

Review and update of Management Units for cetaceans in UK waters



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What are Management Units?

Management Units (MUs) refer to a geographical area in which the animals of a particular species are found. They can be used to inform the spatial scales at which impacts of human activities alone, cumulatively and in combination, should be assessed for their potential impacts on key cetacean species in the surrounding areas.

Boundaries of the MUs are based on our best understanding of **the presence of known populations**, with divisions informed by **ecological evidence** and/or **divisions already used for the management of other human activities**. MUs for the seven most common cetacean species found in UK waters were defined by the Inter-Agency Marine Mammal Working Group (IAMMWG) in 2015;

- ✓ Harbour porpoise (*Phocoena phocoena*),
- ✓ Bottlenose dolphin (*Tursiops truncatus*),
- ✓ Short-beaked common dolphin (*Delphinus delphis*),
- ✓ White-beaked dolphin (*Lagenorhynchus albirostris*),
- ✓ Atlantic white-sided dolphin (*Lagenorhynchus acutus*),
- ✓ Risso's dolphin (*Grampus griseus*) and;
- ✓ Minke whale (*Balaenoptera acutorostrata*)

Emerging evidence

The MU boundaries defined in 2015 for all other species remain unchanged for now. We are aware of emerging evidence for a number of species which may be considered if necessary in future revisions of the MUs.

Coastal bottlenose dolphins

Photo-ID studies along the north-east coast of Scotland and England suggest potential southerly range shift, or expansion of the inshore bottlenose dolphin that were originally associated predominantly with the Moray Firth. As studies continue in the region and confidence in the temporal and spatial extent of these movements improves, the observed shift be considered in a future review of the units.

Risso's dolphins

Initial analysis of Scottish photo-identification catalogues evidence of potential population sub-structuring. With further research and analysis it is possible that multiple sub-populations may exist around the UK.

Atlantic white-sided dolphins

Preliminary results from high-resolution analysis of tissue samples collected from across the North East Atlantic indicate that there is strong evidence to suggest at least two distinct geographical structures, one of which encompasses the UK and continental European waters. It is possible that further clusters within the southern group may be identified as research continues.

Are you involved in relevant research?

Evidence from research on photo-ID, satellite tagging, stable isotopes, genetic analysis is all used to improve our evidence base to better define biologically relevant units. If you are involved in studies investigating the population dynamics of UK cetacean species, we would love to hear from you!



To let us know about your research that could contribute to our evidence base, scan this QR code.



To download the complete IAMMWG, 2023 report and updated associated shapefiles, scan this QR code.

What has changed?

Repeated sightings of known population-individuals in both Sussex and North Cornwall, England using photo-ID data suggests that the core range of this population extends further in both directions than was previously understood. In response to the evidence, the **Coastal West Channel MU** has been extended in both directions from Padstow on the northern coast of Cornwall, to east of the Isle of Wight, in line with Eastbourne (Figure 1).

Abundance estimates for this MU and the surrounding Offshore Channel and South West England MU (OCSW) have been updated in line with the described boundary change. Abundance estimates for all other MUs remain unchanged from the last update in 2022.

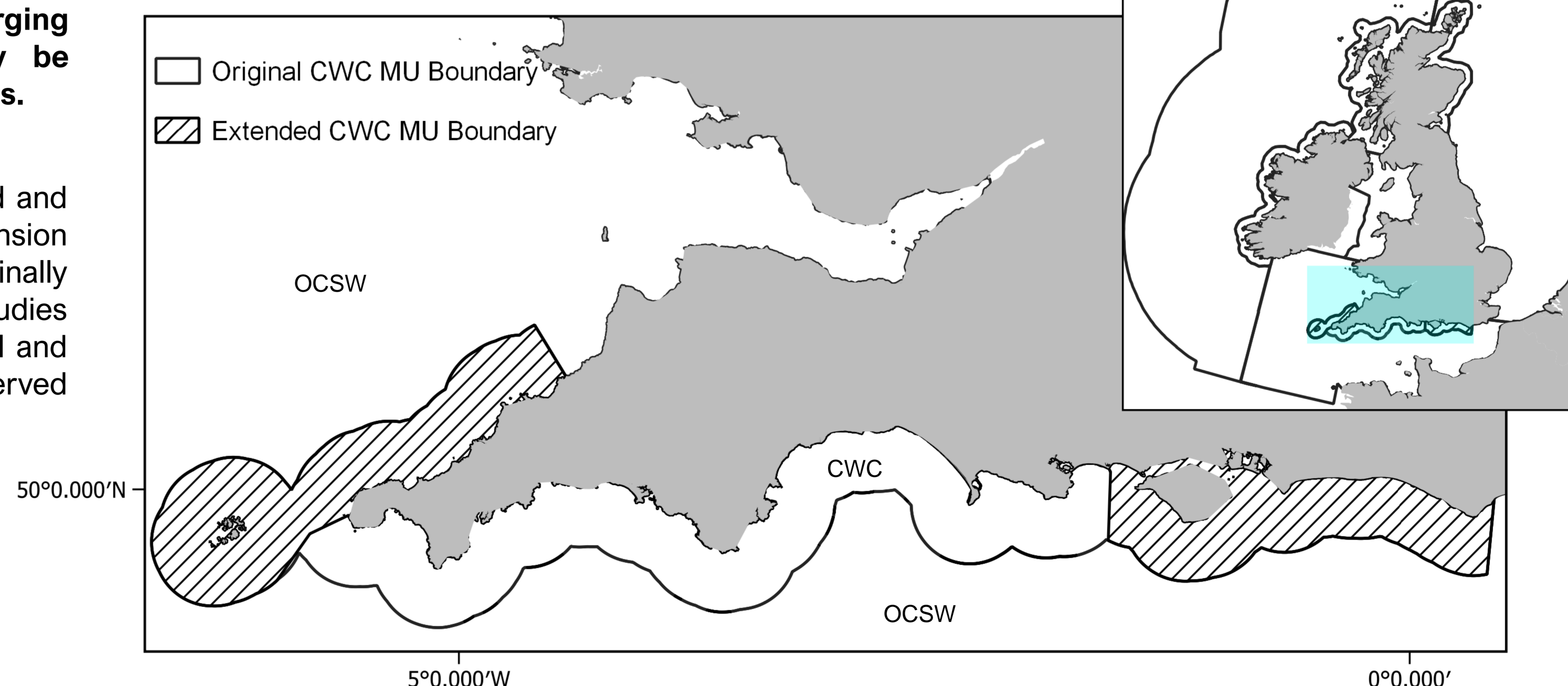


Figure 1. Map displaying the 2023 east and west extensions to the Coastal Western Channel Management Unit for bottlenose dolphins.

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