

SOCIETY FOR MARINE MAMMALOGY: SMALL GRANTS IN AID OF RESEARCH (2018) GRANT REPORT

PROJECT TITLE: “Study on fisheries threats to dolphins at Gulf of Mannar, Sri Lanka.”

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Sri Lanka is an island nation in the Indian Ocean home to about 30 species of marine mammals. Currently fisheries industry is the biggest threat for marine mammals in Sri Lanka. There were many incidents recorded that dolphins were killed during fishing activity due to nylon nets and mainly illegal fishing activities such as Laila nets & dynamiting in the Gulf of Mannar. The objective of the study was to assess incidental dolphin kill by various fishing methods at Gulf of Mannar area. Study was conducted from Kalpitiya to Mannar in the Gulf of Mannar area from October 2018 to September 2019.

During the study period the fishermen attitudinal survey was conducted interviewing 479 fishermen from 10 fish landing sites in the study area to assess the incidental dolphin kill. According to the fishers Laila nets (type of a purse seine net) and dynamiting was the main threat for the Dolphins in the area. Not much incidents of dynamiting recorded in Kalpitiya area. But, so many dynamiting was recorded in Mannar area specially by fishers at Pallimunai landing site. According to the interviewees it was not recorded any dolphin killing during the survey period. Dolphin and whale watching tourism is rapidly increased in the area during last decade and it was very famous during last couple years. So the local tour operators (mostly fishermen) are concerning about the protection of dolphin. This could be one reason to minimize dolphin bycatch. Moreover, due to the strict laws we cannot assume all the fishers answered honestly. Because, it was revealed some fishers hanging a larger weight (bag of sand etc.) to the dead dolphin and put them in the sea for drowning. However, according to the interviewees many sea turtle bycatch occurred during the fishing activities. Out of 479 fishers 63 % caught sea turtles in their fishing gears and about 50% of the turtles released without any harm. Although there were no records of dolphin bycatch during the study period, it is recommended to continue the study as illegal fisheries still continuing in the area.

Photographical summary – Fishers interviews

