that fast boats with other propulsion methods also create high frequency sounds (Browning et al 1997). Another study from local scientists, stated that the noise from fast ferries includes medium and high frequencies that coincide with those used by odontocetes, and therefore there is the risk of masking their vocalizations ( Aguilar y Tejedor, 2012)
- Derelict Fishing Gear. Nets, hooks and all sort of abandoned fishing gear are often seen in the area. This is putting at risk many marine life, but specially turtles. There are several reports annually of turtles entangled. The origin of these abandon gear could be from local fishing, but also could come from further north in the Atlantic, and brought into the area by the currents. Some locals also fish illegally with home made artefacts that are prohibited. One example is attaching a hook to an empty and closed 5 liters water bottle, and leaving it with bait. There was a shark reported last year, and November the 5th 2020 there was a bottlenose dolphin with such gear attached to it (hook in mouth)

We still don't know how this cortisol levels can affect to the resident population of pilot whales but some data still not valuated are suggesting that they may be affecting the survival rate of calves, currently estimated around 60%.

## Q71

List any local or national regulations, programmes, or projects that are working to address these threats, including those carried out by government, research institutes, universities, or NGOs.

There are a lot of non-profit associations, projects and outreach programs in the proposed site that are indirectly related to cetaceans, specially to tackle the problem with plastics in the ocean and coastline. However in this section we will focus on those that undertake projects directly related to cetaceans.

Asociación Tonina  
<https://asociaciontonina.com/>

Since 2014, Tonina Association has been conducting several field seasons to establish the conservation status of the cetacean populations in the area and their principal risks. With the results obtained this Association promoted a package of mitigation measures agreed upon several stakeholders. This mitigation package included the following:

- 1-) Surveillance by both land and sea stations. This measure has been adopted by the proper authorities.

2-) Specific training courses, both to employers and touristic guides. These courses must be attendance-day ones and obligatory to obtain a whale watching license. This measure has been taking partially already for the relevant authorities.

3-) Must be mandatory to have a favourable environmental impact report that include acoustic studies for the boat (noise levels with frequency and different speed). This measure is under negotiation with some tour operators to present this year as mandatory for the Ministry of Ecological Transition to renovate the licenses granted

4-) All the boats working inside the SAC area must have propeller guard. This measure is not only for whale watching tour operators but for all recreative boats, diving boats, and those who have special permits to take underwater photo and/or video as well as research boats. This measure is under negotiation with whale watching tour operators to present it this year to the Canarian Government and the Ministry of Ecological Transition of Spain.

5-) Other measures to adopt once the new data comes out.

BIECOMAC from La Laguna University  
<http://cetaceos.webs.ull.es/bioecomac/>

Biodiversity, Ecología Marina y Conservación, BIOECOMAC is a research group from the local university. This research team on Cetaceans and Bioacoustics has 15 years of expertise on studies of cetaceans, in the fields of foraging and acoustic ecology, diving behaviour and population dynamics. It also investigates marine fauna bioacoustics from invertebrate larvae to large whales. Results are applied to conservation biology in the fields of management of marine protected species and the effects of human impacts such as acoustic pollution or ship strikes. It is important to mention that this group have been putting a lot of pressure on fast ferries companies, and effort to find a solution (i.e. heat sensible cameras on ferries). Last year they persuaded the companies to change their route to avoid passing on top of a very frequent area by pilot whales, and so they did. Since last year, fast ferries are deviating their route by 4 miles.

Canarian Government, department of Ecological Transition <https://www.gobiernodecanarias.org/medioambiente/>  
[http://www.gobiernodecanarias.org/turismo/dir\\_gral\\_ordenacion\\_promocion/observacion\\_cetaceos/index.html](http://www.gobiernodecanarias.org/turismo/dir_gral_ordenacion_promocion/observacion_cetaceos/index.html)

This department is in charge, among other fields, of the management and conservation of biodiversity, habitats and human impacts for all marine fauna and ecosystems. They have several projects related to cetaceans, such as the implementation of the surveillance team for whale watching activities. They cover a vast range of actions such as outreach and information and the Canarian Cetacean

Stranding Network.

