



Mapping the UK Marine Mammal Landscape


A UK-wide overview of research,
monitoring, and conservation
activity

Executive Summary

Why this work matters

Marine mammals are key parts of the UK's marine ecosystems and central to statutory monitoring, conservation management, and policy decision-making. Over recent decades, the UK has seen substantial growth in marine mammal research, monitoring, and conservation activity across academia, government, industry, non-governmental organisations, and citizen science.

While this breadth represents a major strength, activity is often fragmented across sectors, regions, species, and pressures, making it difficult to maintain visibility of effort, identify gaps, and support coordinated strategic action. For organisations working across research, delivery, policy, and funding, this lack of visibility can limit opportunities for collaboration, learning, and strategic alignment.



'Marine mammals' in the context of this report includes all dolphin, whale, porpoise, and seal species found in the UK. Dolphins, whales and porpoises may collectively be referred to as 'cetaceans', and seals as 'pinnipeds'.

What this report does

This report presents a UK-wide, structured overview of marine mammal projects, compiled as part of the UK Marine Mammal Forum (UKMMF) set-up phase. The project database captures past and ongoing activity across the UK and is designed to highlight:

- Where activity is concentrated.
- How evidence is generated and used.
- Where opportunities exist to strengthen coordination and impact.



Explore the database

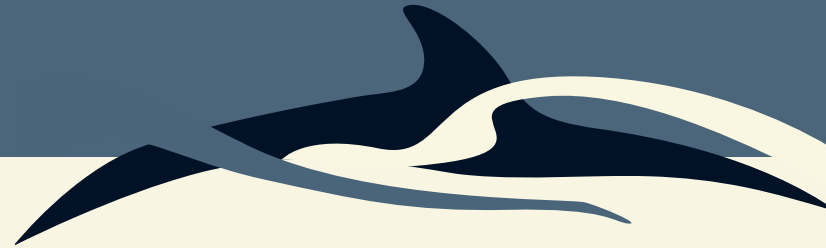
Key findings

A LANDSCAPE BUILT ON LONG-TERM DELIVERY

The project landscape is characterised by long-term and ongoing activity, with most projects focused on sustained monitoring, research, and conservation rather than discrete, completed studies. Evidence generation is a clear strength, particularly for cetaceans and pressures linked to statutory reporting and offshore activity.

CITIZEN SCIENCE AS CORE INFRASTRUCTURE

Citizen science accounts for approximately 38% of projects, providing long-term, geographically extensive data that underpin multiple policy and management processes, particularly at local and regional scales.



Citizen science is not a peripheral engagement activity; it is part of the UK's core marine mammal evidence infrastructure.

UNEVEN PROGRESSION FROM EVIDENCE TO MITIGATION

While monitoring and assessment are well established, work focused on developing and implementing ways to mitigate impacts on marine mammals is less common and more unevenly distributed. Mitigation activity is most visible for fisheries bycatch and disturbance, while projects addressing underwater noise, climate change, pollution, and habitat degradation are predominantly evidence-led, with less clearly articulated pathways to mitigation.

DIFFERENCES ACROSS TAXA, SECTORS, AND POLICY LEVELS

Cetacean-focused projects dominate large-scale monitoring and national policy relevance, while pinniped-focused work is more often embedded in local and site-based management contexts and is less visible at a national scale, despite being highly management-relevant. Evidence generation and delivery are typically led by different sectors, helping to explain why strong evidence bases do not always translate directly into management action.

FUNDING VISIBILITY, NOT FUNDING VOLUME


Funding across the landscape is diverse, spanning government, research councils, charities, industry, and mixed sources. While many projects are long-term in design, information on funding mechanisms and duration is not consistently visible, limiting understanding of how funding arrangements align with sustained delivery and coordination needs.

What this means

Taken together, the findings suggest that the principal opportunity lies not in generating additional baseline evidence, but in improving coordination, visibility, and translation across the existing landscape.

A UK Marine Mammal Forum could add value by:

- Acting as a neutral convening platform.
- Improving transparency around who is doing what, where, and why.
- Supporting clearer pathways from evidence generation to mitigation, management, and policy uptake.



The greatest returns are likely to come from better coordination of existing effort, rather than expanding data collection alone.

Looking ahead

Future development of the database as a living, stakeholder-informed resource—for example through structured surveys or targeted consultations—would strengthen its ability to capture delivery pathways, mitigation maturity, funding mechanisms, and dependencies over time.

This work was supported by The Fishmongers Company as part of the UKMMF set-up phase to establish a shared, evidence-based foundation for future coordination. By improving visibility

and strategic alignment, the UKMMF would help ensure that existing investment in marine mammal evidence delivers maximum long-term impact.

This report is accompanied by a separate policy briefing note, which draws selectively on the findings of the landscape analysis to support strategic discussion in current policy contexts. The briefing does not introduce additional analysis and is intended to complement, rather than replace, the evidence presented here.

