



ANNUAL REPORT 2024

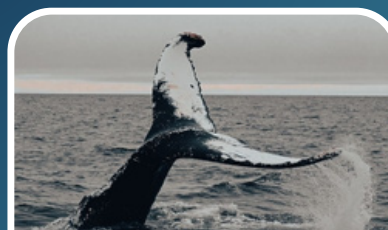


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Statement from the Board



Somewhere on the Irish Whale and Dolphin Group's website is a very old black and white photo of four bearded men at IWDG's first meeting in 1991. We have come a very long way since then.

We have evolved into an organisation of over one thousand members, with a permanent staff of eight (full-time equivalent) and a turnover of EUR 1.3 million. We operate our own research vessel and engage in data collection for a wide range of industrial and academic partners. As envisaged by our founders, we have an ambitious goal for conservation of marine mammals and a clear strategy for getting there. During this year, we have stepped up our engagement with stakeholder, including other environmental NGOs, government, industry, fishers, ports and coastal communities. We recruited a full time Marine Policy Officer to drive this activity forward.

We advocated to governments for policies and action, including efforts to create a Marine Strategy Framework and to influence the Climate Action Plan. We engaged with government departments and agencies, including MARA in Dublin and DAERA in Belfast.

IWDG has a relentless focus on science. Without it, we would not be credible advocates of the species that we seek to protect. We have improved our schemes for reporting sightings and strandings. For example, we have a new protocol for conducting surveys on Celtic Mist, which is further enhancing the quality of our thirty-year dataset of cetacean recordings in Irish waters.

IWDG acts to bring public opinion with us. We continue to co-author scientific publications, delivering conference presentations, and participating in European research projects. We also get our message out to a broader audience via our magazine Flukes, through social media, and our engagements with educators and students throughout our Irish coastal communities.

One word of caution is necessary, however. To maintain our growth and to keep us moving forward, we must prepare for the unforeseen. We will, therefore, maintain financial prudence. We will also engage in risk assessments and development of our own procedures and policies to minimise the chances of accidental losses or damage to our progress. For example, the coming year will see a strong focus on updating our health and safety policies – at sea and on land.

Our long term (2040) goal is to achieve healthy populations of cetaceans in a thriving ecosystem and healthy seas, with synergies with Ireland's coastal communities. In terms of our sighting of whales and dolphins over the year, there is no hard evidence of whether we are nearer or further from our objective. It is clear, however, that changes are happening. Whales are moving further north and dolphins are being found away from their usual habitats. Some species are thriving, others less so. To reach our goal, we must continue to collect scientific evidence, to engage with governments and stakeholders, and to bring public opinion with us. If we keep doing that, we have a good chance of getting there.

Every member is an ambassador for IWDG and their enthusiasm is infectious. Sincere thanks to all of you. Every time you tell someone why it is important to think about whales and dolphins, you are bringing IWDG nearer to its goal. Our amazing team in Kilrush and our officers around the country are the backbone of the organisation. They all deserve our admiration and thanks.

One of the four people in that old black and white photo has been leading the organisation ever since. A third of a century's service is some achievement for the founder of any successful organisation. Hats off to Dr Simon Berrow, our CEO.

Dr Patrick Hartigan
Chairman

A Message From Our Chief Executive



The year 2024 was a busy year with many changes to our team which brings new challenges and dynamics.

Towards the end of the year we lost Becky Dudley, our Science Officer to the University of Exeter who offered her a job and a PhD; hard to compete with that. We recruited a new Education Officer in Claire Kelly, who was then poached by Cork City Council towards the end of the year. However we welcomed Emilie de Loose to the team funded by an EU INTERREG project called Whale Deal and won funding to support Stephen Comerford for a full three-years to work full time on Offshore Renewables and Biodiversity issues. Internally there were also changes with Clowie Russell taking over as IWDG Consulting Manager with her role as Marine Mammal Ecologist at Dublin Port taken on by Jo Green, who had completed an internship on our Shannon Dolphin Project during the summer. Cian Nilan, our Irish Language Officer also joined us, recommended by the late Padraic de Bhaldraithe.

Changes in the team do slow momentum, but we still had a busy year with great support from the Heritage Council, the Irish Environmental Network and our beloved Core Sponsors Inis. During the last government there were more resources, including financial, available to eNGOs which has certainly had a very positive impact on our ability to respond to the challenges facing Ireland marine and coastal environments.

IWDG as well as continuing with maintaining our Stranding and Sighting Schemes and long-term monitoring projects, WhaleTrack Ireland and the Shannon Dolphin Project, maintain a strong presence in the two big pressures building, namely the rollout of offshore renewables and the potential for marine protected areas. Both have the potential to enhance biodiversity and more towards a more sustainable and vibrant future for our marine waters and coastal communities. Great opportunities which IWDG will seek to exploit. Shout Out to our Board who work very hard to provide support and oversight to our large and diverse portfolio of activities.

Looking ahead to 2025, we need to consolidate our team. IWDG is only as good as its officers and members, and we will be recruiting again in the new year. We will continue to run our recording schemes, support and grow our local groups, maintain and offer Celtic Mist for our members to sail and survey on and advocate for whales, dolphins and porpoises and their habitats, to whoever will listen. We will strive to attract corporate sponsors to help us with our recording schemes and conservation actions. Only the Stranding Scheme is part funded (by the NPWS) and its an increasing obligation to the IWDG to find funds and resources to support collecting empirical data to support our evidence-based approach to conservation.

So thank you for your support and I hope you enjoy reading about the work of the IWDG during 2024. Each year new and increasing challenges require the IWDG to be present, vigilant and effective as our marine and coastal waters are probably the most precious asset we have as an island nation.

Dr Simon Berrow
Chief Executive Officer



Humpback whale #HBIRL47, Donegal Bay, 16.09.2024 by Declan Kilgannon

OUR IMPACT

IWDG Recording Schemes

- A total of 2,942 sighting records were validated, a 9% increase on 2023, bringing the milestone to 46,000 verified sightings.
- 2024 marked the busiest year on record for basking sharks, with 357 sighting records, a 48% increase from 2009's previous high of 241.
- First North Atlantic Right Whale sighting in over a century, validated from north Donegal Bay, and first ever humpback sighting in Shannon Estuary, ending the year on #136 in the Irish Humpback Whale Photo ID catalogue. Growth of 5% from 126.
- First confirmed Ireland-Bermuda match for #HBIRL001 and a Cabo Verde match for #HBIRL047, adding to international collaborations.
- A total of 388 stranding records were validated in 2024, down from 406 records in 2023. The peak stranding year is still 2021, with 448 records.
- As 2024 was the busiest year for basking shark sightings, it was also the busiest for basking shark strandings, with 10 animals reported, compared to the regular 2-4 animals per annum.

Welfare

- Rapid expansion of live stranding network to deal with an increase/awareness of live strandings included:
- Delivery of six live stranding courses throughout the republic of Ireland with 103 people trained. Kerry, Cork, Wexford, Donegal and Sligo. An additional course for NPWS personnel only was given in Co. Louth.
- 49 of the 103 people trained were existing IWDG members participating in Live Stranding training for the first time, 14 were previously trained IWDG volunteers refreshing their live stranding skills and 40 were new people training for the first time. Of those 40 training for the first time, 23 were NPWS personnel and the remaining 17 consisted of the general public and Coast Guard/RNLI volunteers. 18 new IWDG memberships signed up through live stranding courses in the republic of Ireland.
- IWDG also trained volunteers in Northern Ireland alongside BDMLR as part of DAERA's cross border Environmental fund. 43 participants were trained resulting in 21 new IWDG memberships in Northern Ireland.
- The live stranding hotline manned by the Live stranding network coordinator received 172 calls in 2024 with quarter one being the busiest time for hotline calls.
- 70 IWDG members signed up to the IWDG Cetacean Stranding Network registration form in 2024 to register for the first time.

- There were 35 live stranding events throughout the country with a total of 58 live stranded cetaceans. This includes one live stranding in Northern Ireland of two emaciated Risso's dolphins. There was also one live green turtle reported from Co. Cork.
- 3 animals were humanely dispatched by NPWS at IWDGs request on welfare grounds. None were chemically euthanized, but an additional 3 animals were identified as requiring euthanasia but were incorrectly refloated by the public. We are also aware that 4 dolphins were dragged back to sea by their tails by the public.

Education & Outreach

- IWDG actively supported National Heritage Week and National Biodiversity Weeks, delivering events that engaged coastal communities, including our award-winning "Marine Biologist for a Day" programme, which won the Wild Child Award at the National Heritage Week Awards in 2023, All-Island Whale Watch Day (May 2024) and participated in Native Species Weekend both at Dublin Zoo and Fota Wildlife Park.
- In 2024 the education officer delivered the IWDG Floating Classroom programme over two weeks, attended by 166 students and 19 teachers from eight primary schools in the Shannon Estuary area. During these workshops, students had hands-on opportunities to explore whale and dolphin bio-facts, practice photo-identification, and learn about species like Shannon bottlenose dolphin, Minke whale, and Common dolphin.
- Delivered five Marine Mammal Observer (MMO) training courses, in collaboration with the ESB, to develop the workforce needed for Ireland's growing renewable energy sector. The training equipped participants with essential skills for monitoring and mitigating the impacts of offshore development on marine wildlife.
- The IWDG hosted the first ever Science Week with a series of free events to engage the public in marine research and conservation. The program included four webinars, an in-person event and three open days at the Shannon Dolphin Centre designed to promote education, citizen science, and public awareness about cetaceans and the marine environment.
- Hosted the annual Stranding Network Meeting at the National Museum of Ireland, Collins Barracks Dublin, bringing together over 50 volunteers, researchers, and partners to reinforce IWDG's role in building capacity among our volunteers, ensuring they are supported with the latest science and practical skills to respond effectively to stranding events.

Policy, advocacy and conservation impact

- Expanded IWDG's influence on marine policy, attending eleven meetings with government departments and agencies, including the Department of Environment, Climate, and Communications, the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, the Maritime Area Regulatory Authority, the Marine Institute, the Sea Fisheries Protection Authority, An Bord Pleanála, and the National Parks and Wildlife Service.
- Made three submissions on Offshore Renewable Energy (ORE) development Environmental Impact Assessments lodged with ABP and eleven submissions on national plans.
- Lobbied Fish Producers' Organisations and NGOs on the DAFM consultation on trawling inside the 6nm limit.
- Actively engaged with Fair Seas, attending meetings, sitting on the Steering Committee, and advocating for the establishment of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), pushing for robust legislation to protect 30% of Irish waters by 2030.
- Took part in two stakeholder panel discussions run by DECC on the South Coast Designated Maritime Area Plan for ORE. Engaged with other NGOs, i.e. Birdwatch Ireland, SWAN, Coastwatch, An Taisce, and the Irish Environmental Network on various topics.
- Launched the MAREIRE project along with Birdwatch and the IEN, funded by DECC to engage full-time with the progression of ORE in Ireland.
- Attended fourteen conferences and workshops, presenting at three of them, raising awareness of cetacean conservation needs and lobbying for effective marine policies.
- Engaged with Wind Energy Ireland and the wider ORE industry as a marine stakeholder and expert on multiple projects.

