HW-36. Incidence of ulcerative lesions caused by *Anisakis* spp. in cetaceans from the Northeast Atlantic: a long-term update

Pons-Bordas, Claudia [1]; Hernández-González, Alberto [2]; Ivaylova, Silvina [2]; López, Alfredo [3]; Covelo, Pablo [3]; Pierce, Graham John [2]; Aznar, Francisco Javier [1]

1. *Marine Zoology Unit, Science Park, University of Valencia, Valencia, Spain*
2. *Instituto de Investigaciones Marinas (CSIC), Vigo, Spain*
3. *CEMMA (Coordinadora para o Estudo dos Mamíferos Mariños), Gondomar, Spain*

Ulcerative lesions caused by nematodes of genus *Anisakis* spp. are known to provoke mild to severe damage in the stomach wall, mainly on the forestomach, of cetaceans worldwide. In severe infections, profuse hemorrhages or gastric perforations can lead to life-threatening complications, with perforations potentially causing peritonitis; either condition may result in death. In a previous study, we reported a significant increase in the prevalence and severity of lesions in most cetacean species along the Galician coastline (Iberian Atlantic coast) between the periods 1991-1996 and 2017-2018. Here, we compare those samples with data from 6 cetacean species in the period 2019-2024, including common dolphin, *Delphinus delphis* (n hosts: 109; prevalence of lesions: 68.8%), striped dolphin, *Stenella coeruleoalba* (9; 77.8%), common bottlenose dolphin, *Tursiops truncatus* (11; 45.5%), harbor porpoise, *Phocoena phocoena* (10; 30%), Risso's dolphin, *Grampus griseus* (4; 75.0%%), and white-sided dolphin, *Lagenorhynchus acutus* (1; 0%). In common dolphins, the prevalence per year, considering both active and healing lesions was 77.8% (2019); 66.7% (2020); 64.7% (2021); 93.8% (2022); 87.5% (2023); 96.4% (2024). The mean abundance (95% CI) of open ulcers per host was 2.0 (1.6-2.5) and their maximum diameter (SD) 63.1 (48.8) mm. We did not find significant differences among years in the infection patterns or lesion diameter. The prevalence of open ulcers in 2019-24 was similar to that observed in 2017-18, suggesting that the recent increase in their incidence is temporarily stable. However, the mean number of open ulcers per host was higher in 2019-24 (2.0 vs. 1.1). Interestingly, we also noticed, in 2023 and 2024, an apparent increase of ulcerative lesions in the glandular stomach coupled with severe ulceration in the forestomach; these ulcers were found on the nodules caused by the digenean *Pholeter gastrophilus*. We interpret that, in these cases, *Anisakis* spp. opportunistically colonized a previously damaged tissue.