Introduction

Marine mammals play a vital role in the UK's seas, helping to shape marine ecosystems and providing clear signals of how healthy those ecosystems are. UK waters support a diverse assemblage of cetaceans and pinnipeds, including internationally significant populations of several species. However, many of their populations remain subject to cumulative pressures from human activities, including fisheries interactions, underwater noise, pollution, habitat change, and climate-driven shifts in prey availability. Addressing these pressures effectively depends on the availability of robust, coordinated, and accessible evidence.

Over recent decades, the UK has seen substantial growth in marine mammal research, monitoring, and conservation activity. This effort spans academic research, statutory monitoring, industry-led surveys, non-governmental initiatives, and an increasingly important contribution from citizen science. While this breadth represents a major strength, previous reviews have highlighted that activity is often fragmented geographically and thematically, with uneven coverage across species, regions, and pressures (e.g. Evans et al., 2021; JNCC, 2023). Data are generated at a wide range of spatial scales, from local population studies and strandings schemes to large-scale surveys, but are not always well integrated – limiting the ability to develop a coherent picture of population statuses and trends.

The need for improved coordination was a central conclusion of a UK-wide scoping workshop convened by JNCC and delivered by Mindfully Wired in 2024 to explore the case for a forum bringing together UK marine mammal stakeholders. That workshop identified short-term priorities, including the development of a database of existing research and monitoring initiatives, alongside longer-term ambitions to improve collaboration, data sharing, and strategic alignment across sectors. Seed funding was subsequently secured to support a set-up phase for the UK Marine Mammal Forum (UKMMF), with the aim of setting the foundations for a sustainable forum from 2026.

This work closely aligns with the UK Cetacean Conservation Strategy (Scottish Government, 2025), which highlights the need to strengthen broadscale surveys, population-level monitoring,

protected area evidence, and data collation to address persistent gaps in understanding cetacean statuses in UK waters. The strategy recognises that, despite extensive data collection, limitations at broader population scales constrain the ability to assess trends, detect emerging issues, and evaluate risks from human activities, and calls for more coherent monitoring and research frameworks to address these challenges.

In this context and in preparation for a possible launch of the UKMMF, Mindfully Wired has established a database of past and ongoing marine mammal research and conservation projects across the UK. This report presents a summary and analysis of that dataset, exploring the scale and diversity of activity and providing an initial strategic overview of where effort is concentrated and where important gaps may exist. By improving visibility of ongoing work and highlighting opportunities for greater harmonisation and collaboration, the database provides a foundation for more coordinated, efficient, and effective marine mammal research and conservation across the UK.



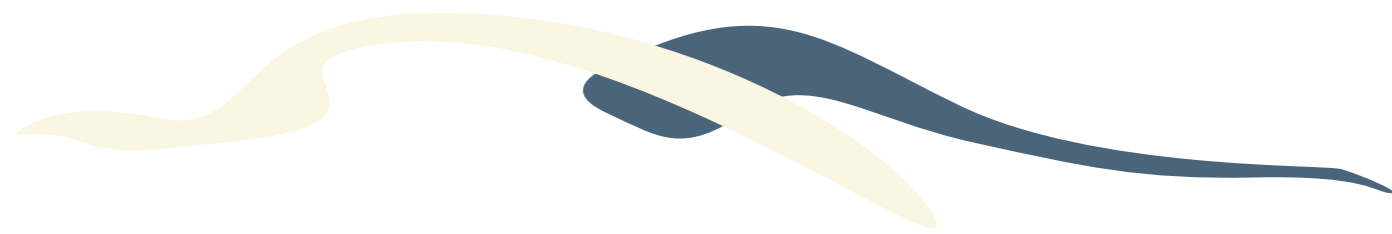
Why coordination and data visibility matter

The UK marine mammal evidence base is generated through a wide range of activities, including academic research, statutory monitoring, industry-led surveys, and long-running citizen science initiatives. Together, these represent a substantial investment and a major strength of the UK's research and conservation effort.

Citizen science, for example, plays an increasingly important role in generating long-term, geographically extensive datasets, yet often operates with limited strategic support or integration into national evidence frameworks. Industry-led monitoring contributes large volumes of data but is not always readily accessible or aligned with wider research objectives.

However, projects are often designed to address specific questions at different spatial and temporal scales, using varied methods and data standards. While appropriate for individual objectives, this diversity can limit the ability to compare findings or build a coherent picture of population status at regional and national scales. Local studies and strandings schemes can reveal fine-scale patterns and emerging issues, while broadscale surveys provide essential context, yet links between these approaches are not always well developed.

Improving coordination does not mean standardising all work, but rather increasing transparency around who is doing what, where, and why, and identifying opportunities for alignment where this adds value. By improving visibility of existing activity, the UKMMF project database provides a practical foundation for better integration of evidence and more strategic, collaborative marine mammal research and conservation across the UK.



Aims of this report

This report has four primary aims:



To provide the first UK-wide, structured overview of marine mammal research, monitoring, and conservation activity across sectors.



To identify broad patterns, gaps, and areas of overlap in current activity, rather than to assess fine-scale performance or project effectiveness.



To establish a baseline dataset against which future updates and longitudinal comparisons can be made as the UK Marine Mammal Forum develops.