Submissions made by IWDG on public consultations in 2024 were on:

- the activities of Maritime Area Regulatory Authority (MARA);
- the Future Framework Policy Statement to Department of Environment, Climate and Communications (DECC);
- the Celtic Sea Sensitivity Analysis to Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (DHLGH);
- drone use (UAS) consultation to Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (DETE);
- trawling inside 6nm to Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and the Marine (DAFM);
- Joint Declaration on Offshore Renewable Energy from Friends of the Irish Environment;
- South Coast Designated Maritime Area Plan to DECC;

- Porpoises and Bottlenose dolphins as new Qualifying Interests in Special Areas of Conservation to DHLGH
- Oriel Windfarm Environmental Impact Assessment Report to An Bord Pleanála (ABP);
- NISA Windfarm Environmental Impact Assessment Report to ABP;
- Codling Windfarm Environmental Impact Assessment Report to ABP;
- the Wildlife legislation review to DHLGH;
- and the Marine Strategy Framework Directive monitoring review to DHLGH.

Community and Membership Growth

- Maintain a record of 1,000+ active members, the highest membership level in IWDG's history. Our continued engagement through social media, newsletters, and events has helped build a strong community advocating for marine conservation.
- The IWDG Northern Ireland Local Group branch has been established to continue to promote the monitoring of whales and dolphins off the island of Ireland embracing our all-Ireland approach to marine conservation.
- Delivered two Residential Weekend Whale Watching Courses for IWDG members and citizen scientists, attended by 57 participants. These courses offered land and sea-based whale watching experiences and added 15 new members.
- Research vessel Celtic Mist, a vital asset to IWDG's research and outreach efforts, facilitated 14 research survey cruises along Ireland's west and north-west coasts exclusively for IWDG members. It also facilitated six weeks of Shannon Dolphin Survey cruises, collecting data in Tralee Bay, Brandon Bay, Dingle Bay and along the coastline from Loop Head to Mutton Island, significantly contributing to citizen science, research, and conservation initiatives.



Whale Watch Ireland 2025



Old Hd Kinsale, Cork Group watch, 15012024, Marcin Benasiak

GOALS AND OUTCOMES

1. SIGHTINGS

Sighting Report Management

Introduction: Core function as sightings officer is the validation of cetacean and basking shark sighting records reported to IWDG via either of 3 methods:

- Website www.iwdg.ie
- IWDG Reporting App
- Hard copy sheets that are still being completed by hand and posted to IWDG for land based effort (timed) watches.

A significant amount of time is spent promoting the sighting scheme to members of the public, boat operators and agency staff, and being available to assist where necessary on matters such as species identification and how to accurately record both casual and effort related sightings. A range of events are delivered each year such as public talks, whale watch trips, All-Ireland Whale Watch day and weekend Residential courses in support of the IWDG Sighting Scheme. Strong connections are maintained with a number of media outlets where the sightings officer is the main IWDG spokesperson on matters relating to marine mammal sightings and when required, strandings.

Data collection

Goal: Manage the IWDG Sighting scheme and increase its reach by encouraging the widest possible participation, both in terms of the number of reports, type of reports (casual V effort) and their geographic spread, ensuring it remains relevant to the next generation of biological recorders. Use the sighting scheme to support more targeted projects such as WhaleTrack Ireland and to encourage members to become more involved in local biological recording of cetaceans and basking sharks i.e..

Outcomes: In 2024 we validated 2,942 sighting records, which is our highest number to date included in this data are the results of 419 land based effort watches, which is double the average for the previous 10 years (2014-2023).

Data Access and Reporting

Introduction: With recording schemes that date back over 30 years, IWDG are uniquely placed to report on the current status of cetaceans, especially those that inhabit our inshore waters. This can be achieved by providing raw sightings data, metadata, by contributing to a variety of publications and by presenting findings at relevant webinars and conferences at home and abroad.

Goal: Fulfil reporting obligations by contributing to publications both internal and external to IWDG on a regular basis: e.g. IWDG Ezine for supporters and members, IWDG website and social media platforms, Marine Times paper, the bi-annual Biodiversity Ireland magazine, and periodically to a range of Scientific publications and Mammal Atlas.

Outcomes: IWDG is the largest data holder in the state for marine mammals and basking shark sightings data and as a result we receive many requests each year for access to this data, each of which necessitate our requesting a standard Data Request Form be completed to ensure those seeking to use our data are using it to further the conservation status of these species, and not for commercial use. To ensure that IWDG remains the “go to” source for reliable and up to date information on cetacean and basking shark sightings in Irish waters.

Collaboration

Introduction: Collaboration with key partners, both domestic and overseas is essential in the study of highly mobile marine mammals that may only be seasonally resident or transiting through Irish waters. IWDG works closely with a broad range of research organisations, researchers, NGO's, government agencies, civil society groups and commercial operators who can assist our work, and we theirs.

Goal: Strengthen and expand partnerships opening up new opportunities for sharing data and expertise.

Outcomes: In 2024, IWDG recorded its first international match of an Irish fin whale (FWIRL023) with a sighting from southwest Portugal. This milestone, achieved in collaboration with Portuguese researchers, demonstrates the value of international photo-ID work and long-term catalogue curation. The match confirmed the presence of highly mobile individuals traveling between Irish and Iberian waters, strengthening the case for international conservation efforts for these large baleen whales.

Sighting Summary 2024

Fin whale report including first international match of an Irish fin whale.

<https://iwdg.ie/first-international-fin-whale-match-for-ireland/>



Sperm whale, 20.09.2024 by Siún Ní Cheallaigh



Minke, whale Inishbofin, 24.05.2024 by Paul Phelan



Entangled humpback whale, Donegal Bay 01.09.2024 by Kevin Smith



Humpback whale #HBIRL47, Donegal Bay, 16.09.2024 by Declan Kilgannon



Killer whale 'Aquarius', May 18 2024, Slyne Head Co Galway by Orca UK.



Humpback whale #HBIRL136, Shannon Estuary Co. Clare, 28/12/2024 © Emma Gordon, IWDG

2. STRANDINGS

Stranding Report Management

Introduction: The core function as strandings officer is the validation of cetacean, basking shark and sea turtle stranding records reported to IWDG via the following four methods:

- Website www.iwdg.ie
- IWDG Reporting App
- Social media
- E-mail

The Strandings Officer spent the majority of her time coordinating with stranding network volunteers in order to collect as much high quality data from each stranding as possible. When volunteers are unable to go to strandings, IWDG follows up with the reporters who often have more images than they submit via the website/app, and of much higher quality. This also allows for positive interactions with reporters who are often curious about their findings, and encourages them to continue to report to the IWDG and spread the word to report to us.

Goal: To increase the quantity and quality of the data collected by the Stranding Network. To go beyond recording baseline data (i.e. species, length, gender, location, date of stranding) and create a database of high quality images of target areas to identify potential signs of bycatch/entanglement, and assess nutritional condition and unique lesions.

Outcomes: Key volunteers have been collecting high quality images which have aided in the identification of potential bycatch cases which would have otherwise gone unnoticed.

Goal: To increase the reach and size of the Stranding Network, particularly in stranding hotspots, and decrease the amount of time spent coordinating volunteers when visiting strandings. In some areas, the burden of visiting strandings always seems to fall upon the same people. I had hoped to increase the size of the stranding network in order to take the pressure off those few individuals by recruiting new volunteers (especially with the ever increasing number of strandings). IWDG also hoped to find a better way to organise visits to stranded cetaceans, as I was often contacting multiple people individually. Individuals often did not communicate when they were able to visit a stranding, resulting in some duplicated effort.

Outcomes: We have been using the IWDG local WhatsApp groups in order to inform all those on the stranding network of a stranding in hopes that someone will be able to attend. As most volunteers are in this group, it saves time as we no longer have to ask people individually, and we have not had any instances of duplication of effort. Volunteers text into the group when they are free to go, so everyone is aware. Less experienced volunteers often ask to come along and assist the more experienced volunteers, which has provided great opportunities for training. New volunteers are then able to take the pressure off of the regulars.

3. IWDG PROJECTS

SHANNON DOLPHIN PROJECT

Project Summary: Monitoring this population of bottlenose dolphins using Photo ID.

Goal: Complete surveys throughout the whole known Shannon Dolphin range. Increasing coverage in Brandon and Tralee Bays, particularly along the Clare Coast up to Doonbeg. A minimum of ten RIB surveys to cover the outer estuary and known hot spots such as Loop Head. Complete six weeks of Celtic Mist Surveys. Complete as many tour boat surveys as possible.

Outcomes: 2024 was our most successful year for effort outside the Shannon Estuary. One of the six survey weeks onboard Celtic Mist was cancelled due to inclement weather. We completed 28 survey days over the remaining five weeks and all but one survey day had sightings of bottlenose dolphins. We also achieved the goal of surveying from Dingle to Doonbeg and recorded several animals rarely sighted.

It was a moderately successful year on the local tour operator boat, with 35 trips completed, although there were no dolphin sightings on 26% of these trips.

We did not achieve our goal of 10 rib-based surveys of the Shannon Estuary with only six completed. To date from the 2024 data collected 179 Shannon Dolphins have been matched to the catalogue, the second-highest number in the history of the project. The matching is not completed and several more animals need to be matched, ergo we will most likely reach the 2022 record of 184 animals.

Goal: Recruit and manage SDP internships for marine science students and recent graduates. Open and manage Shannon Dolphin Wildlife Centre.

Outcomes: During the 2024 SDP recruited, trained and managed three volunteer interns. The internship ran from April to the end of September. The interns ranged in their career level from an undergraduate completing their professional practice to recent graduates of BSc. (Hons) and MSc degrees. Two of the three interns extended their volunteering by an extra month.



Shannon Dolphins, Mags Daly IWDG



Shannon Dolphins, Reserach Vessel Celtic Mist Cruise 9–Rossaveel to Kilrush

WHALE TRACK IRELAND

Project Summary: Monitoring humpback and fin whales in Irish coastal waters using Photo Identification and engagement with IWDG local groups and Citizen Scientists.