Canarias Conservación  
<https://www.canariasconservacion.org/>

Known as Cetaceans & Sea Turtle Research Society, this Association was founded in 2002 with the mission of collaborating with the outreach and conservation of natural resources of the Canary Islands. They collaborate with the government, with the University of La Laguna, and the University of Las Palmas. Over the years, they have done a great work with research, monitoring cetacean populations, outreach, formation, and gathering volunteers for stranding events.

Centro de Recuperación Tahonilla  
<https://www.tenerife.es/portalcabtfe/es/temas/medio-ambiente-de-tenerife/biodiversidad/centro-de-recuperacion-de-fauna-silvestre-la-tahonilla>

Wildlife Rescue Centre La Tahonilla, is a facility funded by Tenerife Council, and it is run by veterinarians. They assist animals in distress in situ, or they take them for medical care and then released back into the wild. They have rescued hundreds of turtles and other marine fauna. They also do outreach and educational programs.

Especies de Canarias

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCS7uMLiBxbd4gdW7hCsHwiQ>

Wildlife filmography that has done several documentaries about local marine fauna and the impacts they face. In 2019 they released a documentary about the south west of Tenerife about the situation with the pilot whales. He also documented the images of HOPE, the pilot whale that had to be euthanized because of its tail being almost chopped off due to a boat propeller.

ACEST

<http://acesterife.com/>

ACEST is an association of Stakeholders from the whale watching sector. ACEST was funded in 2014, and since then have been focusing primarily on the welfare of the local populations of cetaceans, the impact of excessive nautical activity and the bad practices around the whales and dolphins. Over the last 6 years ACEST have had endless meetings with the authorities, both regional and national, for a better management of the activity. It has been on the press, media and documentaries, as well as events and workshops. ACEST works with a lawyer to take legal action against offenders, and furtive activities around the whales. This association has achieved a few important steps in their fight, such us making the government to put a team of surveillance (mentioned several times in this report) and to make the Ministry put a moratorium to stop the amount of permits for commercial whale watching. Sadly there is a lot more to do, and since the actions taken are less than necessary, such us the case of illegal boats and offenders not getting fines, ACEST has decided to report the situation to the office in Brussels, European Union, in charge of the management of the Special Areas of Conservation withing the Nature 2000 Habitats Directives. (Evidence: 5.2; 5.3)

HOPE SPOT, Mission Blue

<https://mission-blue.org/2019/12/spains-canary-islands-declared-a-hope-spot-amid-global-climate-change-discussion-at-cop25/>

Mission Blue has declared Tenerife-La Gomera a Hope Spot in support of increased protection for the area, in the spirit of the IUCN's goal of having 30% of the ocean officially protected by 2030, and to inspire the Spanish and Canary Islands Government to declare a large Marine Protected Area in the waters of the magnificent Canary Islands, where humans and nature can grow together. For this goal, Mission Blue is contacting national and regional authorities and, together with Hope Spot Champions Dr. Natacha Aguilar de Soto, Francis Perez and Dr. Alberto Brito, are advocating for the Tenerife-La Gomera Hope Spot to become a pole for conservation, sustainable tourism and education.

Calderones de Canarias

<https://www.facebook.com/Calderones-de-Canarias-1528928937330079/>

Non profit association that has developed a photo identification catalogue for the local population of pilot whales. This initiative has brought together many whale watching operators to get motivated and collaborate with the catalogue by taking pictures of the animal's fin.

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## Q72

Provide a summary of your current or proposed action plan to address these threats.

The Whale Heritage Site Candidacy Steering Committee, has been chosen in a way that all entities mentioned in this report (Q71) will have a representative. This means that there is a beautiful opportunity to bring together the people that is doing great palpable work to reduce human impacts on the local population of cetaceans, and all the marine area in the site. The Committee has the motivation and background to put together an action plan that covers all threats, as well as the resources available to implement the plan. The Committee has discussed the importance of it, and its development is on the table. Unfortunately, it is not in time for this report, but it will be hand in as soon as it is.

Members of the Steering Committee have helped in the past with the development of Action Plans regarding local cetaceans and marine environment. Bothe, the regional and national Government (Ecological Transition) have also developed an Action Plan for Cetacean Conservation. (Evidence: 3.20; 3.21; 3.22; 3.23). This indicates that the WHS Steering Committee members are qualified to develop the action plan, and they have a well-defined background as starting point and reference for it.