To prioritise descriptive, exploratory, and strategic insights in this initial (v1) analysis, rather than causal inference or evaluation of outcomes.

How this database was developed

Projects included in the UK Marine Mammal Forum (UKMMF) database were identified through a multi-stage discovery process drawing on both internal and external sources. Initial entries were derived from existing datasets held by Mindfully Wired, developed through prior research, mapping exercises, and sector engagement. These were expanded and updated through systematic online searches of publicly available information, including organisational websites, reports, academic and grey literature, and relevant directories.

Stakeholder engagement formed a core component of the discovery and validation process. As part of the UKMMF set-up phase a total of 62 stakeholders across sectors—including researchers, government evidence teams, delivery organisations, industry representatives, funders, and NGOs—were contacted to provide input into the Draft Terms of Reference or the database. Discussions with practitioners, researchers, policymakers, and sector convenors were used to verify existing entries, identify additional initiatives, and clarify project scope and positioning. Projects were

included where sufficient publicly available or stakeholder-confirmed information existed to describe their purpose and relevance. Inclusion does not imply endorsement or assessment of effectiveness.

All identified projects were compiled into a structured database designed to support exploration and comparison across the UK. Each project was reviewed individually, with records consolidated to avoid duplication. Projects were classified using a standardised tagging framework which covered aims, activities, outputs, evidence type, delivery model, geographic scope, policy relevance, and primary pressure addressed. Projects were allowed to have multiple tags, which were applied carefully and consistently based on shared definitions.

The database was developed as a landscape-mapping tool, with an explicitly descriptive and comparative analytical approach rather than an evaluative one. Analysis focuses on the distribution and characteristics of activity across regions, taxa, pressures, and delivery models.

Visibility limits in project discovery

While the database draws on extensive desk-based research and stakeholder input, many marine mammal projects are not formally reported or easily discoverable online. This includes smaller-scale or niche initiatives, early-stage or recently established projects, PhD and other independent research, locally delivered work without a dedicated web presence, and some industry-led, consultancy, or time-limited projects with limited public visibility. For example, Whale Food, a Pilot Project funded by NatureScot, was discovered via stakeholder conversations but could not be located through online searches.

As a result, the database should be interpreted as a structured overview of visible activity rather than an exhaustive inventory. Projects without an online presence, those operating informally,

or initiatives emerging after the data collection period may be under-represented. Classification necessarily involves informed judgment, particularly where projects address multiple objectives.

Mindfully Wired views the database as a living resource, with processes in place to update entries, incorporate new projects, and refine classifications over time. Ongoing stakeholder engagement and future updates will be important for improving coverage of less visible but nonetheless valuable work.



Related outputs from the UKMMF set-up phase

In parallel with development of the project database and landscape analysis, the UKMMF set-up phase also included the following outputs:

- **Draft Terms of Reference (ToR):** Developed to outline the proposed purpose, scope, governance principles, and boundaries of the UK Marine Mammal Forum. The draft ToR was shared with stakeholders for comment as part of the set-up process.
- **Policy briefing note:** Prepared as a complementary output drawing selectively on findings from the landscape analysis to inform current policy contexts. The briefing does not introduce additional analysis and is analytically distinct from this report.

Analysis of the UK Marine Mammal Project Landscape

1. OVERVIEW OF THE PROJECT LANDSCAPE

This analysis draws on a database of 160 UK marine mammal programmes and initiatives, comprising 139 projects and 21 capacity-building or coordination entries.

Overall, the landscape is characterised by a high degree of continuity and sustained delivery. Of the 139 projects identified, 80% (110 projects) were classified as ongoing at the time of data collection. When estimated duration is considered, 86 projects (62%) are classified as long-term projects or monitoring initiatives, defined here as those explicitly described as long-term or with an estimated duration of six years or more. Across the full dataset (projects and capacity entries combined), 67% of entries meet this long-term criterion.

UK marine mammal activity is dominated by long-term, ongoing delivery rather than short, stand-alone studies.

Among ongoing projects, 43 are explicitly identified as long-term programmes or long-term monitoring initiatives, underscoring the importance of continuity, coordination, and data integration across initiatives that extend over multiple years. In this analysis, “ongoing” includes both long-term programmes and time-limited projects that were still active at the time of data collection.

Taken together, these patterns show that evidence generation is largely embedded within ongoing delivery, with outputs produced iteratively over time rather than as discrete, completed studies. This structural characteristic has important implications for coordination, governance, and the translation of evidence into policy and management.

2. GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION OF PROJECTS

2.1 Regional distribution

Projects were analysed by region using normalised counts. This approach allows broad comparison of activity presence while avoiding assumptions about project scale, effort, or impact. Projects operating at UK-wide or multi-regional scales are treated as equivalent units to regionally focused initiatives.

Projects are most commonly UK-wide or Scotland-focused, with additional activity distributed across multiple English regions and Wales, reflecting a mix of national monitoring programmes and regionally delivered initiatives rather than concentrated activity in a single area.