Goal: Curate the Irish Humpback and fin whale Photo ID catalogues, which have been the IWDG's primary tool for tracking these most iconic of our large whales since 1999. Develop, grow and share our catalogues with overseas research platforms such as the North Atlantic Humpback Whale Catalogue and Happy Whale, as well as national catalogues to determine tropical breeding areas, higher latitude feeding areas and migration routes between these areas. Enter data sharing arrangements with students, and research partners both within and outside Ireland, to further our knowledge of these iconic species whilst Irish waters. To establish if humpback whales continued to demonstrate range expansion outside of the Irish Southwest hotspot areas of Counties Cork and Kerry. Collaborate with PhD Candidate Miguel Blasques Hervas on his study of humpbacks to assist in the publication of papers in the Scientific literature.

Outcomes: The Irish humpback whale photo ID catalogue grew by 8% from 126 to 136 recognisable individuals. Among the many matches made over the year was our first match to Bermuda, taking to three the number of our humpbacks we've matched to the Caribbean and western Atlantic. At the close of the year, we also received the good news of our first overseas match of an "Irish" fin whale #FWIRL023 to southwest Portugal.

<https://iwdg.ie/first-international-fin-whale-match-for-ireland/>

DEEP DIVING AND RARE SPECIES INVESTIGATION PROGRAMME(DDRIP)

Project Summary: The Deep Diving and Rare species Investigation Programme (DDRIP) is an initiative by the Irish Whale and Dolphin Group (IWDG) to investigate strandings of rare and deep-diving cetaceans along the Irish coast, particularly beaked whales and uncommon dolphin species. With an increase in reports of these strandings and potential Unusual Mortality Events (UME), DDRIP aims to conduct post-mortem examinations to determine causes of death, gather vital ecological and anatomical data, and assess potential offshore environmental pressures.

Goal: To carry out at least five post-mortem investigations on fresh specimens, of which at least three to be carried out in a laboratory setting. We hoped to carry out at least five post mortem examinations, of which three would be in a laboratory setting in order to have additional testing carried out by the Regional Vet Labs (primarily bacteriology and histology), giving us more information about the health of the animal.

Outcomes: We carried out a partial examination of four large whales in situ (two sperm whales, one fin whale and one humpback whale). We carried out one examination at the Regional Vet Lab in Backweston of a Risso's dolphin, for which we were able to establish a cause of death as live stranding. The animal tested positive for *Photobacterium damsela*.

FERRY SURVEYS PROGRAMME

Project Summary: The IWDG Ferry Surveys Programme monitors cetaceans on the Irish Sea from Rosslare to Pembroke and Dublin to Holyhead with Irish Ferries, and from Belfast to Cairnryan with Stenaline. Monthly surveys are conducted on each route.

Goal: To conduct monthly ferry surveys on 3 routes across the Irish Sea to provide long-term monitoring data on cetacean relative abundance. Maintain the Dublin and Rosslare survey routes and re-establish the Belfast – Cairnryan Route. Upgrade ageing route survey equipment if possible with new laptops and GPS receivers.

Outcomes: Surveys continued on the Dublin – Holyhead and Rosslare – Pembroke routes with Irish Ferries, however with some interruption to the Pembroke route due to vessel changes. An initially promising restart to the Belfast–Cairnryan route was short lived, with volunteer shortages a recurring issue on this route. New laptops and GPS aerials were secured for these surveys, replacing units that were 10+ years old and suffering from physical damage and software issues.

EU OCEAN

Project Summary: The OCEAN project is a multi-partner EU-Horizon funded project to improve navigator awareness at sea, improve safety, reduce incidents and mitigate against Whale strikes. The IWDG contributed their long-standing expertise on recording cetaceans to the project.

Goal: Plan to have a working version of the reporting app for tests in the field this summer. Gather feedback from the EU partners and key OCEAN stakeholders. Respond to feedback, fix any issues and release the reporting app by December.

Outcomes: First version for the field was ready for May and was tested by the IWDG team on RV Celtic Mist. Some issues were found and were resolved. GA3 was attended in Barcelona in April with additional budget requested for App enhancements. An additional budget was agreed in the following weeks. GA4 was held in Portsmouth and attended by Trea and Simon with a status update delivered.

Other presentation level feedback was taken on board and updates made. Final testing was conducted later November and through December. User experience testing was conducted on the Irish Ferries James Joyce with key users and final feedback was gathered and integrated. Final documentation was submitted December 17th as per the grant agreement.

ATLANTIC WHALE DEAL

Project Summary: 'Atlantic Whale Deal' will test innovative technologies to mitigate ship strikes. Ships and whales co-occur across coastal and open sea areas, requiring transnational cooperation between multiple stakeholders to prevent collisions and biodiversity loss. The project aims to develop solutions to reduce ship strikes, thus enhancing carbon sequestration, given the whales' pivotal role in ecosystem functioning. The proposal was successful and IWDG will be responsible for testing the effectiveness of thermal imagery to detect whales in Irish waters using ferries as platforms of opportunity as well as providing expertise for integrating datasets and harmonising existing methods.

Goal: The project commenced in December 2023 and will be reported on in 2024.

Outcomes: The IWDG joined the kick-off meeting in December 2023, successfully launching the project on time. A full time employee was hired for the project, who ensured the data sharing between the partners in accordance with the AWD protocol, participated in the mid-term meeting and boarded the RV Celtic Explorer for the first AWD survey with thermal cameras. The first project proposal was submitted timely.

4. CONSERVATION

IWDG supports its conservation work with the best available evidence or international practice. To this end we generate empirical data through our recording schemes and support research. IWDG act, where possible, to potential conservation threats to cetaceans within the Irish EEZ, by raising awareness of, and pursuing further information on, such threats. We also input consultation calls and policy submissions across a range of areas.

EVIDENCE-BASED CONSERVATION

Goal: The aim is to apply empirical data from sightings, strandings, and photo-ID to identify key areas and pressures affecting cetaceans in Irish waters. IWDG seeks to support both national and international conservation initiatives through data-sharing and expert collaboration.

A further goal is to ensure that our field-based research aligns with broader marine protection efforts, such as the development of Marine Protected Areas and biodiversity action plans.

Outcomes: In 2024, data gathered through WhaleTrack Ireland and the Shannon Dolphin Project provided high-quality spatial and temporal information that contributed to the identification of Important Marine Mammal Areas (IMMAs). IWDG's photo-ID catalogues supported confirmed international matches, including the first verified Ireland–Bermuda humpback whale match and a fin whale match to Portugal. Under the Deep Diving and Rare Species Investigation Programme (DDRIP), IWDG investigated strandings of rarely recorded species. This included a Risso's dolphin, for which the cause of death was determined to be live stranding, with *Photobacterium damsela* identified in post-mortem testing. IWDG also contributed cetacean data and expertise to key collaborative efforts, including HappyWhale, the North Atlantic Humpback Whale Catalogue, and updates to the Irish Marine Atlas. IWDG requested further information on planned use of acoustic deterrent devices on tangle nets in Brandon Bay as part of a seal deterrent study and followed up with the researchers to ensure best practice was being implemented.

CONSERVATION THROUGH COLLABORATION

Goal: To apply empirical data from IWDG recording schemes—including sightings, strandings, and photo-ID—to identify key areas and pressures affecting cetaceans in Irish waters. To support both national and international conservation initiatives through data-sharing and expert collaboration. To ensure field-based research contributes to wider marine protection strategies such as Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) and biodiversity action plans.

Outcomes: IWDG worked to ensure cetaceans remained central to marine spatial planning and policy discussions. We joined the MAREIRE project in partnership with BirdWatch Ireland under the Irish Environmental Network (IEN), with support from the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications (DECC), to explore the intersection between Offshore Renewable Energy (ORE) and cetacean conservation. IWDG submitted formal comments on three Phase I windfarm planning applications to An Bord Pleanála and collaborated with DECC on the South Coast Designated Maritime Area Plan (DMAP), securing a seat on the DMAP Marine Biodiversity and Ornithology Working Group. We presented at two conferences on the subject of underwater noise and its impacts on cetaceans during ORE development. IWDG also engaged widely with industry stakeholders, researchers, and the public to promote awareness of cetacean needs in the context of Ireland's growing renewable energy sector.

SUPPORTING MARINE PROTECTED AREA DEVELOPMENT WITH DATA

Goal: Our objective is to collect and interpret data that supports the scientific basis for designating and managing MPA in Irish waters. We also aim to identify and address critical research gaps that hinder the recognition and protection of important habitats for key life stages such as feeding, breeding, and migration.

Outcome: IWDG contributed long-term datasets to the IUCN-led identification of IMMAs in Irish waters, helping to guide evidence-based marine protection efforts. We continued to work closely with Fair Seas and other marine NGOs to campaign for a well-managed network of MPAs, and remained active on the Fair Seas steering committee, contributing to lobbying efforts for the long-awaited MPA Bill. Engagement with the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) focused on addressing cetacean-related issues in existing Special Areas of Conservation (SACs). Research during the year highlighted the ongoing lack of baseline data for offshore breeding and feeding habitats, particularly for Annex IV species such as the common dolphin. IWDG continued to advocate for targeted, state-funded research to close these critical data gaps. The MPA Bill remains in draft at the end of 2024, with publication expected in late 2025. In 2024 the IWDG also released cetacean data to the National Parks and Wildlife Service for the next round of EU national reporting (2019–2025) under the EU Habitats and Birds Directives (Art 17 and Article 12 respectively).

FISHERIES AND FORAGE FISH PROTECTION

Goal: To support the introduction of legislation that limits the fishing of sprat and other forage fish critical to the diets of cetaceans, seabirds, and other marine predators—particularly in inshore Irish waters.

Outcomes: IWDG consulted with Fish Producers' Organisations to raise awareness of the ecological significance of forage fish and worked with other marine NGOs to coordinate a unified conservation message. A submission was made to the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) as part of the Minister's consultation on trawling activity inside the 6 nautical mile limit and baseline zones. As of the end of the year, a ministerial decision on the proposed regulatory changes was still pending.

CONTRIBUTING IWDG DATA AND EXPERTISE TO IRISH MARINE SPATIAL PLANNING (MSP) POLICY AND STRATEGY

Goals: To maintain IWDG representation on the Irish Government's Marine Spatial Planning Advisory Group, actively participate in the Group discussions, and make submissions on MSP for cetacean and marine conservation in Ireland. Also to maintain a watching brief on MSP developments in Irish waters and remain up-to-date on MSP best practice for cetaceans in Europe and Globally.

Outcomes: IWDG has been a member of this group since 2018. IWDG continues to attend MSP Advisory Group meetings, positively engaging in group discussions and emphasising the need to protect marine biodiversity and reduce potential impacts from marine developments and activities on cetaceans and their habitats. Presence on this stakeholder forum and our access to unique empirical data from our recording schemes greatly enhances our positive influence on the MSP process in Ireland.

