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DIET OF FIVE CETACEAN SPECIES IN THE NORTH AEGEAN SEA (GREECE)

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Few records on cetaceans' distribution are available for the North Aegean Sea and no research on diet has been attempted up to now. The present study, based on stomach content analysis of stranded animals, aims to fill the lack of data on cetaceans' feeding habits in the area. Out of the 32 cetaceans stranded since 2002 from Strimonikos Gulf in Chalkidiki to Alexandroupoli on the Turkish border, stomachs' samples were collected whenever possible. The stranded specimens belong to five species: Bottlenose dolphin (*Tursiops truncatus*), Common dolphin (*Delphinus delphis*), Striped dolphin (*Stenella coeruleoalba*), Risso's dolphin (*Grampus griseus*) and Harbour porpoise (*Phocoena phocoena*).

A total of 17 stomachs were examined, among them two were empty. From the others fifteen stomachs, fish otoliths, undigested fish, cephalopods beaks, undigested cephalopods and crustaceans' parts were found and analyzed up to species level, whenever possible. The results show that the first three dolphin species' diets were composed of both fish and cephalopods: Common dolphin's diet was composed of species from the Clupeidae family and very few cephalopods, while Striped dolphin fed on small pelagic fish, such as bogue (*Boops boops*), Myctophidae as Madeira lantern fish (*Ceratoscopelus maderensis*) and in smaller proportion on cephalopods. The Bottlenose dolphins fed primarily on snake blenny (*Ophidion barbatum*), bogue (*Boops boops*) and cephalopods squids of the genus *Loligo*. Risso's dolphin's diet was composed exclusively of cephalopods, prevalently from the Theutidae family, and by the genus *Histiotheutis*.

This present work also contributes first data on Harbour porpoise's diet in the Mediterranean Sea: the diet of the Harbour porpoise was found to consist of fish, with a high preference of the Gobidae family.

This ongoing investigation is complementary to both fisheries and field research so as to understand cetacean needs and human impacts on their survival in the region.