2.2 Spatial patterns in project activity

Around one third of all projects operate at a UK-wide scale, reflecting the prominence of national monitoring programmes, coordination initiatives, and policy-facing activity. These UK-wide projects form a backbone of the landscape, supporting statutory reporting, large-scale surveys, and cross-regional integration, but do not imply uniform effort across all regions.

Among regionally focused activity, Scotland accounts for the largest share, reflecting its extensive coastline, high marine mammal diversity, long-standing monitoring programmes, and concentration of research and conservation institutions. Wales and south-west England also show relatively high levels of activity, particularly for coastal monitoring, protected sites, strandings response, and public engagement.

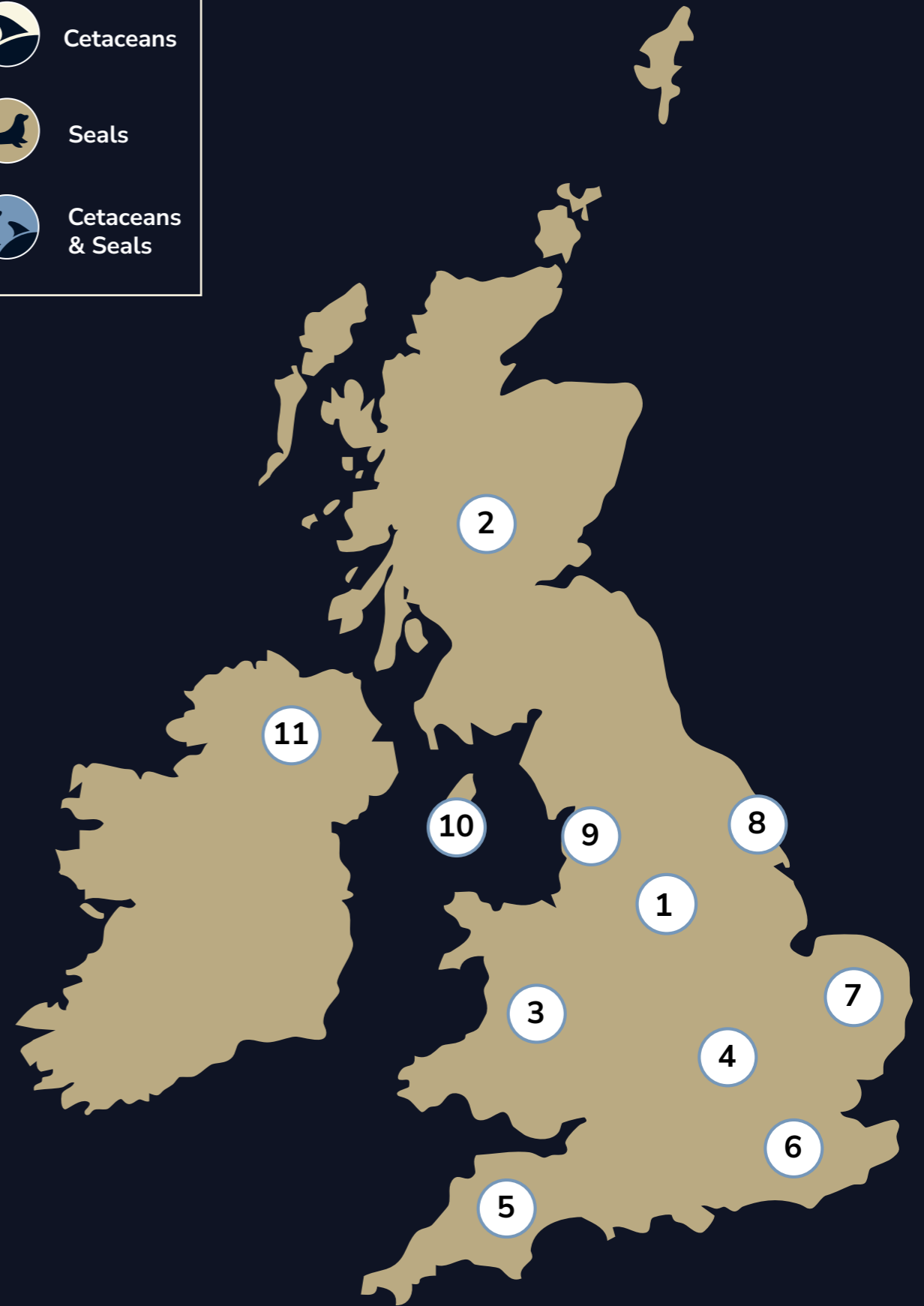
Across England, activity is distributed across multiple coastal regions rather than concentrated in a single area, with modest numbers of projects in the south-east, north-east, east, and north-west. Northern Ireland, the Isle of Man, and smaller sub-regional areas are represented by relatively few projects, which may reflect differences in governance, reporting practices, or visibility rather than an absence of activity.