IMPORTANT MARINE MAMMAL AREAS (IMMAs)

Important Marine Mammal Areas (IMMAs) are defined as discrete portions of habitat, important to marine mammal species, that have the potential to be delineated and managed for conservation. The process is carried out by the IUCN and is seen as an important process towards the designation of marine protected areas for marine mammals. The IWDG proposed a number of IMMAs in Irish waters and attended a workshop in Germany to prepare the justifications for peer-review. They are not legal designations but independent, peer-reviewed assessments based on a set of criteria supported by data.

Goal: To designate new IMMAs for Irish Waters. The identification of IMMAs through a consistent expert data based process, independent of any political and socio-economic concerns, will provide valuable input of marine mammals into existing national and international conservation tools with respect to marine protected areas, including Ecologically or Biologically Significant Areas (EBSAs) under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), and Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs) identified through the IUCN Standard (Weaver and Johnson, 2014; IUCN, 2016).

Outcomes: Six new IMMAs, which include Irish waters and three additional Areas of Interest (AoI) were approved by the IUCN. The IMMAs in Ireland that have been agreed by the IUCN are:

1. Porcupine Seabight and Bank IMMA
2. Dingle to Mizen Head IMMA
3. Southeastern Rockall Slope and Canyons IMMA Celtic Sea IMMA
4. Rockall Trough Seamounts and Banks IMMA
5. The Shannon (Sionna) Approaches IMMA

Together with three Areas of Interest including Malin Head to Clew Bay Aol, Rockall and Hatton Banks Aol and Galway Bay Aol, which though identified as important require more data to be considered a full IMMA.

The southwest peninsulas have been included in the Dingle to Mizen Head IMMA due to the habitats and currents that support a rich diversity of marine mammal species including minke whale aggregations, seal breeding areas and regular humpback whale feeding. The Porcupine Seabight and Bank IMMA provides important habitats for blue and fin whales which are vulnerable species still recovering from whaling. In addition, the diversity of marine mammal species from long-finned pilot whale to Sowerby's beaked whale is also recognized, with upwellings along the shelf break, providing a rich source of nutrients. The Shannon (Sionna) Approaches IMMA extends the Special Area of Conservation which was established to protect the genetically unique locally resident bottlenose dolphin population, which have been the subject of intensive research, while the IMMA extends the areas to all areas important for the survival of this population which have recently extended their range most likely to find prey.

5. WELFARE

LIVE STRANDING NETWORK

Introduction: Live Stranding Coordinator (LS coordinator) core function is to task trained IWDG volunteers to live stranding events, ensure the correct data is gathered to assist in making the best decision for the live stranded animals welfare, recruit and train up members in up to date live stranding techniques and man the Live Stranding Hotline which operates 24/7. Live strandings are reported to IWDG via

- 097 28118 Hotline – which can be found on iwdg.ie in prime locations (majority of calls)
- Via local responders being informed by their community (common)
- Via calls to Seal Rescue Ireland or the Coast Guard (common)
- Via calls to Kilrush office. (rare)

The majority of the LSN Coordinators time during a live stranding call is finding volunteers to attend, guiding them over the phone on how to stay safe and support the animal, requesting detailed photos and video, forming a plan of response based on the location, animal condition and the experience levels of the volunteers.

Live strandings can take hours from start to finish and so the LSN Coordinator is engaged throughout until the IWDG volunteers are finished and have left the area. Some may need a debrief after the event especially in the case of difficult strandings where an animal was visibly suffering. All data gathered is then written up and sent to the Stranding Officer.

Goal: To increase the number of trained Live Stranding Responders on the stranding network by delivering five training courses around Ireland and recruit those attending to the stranding network, inform interested members of the public about the stranding network when they call about a live animal and use social media as a call to action for new recruits when posting about a live stranding event.

Outcomes: 5 public live stranding courses were given by the LS coordinator in 2024 in counties, Kerry, Cork, Wexford, Sligo and Donegal, training a total of 80 people. Of this 80, 49 were existing IWDG members who hadn't previously trained in Live Stranding response, 14 were IWDG members previously trained but were refreshing their skills and 11 were NPWS staff. Due to word of mouth amongst NPWS staff, a NPWS District Conservation Officer from the Louth area requested a live stranding course for NPWS personnel, which was given in Co. Louth, training 12 NPWS staff, this brought the number of IWDG live stranding courses in the republic to 6.

IWDG also assisted BDMLR in Northern Ireland in the delivery of two BDMLR courses. Our Live Stranding coordinator was the instructor on the pontoon section of the course in addition to instructing participants on data collection / DNA samples of dead cetaceans at Northern Ireland strandings. 43 course participants in total were taught.

Goal: To increase the amount of equipment available to volunteers around the country for live strandings. For areas which have higher levels of live strandings some of the profits made from the live stranding course were used to buy equipment.

Outcomes:

- Two orange basket stretchers, one for Co. Cork and one for Co. Wexford was purchased in 2024 and distributed to the local group coordinators for those counties. These stretchers were also complemented with a set of wheels/axles donated to IWDG in 2023 by Cadkat.
- One drysuit was purchased for Kerry volunteer Louise Overy who had responded to countless common dolphins in her home area Cloghane over the past decade. Cloghane is one of the two live stranding hotspots in Ireland for common dolphins.
- Paint sticks and PPE were purchased for Live stranding responders. These were distributed at the live stranding courses and annual stranding network meet.

- A grant was applied for by Mayo IWDG through Mayo Co. Co Public Participation Network (PPN) to the Oweninny wind farm community benefit scheme for dolphin stretchers and. €1000 was awarded. Our LS Coordinator sent measurements and drawings to Glendy Cullen Sailmaker who made a prototype which was then tested on a deceased adult common. With refinements, 5 common dolphin stretchers were being made by Glendy Cullen at the of 2024 and were delivered in early 2025.

Goal: To increase Stranding Network responders knowledge. To increase responders confidence in understanding cetacean welfare and decision making at live strandings.

Outcomes:

- The 2024 Live Stranding training course was reviewed and included more information on thermoregulation, dolphin first aid and the various severe gull predation on dolphins, from superficial injuries to dolphins requiring euthanasia.
- A grant was applied for by Mayo IWDG through Mayo Co. Co PPN Local Enhancement Program (LEP) for a new dolphin training mode. €1000 was granted and Whaleworkshop.org built a common dolphin model which was received in October 2024 and is available for live stranding training, particularly mass stranding training in Co. Mayo.
- To increase IWDG knowledge in Live stranded dolphin welfare our live stranding Coordinator got in touch with IFAW Marine Mammal Response director Brian Sharp and had a video call about the Live stranding hotspots in Ireland. She self funded trip to IFAWs HQ and Rescue Command Centre in Cape Cod which led to 1.5 days of structured training in various aspects of Live strandings, including a one on one session with their vet Dr. Sarah Sharp. This knowledge transfer is being implemented in the training material for IWDG live stranding courses going forward, in addition to our response and data collection at live strandings and IWDG knowledge transfer to vets around Ireland interested in assisting live stranding dolphins.

Goal: To increase live stranding awareness amongst veterinarians in Ireland who could assist IWDG during live strandings and help us further develop our response to live stranded dolphins, particularly those found in the live stranding hotspots.

Outcomes: A Veterinary WhatsApp group, established by our Strandings officer has had a steady influx of vets join it due to increased efforts of the Strandings officer and Live Stranding Coordinator to engage with vets. As of the end of 2024, 9 vets from around Ireland, including from private practices, Dublin Zoo, University College Dublin and our welfare officer DMV Sloan Massey are in this IWDG Veterinary group and are engaging and discussing live stranding treatment plans to rehydrate live stranded dolphins who deemed suitable for refloat. Treatment plans are based on the knowledge transfer from IFAW.

Goal: Increase public awareness of what they should or should not do if they encounter a live stranded animal. Social media posts to highlight the do's and don'ts.

Outcomes: When a call from the public comes in on the hotline our live stranding coordinators first instruction to the caller is to make sure no one drags the dolphin by the tail or attempts to lift it. Sometimes this has already happened and the caller feels terrible. They receive empathy as they knew no better at the time, so are given an explanation of the risk to the dolphin from mishandling and how it is done correctly by trained volunteers. The public who call are usually updated at the end of the live stranding response, if IWGD volunteers have attended the live stranding. They are thanked for their call and assistance and told about the IWGD reporting app and All Ireland stranding network.

Goal: Increase funding for the Live Stranding Coordinator's time, which is currently solely supported by an Animal Welfare Grant from the Department of Agriculture, Food, and Marine (DAFM). Coordinating live stranding responses requires significant volunteer hours in addition to the time allocated by the Welfare Grant. The coordinator is responsible for being available to the hotline seven days a week, delivering five training courses, and growing the volunteer network. This includes ensuring that volunteers have the right knowledge to make the best decisions on the day, both for the welfare of the animals and for their own safety. The coordinator also ensures that our training and response strategies remain up-to-date with the latest research on live stranding response.

Outcomes: In 2024, unfortunately, the Department of Agriculture, Food, and the Marine (DAFM) awarded the same amount of funding as in 2023, which covers only one day per week of roughly five hours, of the Live Stranding Coordinator's time, despite a request for double the amount. A funding proposal was submitted to Oceancare to expand the role to three days per week, but this request was unsuccessful as Oceancare is already fully subscribed. A third attempt to secure additional funding was made through a proposal to a philanthropist who has previously expressed interest in IWGD's work. However, this was met with a request for an all-inclusive weekend for the philanthropist and a few others. After assessing the costs and the amount offered, it was clear that such an event would require significant planning but yield minimal return.

LIVE STRANDINGS OVERVIEW FOR 2024

A total of 35 live stranding events occurred around Ireland in 2024, with a total of 58 live stranded animals. Data about Live Strandings are recorded in the strandings database but additional more detailed records also recorded in excel by our live stranding coordinator who uses these looks at outcomes such as dragged, dispatched, relocated etc. .

This information will further help us develop the Live Stranding program and monitor its progress and impact

RESPONSES	TOTAL ANIMALS	EVENTS
Natural Death	2	1
Natural Refloat	4	2
Should not have been refloated	3	2
Dispatched by NPWS	3	3
Refloated by IWDG	13	6
Relocated & Refloated (IWDG)	8	4
Refloated (by NPWS & IWDG)	3	2
Refloated by Public	14	11
Refloated under IWDG direction by Public	4	1
Observed (IWDG) due to inaccessible mud	4	3

HOTLINE CALLS FOR 2024

The live stranding hotline manned by the Live stranding network coordinator received 172 calls in 2024 with January to March being the busiest time for hotline calls. Additional calls about live stranded cetaceans were received directly by our live stranding coordinator, but these usually were for animals found alive in difficulty in the Co. Mayo hotspot where she lives. Some additional calls were received via the IWDG Kilrush landline during office hours. Not all calls to the hotline are for live strandings, a small number from concerned callers about sightings of close to shore animals and the caller is asked to log them as a sighting. An average of 9 calls a year are received in regards to seals and Seal Rescue Ireland's phone number is passed to the caller.



Elly Bay Live Stranding © Susi Quinn



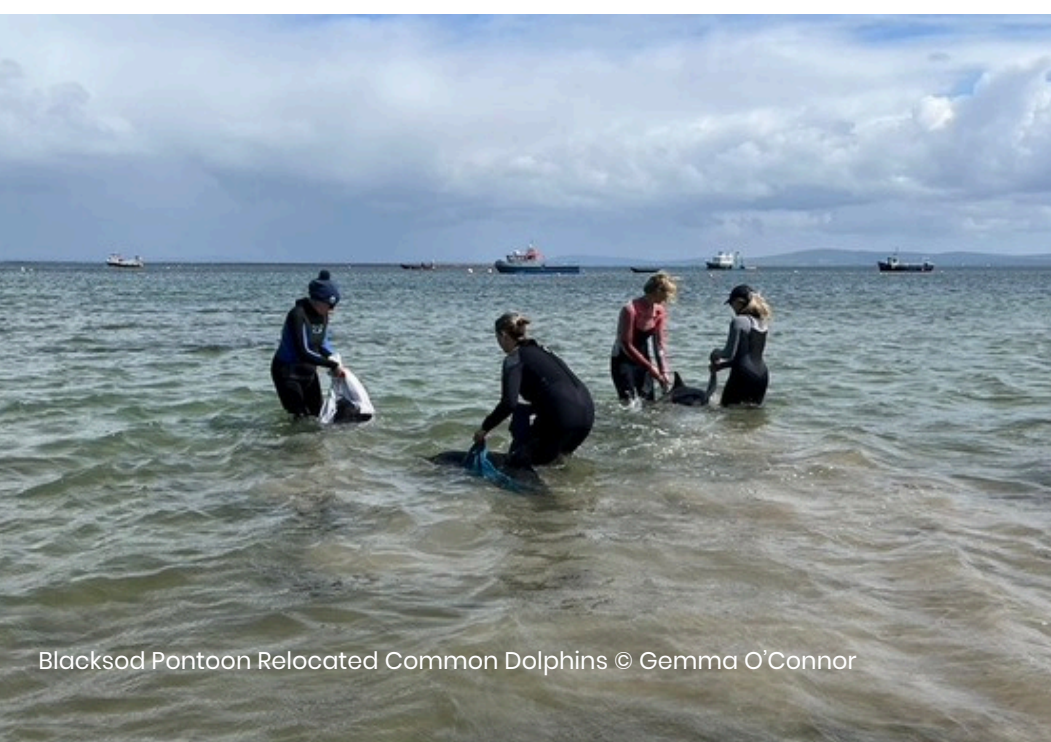
Elly Bay Live Stranding © Gemma O'Connor



Kilcummin Fin Whale stranding with Agatha Angela Lizzy Tom © Gemma O'Connor



Kilcummin Fin Whale stranding with Agatha Angela Lizzy Tom © Gemma O'Connor



Blacksod Pontoon Relocated Common Dolphins © Gemma O'Connor



Elly Bay Live Stranding © John Cuff

6. POLICY

OFFSHORE RENEWABLE ENERGY (ORE)

Introduction: The development of ORE in Irish waters remains a key area of interest and a focus of effort. The Group continues to support the broad aims of Government and the state agencies in developing ORE to decarbonise our energy systems, reduce our fossil fuel dependency and achieve our national targets under the Climate Action Plan (2023). The Group also welcomes the initiation of a State-led system of Designated Maritime Area Plans (DMAPS) for ORE projects, which began with the designation of the South Coast DMAP off the Waterford Coast in 2024. An ORESS 2.1 auction will take place in 2025 for development companies to bid on developing a 900 MW windfarm at the Tonn Nua site in the South Coast DMAP. In the meantime the Phase I ORE projects submitted environmental impact assessment reports (EIARs) as part of their applications for planning permission to An Bord Pleanála (ABP).

The development of ORE in Irish waters in the coming years and decades will be a massive civil engineering project, of greater magnitude than anything previously undertaken by the State. As such it will have inevitable environmental impacts in the marine and coastal domain. In 2024 the IWDG maintained involvement with a range of stakeholders to provide data, gain expertise, strengthen relationships and above all advocate for the conservation and protection of whales, dolphins and porpoises throughout the planning, surveying, construction and operation of ORE in Irish waters now and into the future.

Goals: That the IWDG will be considered a willing and active stakeholder by all actors in the development of ORE and will be the “go-to” NGO for consultation in relation to whales, dolphins and porpoises and the broader marine environment. That our in-house expertise on the engineering challenges of ORE development and their potential interaction with sensitive marine species, in particular in relation to underwater noise, will be recognised by industry and government. That our opinions will be considered and that we will influence decision-making through all stages of ORE development. To build relationships with ORE developers, relevant Government departments, and other NGOs to maintain the relevance of the IWDG and promote the views and opinions of the Group throughout the roll-out of offshore wind. To maintain involvement in the ORE planning process through participation in stakeholder engagement exercises; making submissions as required on projects and plans; and commenting on EIA scoping reports and foreshore license applications for site investigation surveys.

Outcomes: The IWDG engaged directly with the public consultation process, making detailed submissions to ABP on the subject of underwater noise during the construction phase of planned Phase I projects. The Group also worked closely with the Department of Environment, Climate and Communication (DECC), both in consultation, and taking part in several DECC panel discussions about the South Coast DMAP. In addition, the IWDG has committed to joining the SC-DMAP Marine Biodiversity and Ornithology Working Group. Good relations were maintained with industry, particularly through Wind Energy Ireland (WEI) and the IWDG presented at a WEI webinar for industry on underwater noise mitigation. The IWDG also presented on the same topic at the Marine Mammal Observer Association conference in Edinburgh.

Following a tender process, the IWDG were granted funding in September for a full-time ORE Marine Biodiversity Officer from DECC through the IEN. This is under the new IEN project MAREIRE which also covers a Marine Spatial Planning position at Birdwatch Ireland and a further coordinating position at the IEN. Duties relating to ORE previously carried out by Stephen Comerford as Marine Policy Officer will now be carried out by Stephen as ORE Marine Biodiversity Officer, allowing more concentrated efforts in this area which is of such importance to cetacean conservation.

Outlook: IWDG will continue consultation with all relevant stakeholders in the ORE development space and will engage constructively in upcoming work in 2025 including the SC-DMAP Marine Biodiversity and Ornithology Working Group, the upcoming consultation on new underwater noise guidance in Ireland, and an international workshop on the same topic at the European Cetacean Society Conference. Work on Phase 1 EIARs is ongoing, and IWDG now sits on the Technical Group for the next monitoring phase for the Marine Strategy Framework Directive Descriptor 11 underwater noise.

MARINE PROTECTED AREAS (MPAs)

Introduction: The long-awaited Marine Protected Area Bill, designed to achieve designation of 30% of Irish waters as MPAs by 2030, has at time of writing failed to materialise. The Bill still sits with the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (DHLGH) and is expected in 2025.

The IWDG is part of Fair Seas, a coalition of Irish NGOs formed and funded with the express intention of lobbying to protect Irish waters through strong and well-designed MPA legislation. The coalition, formed in 2021, consists of IWDG, Birdwatch Ireland, Coastwatch, the Sustainable Water Network (SWAN), the Irish Wildlife Trust (IWT), Streamscapes and the Irish Environmental Network (IEN). Fair Seas is funded by Oceans 5, Becht Foundation, Blue Nature Alliance and Wyss Foundation.

Goals: That the MPA Bill will finally be published and enacted, and through appropriate consultation and scientific analysis a network of MPAs will be designated.

Outcomes: The IWDG remains involved with the work of Fair Seas and will appoint a new Marine Policy and Advocacy Officer to work on this topic.

FISHERIES

Introduction: The development of ORE and the designation of MPAs continue to be divisive issues on the coast, with the fishing community somewhat at odds with other stakeholders. The Seafood ORE Working Group remains the main forum for meaningful discussion so far. Of particular concern to the IWDG is the continued unregulated fishing of forage fish by pair trawlers in inshore waters, specifically sprat but also anchovy, pilchards and sandeels.

Goal: The Group is working to break down suspicion and mistrust of the eNGO sector and the IWDG, and to build relations, particularly with the inshore fleet.

Outcomes: Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine Charlie McConalogue opened a consultation on trawling, presenting four options for fisheries management inside the 6nm limit and the baselines: business as usual; a ban on all pair trawling; a ban on all trawling by vessels over 15m in length; and a ban on trawling by vessels over 18m. The IWDG was centrally involved within the marine NGO community in presenting a unified approach to submissions on this consultation, choosing the option of preventing vessels over 18m from trawling inside 6nm on the basis of maximising the environmental benefit while balancing fairness to the fishing fleet. To date a decision from the Minister is still awaited.

The IWDG also secured funding from the IEN for a project to develop, through research, engagement and consultation with stakeholders and experts, a roadmap for sprat to be designated a quota species under Common Fishery Policy rules.

The appointment of a new Policy and Advocacy Officer will enable further work in this sector.

7. EDUCATION AND OUTREACH

EVENTS

Goal: To raise awareness and inspire public engagement with Ireland's marine biodiversity through accessible, educational, and community-focused outreach events.

Outcomes: IWDG delivered a range of public events in 2024 that helped build stronger connections between communities and marine conservation. The group actively supported National Heritage Week and National Biodiversity Week, hosting events that engaged families and coastal communities around the country.

One of the highlights was an open day at the Shannon Dolphin Centre during Heritage Week, where IWDG delivered its award-winning "Marine Biologist for a Day" programme. This immersive event offered children a hands-on introduction to marine science and cetacean conservation, and continued the success of the initiative, which received the Wild Child Award at the National Heritage Week Awards in 2023.

IWDG also coordinated the All-Island Whale Watch Day in May 2024, encouraging public participation at multiple land-based whale watching sites. Additionally, the team participated in Native Species Weekend at both Dublin Zoo and Fota Wildlife Park, engaging thousands of visitors with interactive educational activities and promoting awareness of Ireland's native marine species.

Goal: Organise and Deliver Events to engage more people in citizen science

Outcomes:

- Whale Watch Ireland 2024, Biodiversity Week Event
- Native Species Event in Dublin Zoo and Fota Wildlife Park
- Electric Picnic Global Green Area
- Be a Marine Biologist for a Day, Heritage Week Event
- Whale Watch Day at Loop Head, Heritage Week Event
- Connemara Sea Week
- Science Week Programme

RESIDENTIAL WHALE WATCHING WEEKEND COURSES

Goal: To encourage existing members to become more actively involved in IWDG's sighting scheme, by immersing them over the weekend in a series of indoor presentations covering a wide range of related topics, combined with land watches and a pelagic whale watch trip out from Baltimore.