Overall, the spatial pattern highlights broad national coverage alongside uneven regional visibility, providing a baseline for identifying where improved coordination or data visibility may add particular value. **See the Projects Map on the next page for a visualisation of this spatial pattern.**



Projects Map

1	UK (NATIONAL)	 29	 8	 13	50 Total
2	SCOTLAND	 17	 3	 10	30 Total
3	WALES	 10	 1	 2	13 Total
4	ENGLAND	 1	 0	 1	2 Total
5	SOUTH-WEST ENGLAND	 3	 3	 7	13 Total
6	SOUTH-EAST ENGLAND	 2	 4	 4	10 Total
7	EAST ENGLAND	 1	 3	 2	6 Total
8	NORTH-EAST ENGLAND	 4	 3	 2	9 Total
9	NORTH-WEST ENGLAND	 1	 1	 0	2 Total
10	ISLE OF MAN	 2	 1	 0	3 Total
11	NORTHERN IRELAND	 0	 1	 0	1 Total



3. TAXONOMIC FOCUS OF ACTIVITY

Analysis by taxonomic focus shows that projects are distributed as follows:

- Cetaceans only: 71 projects (=51%)
- Cetaceans and pinnipeds: 41 projects (=29%)
- Pinnipeds only: 28 projects (=20%)

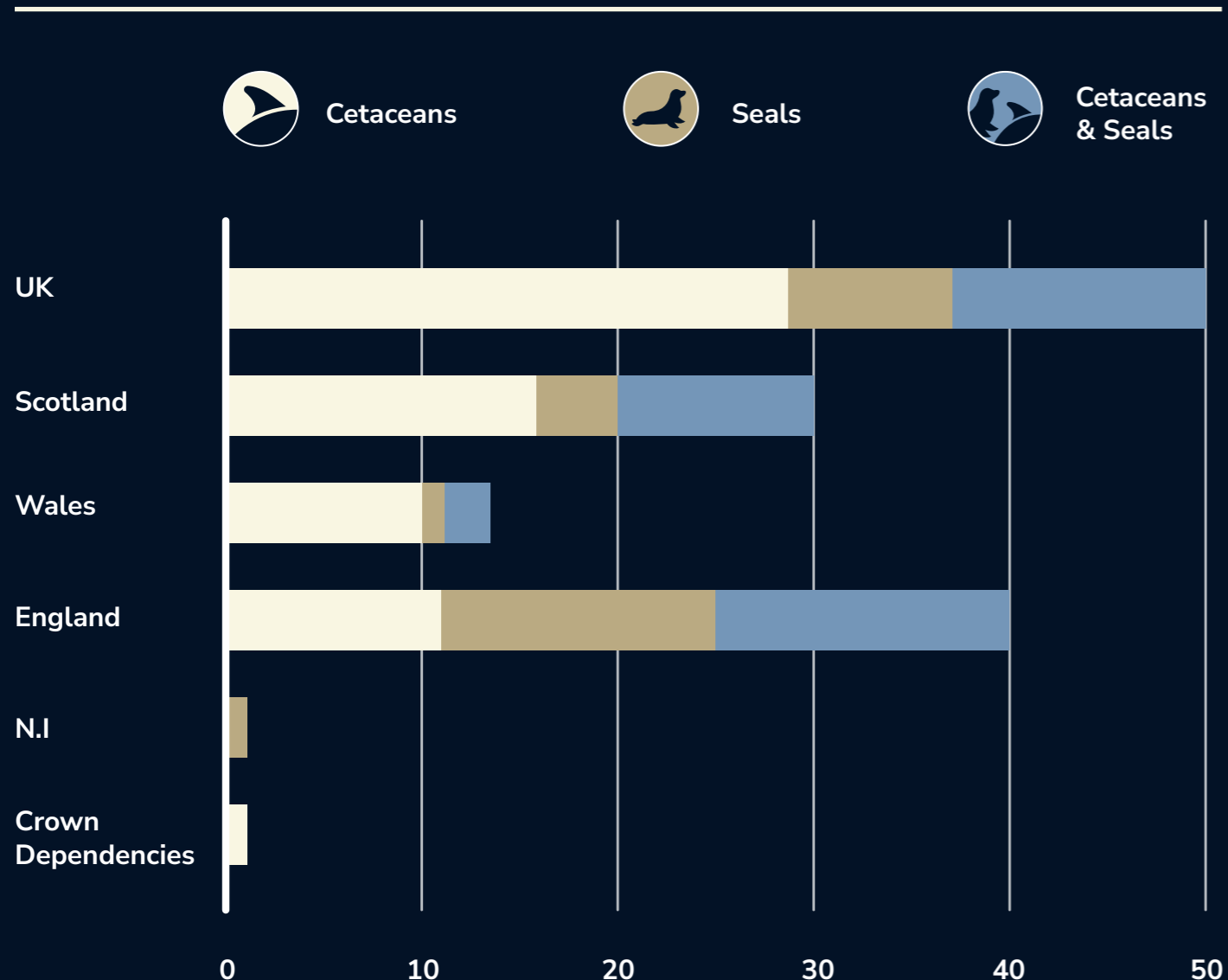
Cetaceans dominate the project landscape, reflecting their central role in large-scale survey programmes, offshore monitoring, and statutory reporting frameworks. Pinniped-focused projects are fewer and are more often associated with site-based monitoring, such as haul-out and breeding colony work, protected areas, and local management contexts.