Outcomes: Delivered two residential whale watching weekends at CECAS, Leap in West Cork in May and September 2024, with close to full occupancy of all 24 available rooms at the venue. This course is also open to non members, and the course fee includes 1 year membership, which also helps build the membership base.

COURSES AND WORKSHOPS

Goal: Support National Biodiversity Week and National Heritage Week by delivering engaging public events during these weeks.

Outcomes: The annual Whale Watch Day was brought forward to coincide with National Biodiversity Week and the launch of Ireland's Coastal Whale Trail. Free, guided land-based watches were conducted at 10 sites in 10 coastal counties throughout the four provinces. The event was attended by over 500 people with sightings reported at four of the ten sites. During National Heritage Week, themed Connections, Routes and Networks, IWDG held the Wild Child Day event, "Be a Marine Biologist for the Day" at the Shannon Dolphin Centre. A free, guided land-based watch was held at Loop Head and IWDG presented at the 170th anniversary of Loop Head Lighthouse. IWDG attended Native Species Weekend Events at Dublin Zoo and FOTA Wildlife Park.

Goal: Organise and deliver events for young people

Outcomes: In 2024 the education officer delivered the IWDG Floating Classroom programme over two weeks, attended by 166 students and 19 teachers from eight primary schools in the Shannon Estuary area. During these workshops, students had hands-on opportunities to explore whale and dolphin bio-facts, practice photo-identification, and learn about species like Shannon bottlenose dolphin, Minke whale, and Common dolphin.



IWDG Residential Whale Watching Course Group at Baltimore 21.09.2024



Whale Watch Ireland 2024, Erris Head Co Mayo



Whale Watch Ireland 2024, Galley Head Co Cork

ANNUAL STRANDING NETWORK MEETING

Goal: To provide training, knowledge-sharing, and networking opportunities for IWDG volunteers and partners through the annual Stranding Network Meeting, ensuring they remain equipped with up-to-date science, research findings, and best practices in stranding response.

Outcome: Over 50 volunteers and partners attended the 2024 Stranding Network Meeting at the Natural Museum of Ireland – Natural History (NMI-NH), at their Collins Barracks site in Dublin. Participants received updates on stranding and live response trends, learned about recent research into white-beaked dolphins using samples from the Irish Cetacean Genetic Tissue Bank (ICGTB), and explored wider concepts such as One Health. The event strengthened volunteer capacity, improved collaboration between researchers, institutions, and citizen scientists, and reinforced IWDG's ability to respond effectively to strandings nationwide.

IRISH LANGUAGE ENGAGEMENT

Introduction: As part of IWDG's commitment to inclusivity and cultural heritage, we aim to integrate the Irish language into our outreach and education initiatives. This section will highlight efforts to engage Irish-speaking communities, provide bilingual resources, and promote the use of Irish in marine conservation education.

Goal: To expand the use of the Irish language in IWDG's outreach and education programs, ensuring greater accessibility and engagement with Irish-speaking communities.

Outcomes: A new Irish language officer, Cian Ó Nialáin, was appointed on a voluntary basis this year, engaging with Irish language media such as TG4 and Raidió na Gaeltachta and providing translation for some of IWDG's works. New to the group, Cian develops his skills while also balancing academic commitments, and aims to contribute more to the group in 2025.

MEMBERSHIP AND MERCHANDISE

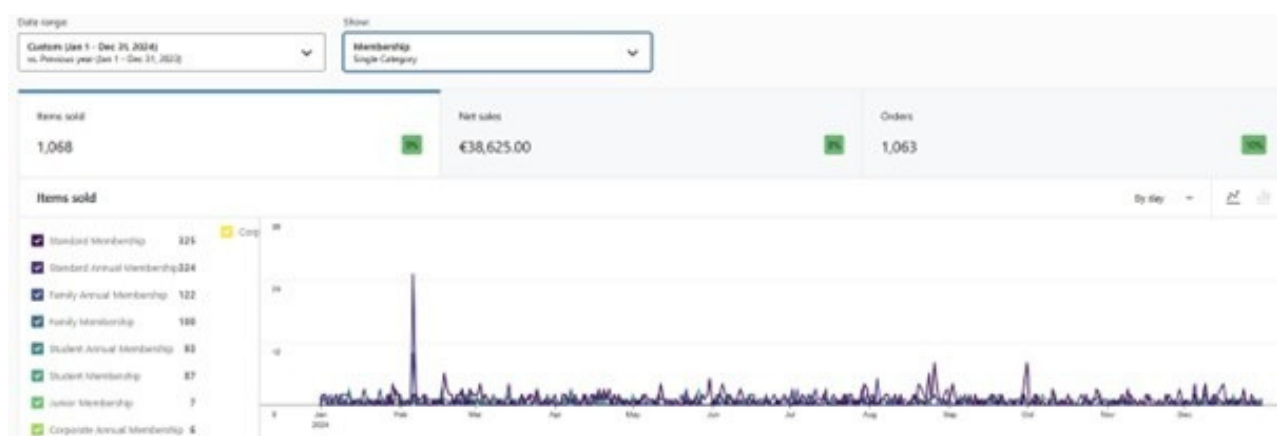
We continued to increase engagement with IWDG members and the public, sharing our knowledge and enthusiasm to promote our conservation actions and priorities.

Goal: To retain existing members and grow our membership.

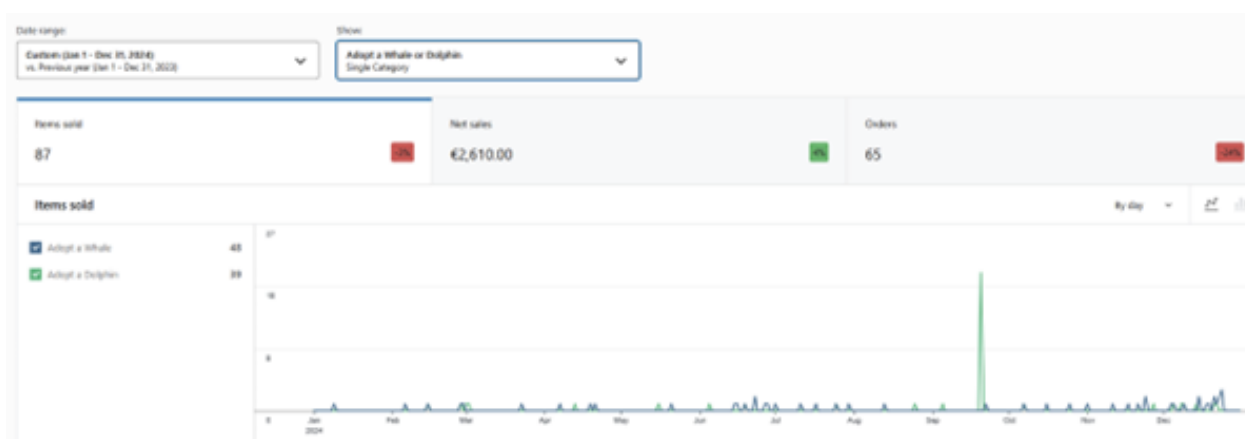
Outcomes: Membership numbers are steady with an increase of 9% in 2024. Whale or Dolphin 'Adoptions' are another means to support the group and although the adoptions were down slightly by 3%, they still provided much needed income for both the Shannon Dolphin and Whale Track projects. The Shannon Dolphin book (30 years studying the Shannon Dolphins) also continues to provide income for the Shannon Dolphin project. The Adoptions of the Shannon Dolphins has been changed slightly to offer adoptions of family groups to make it easier for the SDP project officer to provide annual email updates. We are also investigating a subscription type of product for the adoptions so members' adoptions can renew automatically each year.

Goal: To provide best-effort ethically sourced IWDG branded products for purchase by the public to promote the brand, raising awareness and raising funds.

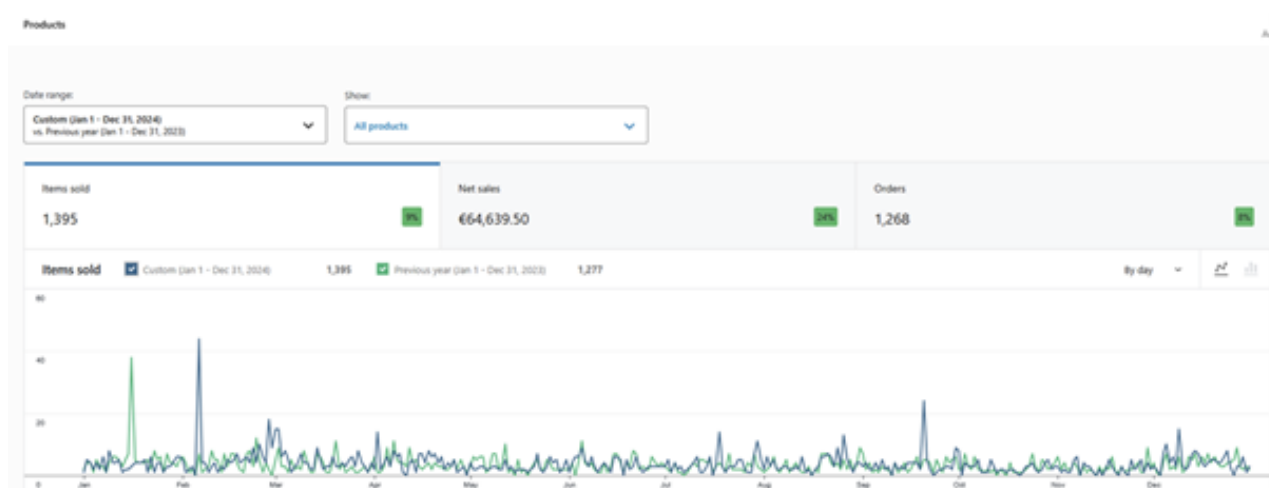
Outcomes: We have been using the Irish supplier An Spailpín Fánach, from Galway since 2021. This company was the original supplier of our IWDG t-shirts in Irish in the mid nineties. They use the ethical French brand 'Sols' for hoodies, sweatshirts and t-shirts.



Memberships – comparison of 2024 vs 2023



Adoptions – comparison of 2024 vs 2023



Sales – comparison of 2024 vs 2023

<input type="checkbox"/>	Product title	SKU	Items sold	Net sales	Orders	Category
<input type="checkbox"/>	Standard Membership	Standard Membership	325	€9,960.00	324	Membership
<input type="checkbox"/>	Standard Annual Membership	Standard Annual Subscription	324	€11,115.00	323	Membership
<input type="checkbox"/>	Family Annual Membership	Family Annual Subscription	122	€5,460.00	121	Membership
<input type="checkbox"/>	Family Membership	Family Membership	100	€4,500.00	100	Membership
<input type="checkbox"/>	Student Annual Membership	Student/CAP Annual Subscription	93	€2,780.00	92	Membership
<input type="checkbox"/>	Student Membership	Student/CAP Membership	87	€2,250.00	87	Membership
<input type="checkbox"/>	Celtic Mist survey deposit 2023		54	€16,200.00	51	Uncategorized
<input type="checkbox"/>	Adopt a Whale		48	€1,440.00	47	Adopt a Whale or Dolphin
<input type="checkbox"/>	Adopt a Dolphin		39	€1,170.00	39	Adopt a Whale or Dolphin

Top Products – comparison of 2024

We will continue to use this Irish company for hand screen printing. Our members are often returning customers purchasing birthday gifts, going on the Celtic Mist trip or very proud to be wearing IWDG abroad. Our neckies and headbands are merino wool and are sourced from Decathlon and are stitched with our logo locally by Leah at Central Sports in Kilrush. Although more expensive than polyester they are more a natural material choice and are of a higher quality standard and more enduring. The IWDG t-shirts and neck warmers/headbands are lightweight and very affordable to post and are very popular for all age groups.

In 2025 we will introduce a long sleeve t-shirt to our clothing products, a new colour tone of hoodie and sweatshirt and the reintroduction of a more ethically sourced peaked cap with our IWDG stitched logo.

We continue to use An Post as our postal delivery system. Supporting our local post office and our relationship with its kind local staff. 'An Post' has for 2025 increased the weight on its padded prepaid package making this way of posting our products very economical.

We use 'The Factory', an Irish eco-friendly Graphic Design Printers company, based in Offaly for our adoption certificates. printed on eco recycled paper cards. This makes this product very popular among all age groups and is an alternative way of 'being a member'. In 2024, the Green School's Marine Team.

LOCAL GROUPS

Introduction: The IWDG recognises that in order for members to actively participate in IWDG activities, primarily the sighting and stranding schemes, that they need support, guidance and a mechanism to meet other like-minded members in their area. To enable this, local groups have been created. Local groups also make it easier for the Education and Outreach programme to identify and address member needs more effectively as members now have a mechanism to request information and or training from the IWDG Education & Outreach (E&O) Officer who is the point of contact for members within the group.

Goal: The overarching goal is to grow and support the Local Group Network by enhancing communication channels, providing consistent updates on events and training opportunities, and ensuring that each group feels supported in their regional efforts.

IWDG also aims to strengthen the Northern Ireland Local Group, building further engagement and representation at marine conservation meetings and events across the island. Additionally, the Shannon Dolphin Centre should serve as a central hub for education and outreach, inspiring individuals of all ages to learn more about cetaceans—especially the Shannon Dolphins—and take an active role in conservation initiatives.

Outcome: Local groups provided vital support throughout 2024 by contributing to citizen science data collection and supporting live stranding response efforts. The Northern Ireland Local Group expanded its activities, hosted regional events, and continued to promote IWDG’s all-island approach to marine conservation. The Shannon Dolphin Centre remained a focal point for public engagement, hosting educational events, training sessions, and outreach activities that reached hundreds of visitors, students, and volunteers throughout the year.

8. CELTIC MIST



Celtic Mist is the IWDG’s research vessel, serving as a vital platform for marine conservation efforts. It provides opportunities for researchers, members of the IWDG, and citizen scientists to participate in various initiatives aimed at studying and protecting marine wildlife, particularly whales and dolphins, along Ireland’s coastlines. The vessel plays a key role in IWDG’s mission by facilitating fieldwork, monitoring marine biodiversity, and fostering greater public engagement in conservation efforts through hands-on participation and education.

EDUCATION, RESEARCH AND ENGAGEMENT

Goal: To raise public awareness of and foster connections with marine wildlife, particularly whales, dolphins, and porpoises in Irish waters. Increased awareness of and connection with cetaceans (whales, dolphins and porpoises) and the marine environment in general through education and first-hand experience on the water. By offering opportunities for people to participate in research trips aboard vessels like Celtic Mist, the IWDG allows individuals to observe cetaceans in their natural environment. These experiences, combined with educational outreach, deepen public knowledge of cetaceans and highlight the importance of protecting these species and their habitats. This hands-on approach is crucial in fostering a connection between people and marine conservation efforts in Irish waters.

Outcome: Celtic Mist was scheduled for 14 weekly surveys and six Shannon Dolphin surveys for a total of 20 weeks sailing. Due to various weather conditions, two of the weekly surveys were cancelled, along with one Shannon Dolphin survey; Celtic Mist sailed for 17 successful survey weeks between May and September.



A selection of images taken by IWDG members during the R/V. Celtic Mist Summer Survey Cruises 2024.

Additionally, Celtic Mist was used for a skipper and mate training/familiarisation weekend in April and the practical aspect of an IWDG Marine Mammal Observer course in September, both within the Shannon Estuary. About 125 people sailed on Celtic Mist throughout the summer, a number which includes skippers, volunteers, IWDG staff, Shannon Dolphin Interns and IWDG members; 15 of those on the MMO training course. Six official ports were visited across five counties with many more overnight stops in small bays and marinas. Open days and educational events were held on board, as was the IWDG initiative 'Floating Classroom' which saw children from multiple schools based around the Kilrush area visit the vessel and learn about vessel safety, Irish waters and the animals within.

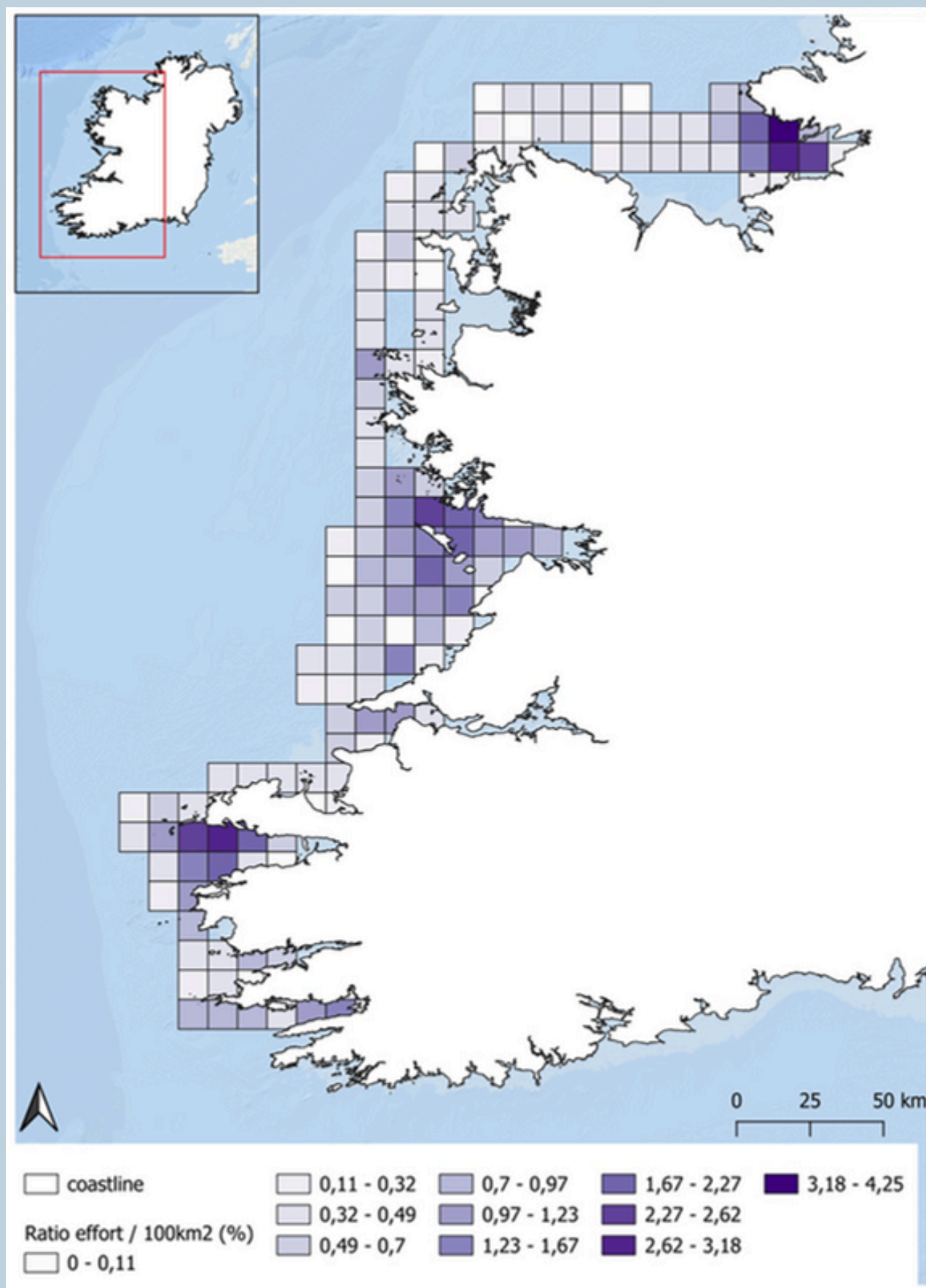
Goal: Ensure the Celtic Mist remains in optimal condition to support ongoing research and conservation efforts.

Outcome: Extensive maintenance of the vessel was carried out over winter, including refits, de-rusting, painting, deep-cleaning and repairs. Particular attention was paid to the skippers cabin where leaks were addressed with a partial overhaul of the ceiling area and a rebuilding of the steps into the wheelhouse. This was achieved through continuous work by competent volunteers including electricians, carpenters, welders and skippers. Some volunteers conducted daily work for an extended period, and some joined for intensive weekends. The volunteer efforts were complimented by paid professionals where necessary. These efforts were overseen by experienced IWDG personnel and meant Celtic Mist was fit and ready for sailing on schedule.

RESEARCH SURVEYS

Goal: Robust data collection on board our research vessel. Following on from new protocols implemented in 2022 the scientific programme onboard expanded and a new seasonal field biologist will ensure consistency in the data collection. The surveys this year have been specifically designed to survey Areas of Interest (AoI) identified by IWDG and the Fair Seas campaign which warrant consideration for a future MPA network. The aim was to concentrate on two of these areas, Loop Head to Kenmare and the Southwest Coast AoI.)

Outcomes: Surveys were successfully undertaken in the AoI highlighted for focus in 2024 (see map of survey effort). Visual data was collected through line transect surveys. The route of the surveys was weather dependent, but the flexibility of our survey programme allowed us to cover as much of these areas as possible. Celtic Mist travelled 3527 km during 2024, with 2537 km with observers 'on effort'. Fair Seas were able to place personnel on board during these focused surveys, who were able to document these undertakings across social media.