The substantial proportion of cross-taxa projects (29%) represents a clear strength of the landscape. Many initiatives are designed around shared ecosystems, pressures, or monitoring platforms rather than single species groups, enabling evidence to inform multiple policy and management needs simultaneously.

However, the more localised and operational nature of pinniped-focused work means it is less visible at national scale, suggesting an opportunity to improve aggregation and integration of pinniped evidence within national frameworks rather than a lack of activity.

The figure below displays the distribution of projects by species group and region.

Distribution of projects by species group and region



4. PRESSURES ADDRESSED AND MITIGATION PATHWAYS

4.1 Monitoring versus mitigation

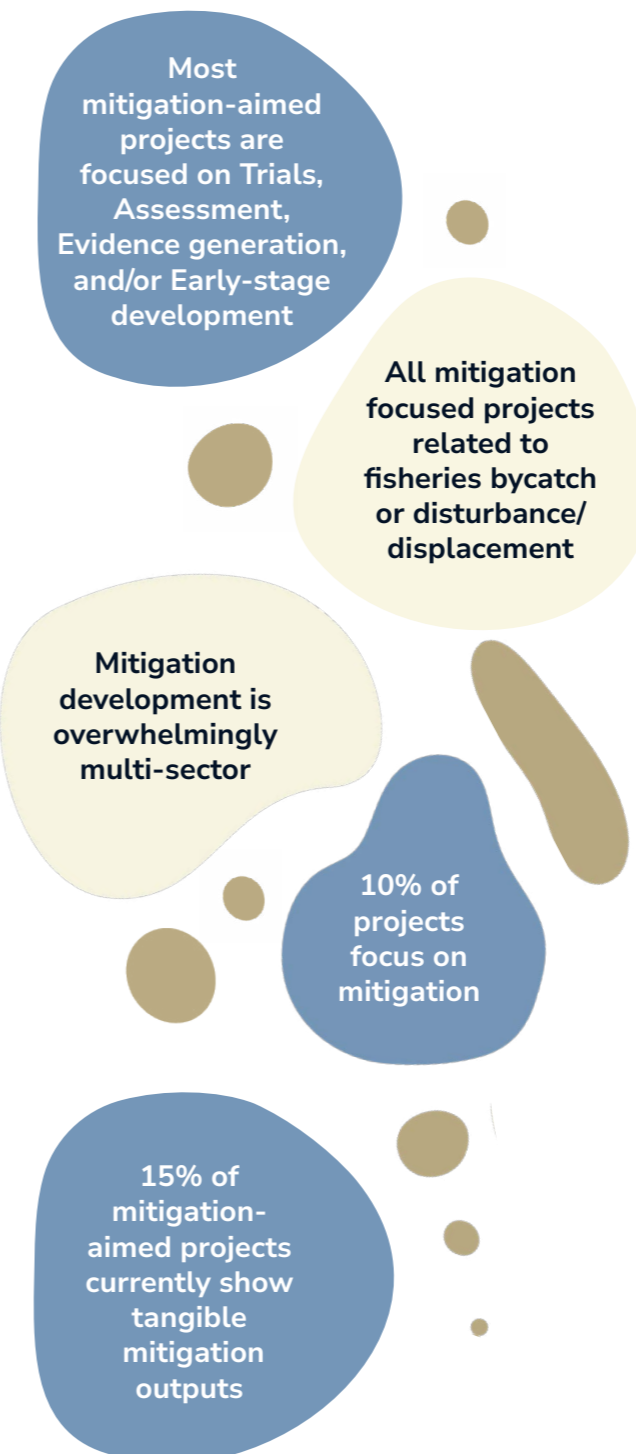
Based on stated project aims, approximately 40% of projects focus on population monitoring and ecological evidence generation, while fewer than 10% explicitly aim to develop or test mitigation measures. Many projects contribute indirectly to mitigation through evidence generation or decision support, even where mitigation is not a primary stated aim.

4.2 Variation by pressure

Monitoring and evidence-generation activity dominates projects that are not pressure-specific or address broad anthropogenic pressures, reflecting a strong emphasis on baseline and cross-cutting evidence. In contrast, mitigation-focused projects are concentrated in a small number of pressure areas where intervention pathways are more clearly defined.

Mitigation pipelines are most developed for fisheries bycatch and disturbance, while pressures such as underwater noise, climate change, habitat degradation, and pollution show strong evidence bases but limited visible mitigation development.

Importantly, absence of mitigation projects does not imply absence of mitigation action; mitigation may be embedded within regulatory processes or sector-led initiatives not captured as discrete projects.



Where mitigation activity is concentrated

Mitigation-focused projects are most evident for fisheries bycatch and disturbance-related pressures. Projects addressing broader or cross-cutting pressures, including underwater noise, climate change, pollution, and habitat degradation, are predominantly focused on monitoring and assessment.

The current project landscape shows a strong evidence base but a relatively thin mitigation pipeline, indicating opportunities to better translate existing knowledge into practical management action.

5. ROLES, OUTPUTS AND EVIDENCE PATHWAYS

5.1 Roles across the landscape

There is a clear differentiation of roles:

- NGOs primarily lead public engagement and policy-influencing activity.
- Government, industry, and operational NGOs lead delivery and implementation.
- Academic projects primarily contribute evidence and advisory support.

This separation helps explain why strong evidence bases do not always translate directly into mitigation or management action and reinforces the importance of coordination mechanisms.

5.2 Outputs produced

Most projects produce evidence and knowledge products, including datasets, technical reports, and scientific publications. Public-facing outputs are common but secondary. In contrast, operational tools, technologies, guidance, and training materials are produced by a much smaller subset of projects and are closely associated with mitigation aims.



The UK marine mammal project landscape is rich in evidence outputs, but comparatively thin in operational and implementation-focused products.

6. CITIZEN SCIENCE AS CORE INFRASTRUCTURE

Citizen science accounts for 52 of 139 projects (≈38%) and plays a central role in long-term monitoring, spatial coverage, and trend detection. These projects are mainly ongoing and strongly associated with local and regional policy relevance, with approximately 84% operating at site-based or regional scales.

While citizen science projects are rarely mitigation-focused, they provide foundational evidence that underpins national assessments through aggregation and synthesis. Their prominence highlights citizen science as a core component of the UK's marine mammal evidence infrastructure, while underscoring the importance of improved coordination, visibility, and integration within national evidence frameworks.

Citizen science delivers extensive local and regional evidence; maximising its national policy impact depends on coordination and integration rather than further data collection.

7. FUNDING VISIBILITY

Projects are supported by a diverse mix of government, research council, charitable, industry, and mixed funding sources. However, the database does not consistently capture funding duration or mechanisms. As a result, while the landscape is clearly structured around long-term delivery, there is limited visibility of how funding arrangements align with long-term evidence and coordination needs, representing a transparency gap rather than a demonstrated funding shortfall.

The key funding question is not overall investment, but how visible and aligned funding mechanisms are with long-term, coordinated delivery.

Gaps and Future Priorities

The UKMMF project database provides a first UK-wide snapshot of marine mammal research, monitoring, and conservation activity. While the dataset highlights a strong and diverse evidence landscape, the analysis also identifies a number of system-level gaps and opportunities that could be addressed through improved coordination, visibility, and future development of the database.

GAPS IN THE CURRENT LANDSCAPE

1. Uneven translation from evidence to mitigation

The analysis shows a strong emphasis on long-term monitoring and evidence generation across most pressures, species, and regions, with mitigation development concentrated in a small number of pressure areas, particularly fisheries bycatch and disturbance. For pressures such as underwater noise, climate change, pollution, and habitat degradation, projects are mainly evidence-led, with limited visibility of mitigation-focused initiatives. This indicates an opportunity to strengthen pathways that connect existing evidence to mitigation development, rather than a lack of evidence per se.

2. Limited implementation-focused outputs

Most projects produce datasets, reports, and other knowledge products, while outputs that directly support implementation—such as operational tools, technologies, guidance, or training materials—are less common. This mirrors the mitigation pattern and highlights a gap between evidence production and practical application, particularly where delivery responsibility sits outside individual projects.

3. Under-visibility of pinniped-focused activity at national scale

Most projects produce datasets, reports, and other knowledge products, while outputs that directly support implementation—such as operational tools, technologies, guidance, or training materials—are less common. This mirrors the mitigation pattern and highlights a gap between evidence production and practical application, particularly where delivery responsibility sits outside individual projects.

4. Limited visibility of funding mechanisms and delivery pathways

Although the database captures funding sources, it does not consistently record funding duration, mechanisms, or stability. This limits the ability to assess how funding arrangements align with the long-term and ongoing delivery that characterises much of the project landscape, representing a transparency gap rather than a demonstrated funding shortfall.

5. Coordination dependencies associated with citizen science

Citizen science underpins a large proportion of long-term monitoring activity and provides critical local and regional evidence. However, its effectiveness depends on sustained coordination, data integration, and support, which are not always visible within project-level descriptions. These dependencies warrant strategic attention to ensure the resilience and long-term value of citizen science contributions.



OPPORTUNITIES FOR FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

1. Strengthening coordination and translation pathways

The analysis consistently indicates that coordination—rather than additional data generation—is where added value is most likely. A UK Marine Mammal Forum could support clearer pathways from evidence to mitigation, facilitate cross-sector dialogue, and help align monitoring outputs with management and policy needs.

2. Improving visibility of delivery and implementation activity

Future iterations of the database could place greater emphasis on capturing implementation-related information, including mitigation trials, operational changes, and management actions that may currently be embedded within broader programmes or regulatory processes.

3. Enhancing taxonomic and regional integration

Improved aggregation of pinniped-focused work and clearer links between local, regional, and national activity would support more balanced representation across species and geographies, without altering the delivery models that make many projects effective.

4. Developing a v.2, stakeholder-informed database

A future version of the database could move beyond desk-based compilation to incorporate structured stakeholder input, for example through surveys or targeted consultations with project leads, funders, regulators, and delivery partners. This would enable more consistent capture of:

- Funding mechanisms and duration.
- Stage and maturity of mitigation and implementation activity.
- Data integration pathways and policy uptake.
- Dependencies, risks, and coordination needs.

Such an approach would improve data completeness and comparability while maintaining the database's role as a neutral landscape-mapping tool rather than a reporting or evaluation system.

5. Establishing the database as a living coordination asset

Positioning the database as a living resource, supported through ongoing engagement with the UK marine mammal community, would allow it to evolve alongside the UKMMF. Regular updates, stakeholder validation, and iterative refinement of classifications would ensure continued relevance and support strategic discussion over time.

Conclusions

This landscape analysis provides the first UK-wide, structured overview of marine mammal research, monitoring, and conservation activity, drawing together diverse projects across sectors, species, pressures, and regions. It highlights a vibrant and active landscape, characterised by long-term and ongoing delivery, strong evidence generation capacity, and substantial contributions from citizen science, statutory monitoring, academic research, industry-led surveys, and non-governmental initiatives.

At the same time, the analysis shows that activity is unevenly distributed across pressures and output types. Monitoring and assessment are well established, particularly for cetaceans and pressures linked to statutory reporting and offshore activity, while explicit mitigation development and implementation-focused outputs are concentrated in a smaller subset of projects. For several pressures, including underwater noise, climate change, pollution, and habitat degradation, the evidence base is comparatively strong but pathways to mitigation are less clearly articulated within the current project landscape.

The analysis also highlights important structural characteristics of the system. Evidence generation, public-engagement, and delivery are typically led by different sectors, and much seal-focused work is embedded in local and site-based management contexts that are less visible within national policy frameworks. Citizen science plays a critical role in providing long-

term, geographically extensive data, but relies on coordination, integration, and sustained support. Funding across the landscape is diverse, yet information on funding mechanisms and duration is not consistently visible, limiting understanding of how funding aligns with long-term delivery needs.

Taken together, these patterns indicate that the principal opportunity lies not in generating additional baseline evidence, but in improving coordination, visibility, and translation across the existing landscape. A UK Marine Mammal Forum has the potential to add value by providing a neutral platform to connect evidence producers, delivery partners, and policymakers; to improve transparency around who is doing what, where, and why; and to support more efficient progression from evidence generation to mitigation and management action. Continued development of the database as a living, stakeholder-informed resource would further strengthen its role in supporting strategic discussion, identifying emerging gaps, and tracking change over time.

This report provides a shared evidence base to inform coordination and strategic discussion, rather than a prescriptive roadmap for action. By improving visibility of existing efforts and strengthening connections across sectors, it offers a foundation on which more coherent, collaborative and effective marine mammal research and conservation can be built in the years ahead.

SYNTHESIS

Taken together, these gaps and opportunities suggest that the greatest returns are likely to come from investment in coordination, visibility, and integration of existing activity, rather than from expanding data collection alone.



UKMMF success indicators (three-year horizon)

Coordination and trust

- The UKMMF is recognised as a neutral, trusted convening space across sectors.
- Regular cross-sector engagement is established, with participation from research, delivery, policy, industry, and citizen science.

Evidence integration and translation

- Stronger connections between monitoring, mitigation, and management activity are evident.
- Citizen science data are more clearly integrated into national evidence and policy frameworks.
- Pinniped-focused and site-based management work is more visible at the national scale.

Visibility and transparency

- A maintained, publicly accessible UKMMF project database is in place and regularly updated.
- Improved visibility of who is doing what, where, and why across species, pressures, regions, and sectors.
- Clearer articulation of long-term monitoring activity, mitigation development, and funding pathways.

Strategic value

- Shared understanding of evidence gaps, overlaps, and priorities across the community.
- Reduced duplication and clearer alignment of effort across projects and sectors.
- UKMMF outputs are used to inform strategic discussion, funding decisions, and coordination—not to evaluate or rank projects.

What success looks like for the UKMMF in 3 years' time

Within three years, success for the UK Marine Mammal Forum (UKMMF) would be reflected in improved coordination, visibility, and strategic alignment across the UK marine mammal evidence landscape, rather than in the delivery of projects or advocacy positions. The Forum would be recognised as a trusted, neutral convening space, bringing together researchers, practitioners, policymakers, industry, and funders to improve understanding of who is doing what, where, and why.

Practical indicators of success would include a maintained and regularly updated project database, co-developed with stakeholders, that provides clearer visibility of long-term monitoring activity, mitigation development, funding pathways, and dependencies.

Evidence of improved translation between monitoring, mitigation, and management—such as clearer articulation of mitigation pipelines, better integration of citizen science data into national frameworks, and increased visibility of pinniped-focused and site-based management work at national scale—would signal progress.

More broadly, UKMMF success would be seen in more informed strategic discussion across sectors, reduced duplication of effort, and clearer identification of shared priorities and gaps.

By supporting connection rather than delivery, and transparency rather than prescription, the Forum would help strengthen the resilience, efficiency, and impact of the UK's marine mammal research and conservation system over time.



With special thanks to The Fishmongers' Company for funding the set-up phase of the UK Marine Mammal Forum.