Map showing the 2024 survey effort within the designated Area of Interest (AoI), where focused surveys were successfully undertaken during the R.V. Celtic Mist Summer Survey Cruises

9. COMMUNICATIONS

Introduction: To enhance public awareness, stakeholder engagement, and internal coordination through a comprehensive communication strategy aligned with the IWDG's broader conservation mission.

ENGAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATION

Developed an Overall Communications Strategy (2025-2028) to provide a structured approach to IWDG's outreach, stakeholder engagement, and internal coordination. This strategy was informed by key reviews of past reports and workshops, identifying strengths such as stakeholder engagement and evidence-based advocacy, while addressing challenges like funding constraints and the need for enhanced digital communication. The strategy sets clear objectives for public awareness, policy engagement, citizen science, and internal communication while implementing evaluation metrics to measure its effectiveness.

The IWDG Social Media Policy was revised to make our external communications clearer and more consistent. Issues like misunderstandings and the sharing of sensitive topics, such as offshore wind energy projects and sprat fishing, showed us the importance of balancing advocacy, accuracy, and public engagement. The new policy sets clear guidelines for sharing accurate and consistent messages, introduces protocols for discussing sensitive environmental topics constructively with stakeholders, and outlines best practices for dealing with misinformation. This ensures our communications align with IWDG's mission and conservation goals.

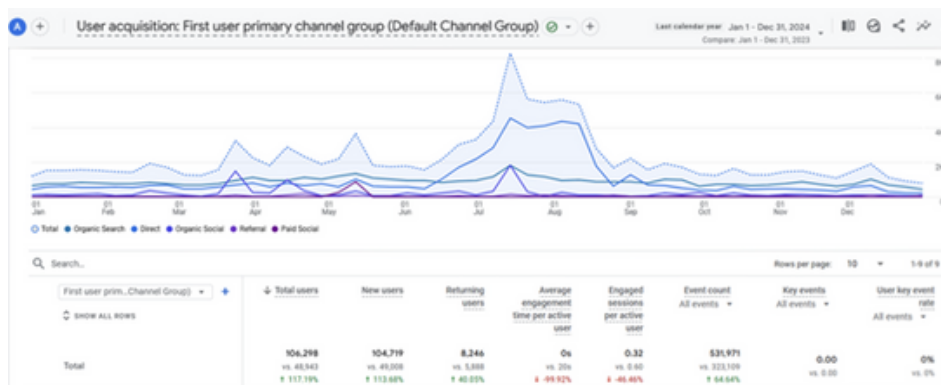
We are working to improve stakeholder relationships by disseminating the new IWDG Corporate Partnership Guide, to attract new corporate sponsors and build partnerships with key industries and organisations.

Engaged young audiences through education initiatives such as the Floating Classroom 2024, which provided hands-on experience to over 160 primary school students, and outreach at major events like Electric Picnic 2024. IWDG also participated in the Science Week initiative for the first time, running a week-long series of events at IWDG HQ in Kilrush and hosting a range of research and conservation webinars throughout the week.

GROWING OUR AUDIENCES

In 2024, IWDG significantly expanded its reach and engagement, connecting with a wider audience across media, digital platforms, and community initiatives. Media coverage increased to 50 , with IWDG featured in national and regional outlets, raising awareness of key conservation issues. Website traffic grew by 117% reflecting greater public interest in IWDG’s research and advocacy. Social media engagement also saw strong growth, with a 9% increase in followers across platforms, ensuring conservation messaging reached a broader audience. This growth directly supported IWDG’s outreach efforts, increasing participation in citizen science projects and strengthening policy advocacy campaigns.

Website updates and the introduction of dedicated domains for key projects, such as www.whaletrack.ie and www.shannondolphins.ie , improved accessibility and usability, making it easier for visitors to explore research findings, educational materials, and real-time cetacean sighting data.



Website Analytics – 2024 vs 2023 – increase of 119% but lower engagement time

To enhance communication efficiency, IWDG transitioned to Brevo as a cost-effective alternative to Mailchimp for automated email communications. This, along with a structured media strategy that included targeted email marketing, resulted in a 18% increase in engagement rates, ensuring members and supporters received timely and relevant updates. These advancements have helped boost participation in conservation activities, fundraising events, and awareness campaigns.

	Landing page	Sessions	Active users	New users
Total		158,679 100% of total	105,835 100% of total	104,719 100% of total
1	/	64,063 (40.37%)	35,784 (33.81%)	34,224 (32.68%)
2	/news	6,312 (3.98%)	1,340 (1.27%)	1,128 (1.08%)
3	/1st-irish-record-of-a-north-atlantic-right-whale-validated-by-iwdg	4,392 (2.77%)	3,688 (3.48%)	3,616 (3.45%)
4	/sail-with-us	2,734 (1.72%)	1,845 (1.74%)	1,639 (1.57%)
5	/sightings	2,697 (1.7%)	2,149 (2.03%)	1,841 (1.76%)
6	/whale-watch-ireland-2024-saturday-18th-may-1700-1900	2,634 (1.66%)	1,943 (1.84%)	1,861 (1.78%)
7	/first-basking-shark-sighting-of-2024	2,169 (1.37%)	1,933 (1.83%)	1,872 (1.79%)
8	/species	2,010 (1.27%)	1,688 (1.59%)	1,458 (1.39%)
9	/grey-seal-interaction-with-common-dolphin-	1,888 (1.19%)	1,776 (1.68%)	1,774 (1.69%)

Website Analytics – Behaviour – Top landing pages

OUR SUPPORTERS: SPONSORS AND FUNDERS

Thanks to all individuals, governmental agencies, and philanthropic organisations that helped us accomplish our goals this year:

- Inis Energy of the Sea
- Irish Environmental Network
- The Heritage Council
- National Parks and Wildlife Services (NPWS)
- Research Ireland (SFI)
- Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage
- Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine
- Kerry County Council
- Donegal County Council
- Limerick County Council
- Mayo County Council
- Sligo County Council
- Wexford County Council
- SECAD Partnership CLG
- EU OCEAN – EU Horizon 2020
- Benevity
- Paypal GivingFund

Corporate Members:

Achill Seascope, Dingle Boat Tours, Eli Lily, Grainne Griffin, Hook Lighthouse, Mowi Ireland, Quinns Pharmacy Gort, Safety Compliance Support, Shoes for Crews, Vagabond Tours, Wolfhound Adventure Tour, Dingle Boat Tours



An Roinn Tithíochta,
Rialtais Áitiúil agus Oidhreachta
Department of Housing,
Local Government and Heritage



An Roinn Talmhaíochta,
Bia agus Mara
Department of Agriculture,
Food and the Marine



An tSeirbhís Páirceanna Náisiúnta
agus Fiadhúlra
National Parks and Wildlife Service



Taighde Éireann
Research Ireland



Comhairle Contae Chiarraí
Kerry County Council



SLIGO
COUNTY COUNCIL



Comhairle Contae Mhaigh Eo
Mayo County Council



Comhairle Contae Loch Garman
Wexford County Council



Comhairle Cathrach
& Contae Luimnigh
Limerick City
& County Council



Comhairle Contae
Dhún na nGall
Donegal County Council
Council of the Year 2025

IWDG CONSULTING

Goal: Maintain and grow consultancy revenues as required to fund any shortfall to achieving total revenue target

Outcomes: IWDG Consulting continued to thrive and delivered services to a number of large infrastructure projects including static acoustic monitoring in two proposed wind farms sites off the southeast coast, provision of MMOs for dredging and piling operations and Annex IV Risk Assessments. This provided a steady income to support the work of the IWDG.

During 2024 the role of Clodagh Russell evolved within the IWDG. She took over managing IWDG Consulting while a new MMO (Jo Green) was employed to deliver our services to Dublin Port. This provides a better service to clients and ensures compliance with health and safety obligations.

Goal: Influence marine and coastal activities through consulting services

Outcomes: IWDG Consulting during the course of its work, provides many opportunities for the IWDG to influence design and planning of coastal works to ensure marine mammal mitigation measures are considered at an early phase. This ensures these measures are integrated into the design phase resulting in less financial constraints to what can be achieved.

Goal: Provide work opportunities to young marine mammal biologists in Ireland

Outcomes: IWDG Consulting manages an MMO Panel which provides work for marine mammal biologists. IWDG try to support MMOs based in Ireland and have collaborated with the ESB to provide MMO training in support of the increasing demands of these services. IWDG Consulting has provided work for three of these ESB trained MMOs during 2024.



ORGANISATION OVERVIEW

HISTORY

The Irish Whale and Dolphin Group (IWDG) was founded in 1990 to establish an Irish stranding and sighting scheme and to campaign for the declaration of Irish territorial waters as a whale and dolphin sanctuary. Just six months later, in June 1991, the Irish Government declared all Irish waters to be a whale and dolphin sanctuary – the first of its kind in Europe. The IWDG is a broad mix of conservationists, whale watchers, researchers, educators and, above all, people who are passionate about marine wildlife and cetaceans in particular.

MISSION

The Irish Whale and Dolphin Group (IWDG) is dedicated to the conservation and better understanding of Irish cetaceans (whales, dolphins, and porpoises) and their habitats through research, study, education and interpretation.

Our focus is to promote better understanding of Irish cetaceans and their habitats through education and research. We achieve this through a number of activities:

- We collect information and disseminate it through our website (www.iwdg.ie), publications, literature and media to support conservation initiatives in Ireland.
- We collaborate with universities, government agencies and other research groups in research into cetaceans and their habitats in Ireland and abroad.
- We work towards making the Irish Whale and Dolphin Sanctuary effective in the conservation of all cetaceans that either live in, or migrate through Irish waters.
- We work side by side with industry, fishers and other groups whose interests may sometimes conflict with those of cetacean conservation, to solve problems to the benefit of both humans and cetaceans.
- We highlight the fact that Ireland is one of the best locations in the North Atlantic to see cetaceans and to stress the need to conserve them for future generations.
- We promote best practice in welfare, marine tourism and whale watching in Ireland.
- The IWDG publishes and reviews annually a three-year plan following consultation with members.

GOVERNANCE

The IWDG is a registered charity (Charity Number: CHY 11163) and registered with the Charities Regulator (RCN 20029913). The IWDG is governed by a voluntary board of Directors composed of members to ensure good gender balance and diversity of skills to assist in areas such as governance, research, education and development. The IWDG is an employer with three full-time employees, eight service providers and six volunteer officers assisting us to deliver our work. During 2022, ten external consultants assisted us in our consultancy work. The CEO is responsible for the day to day running of the IWDG while the board is developing a longer-term, more strategic view of the IWDG and continues to provide oversight on corporate governance and finance.

CHALLENGES AND FUTURE INITIATIVES

Unexpected challenges, delayed policies

This year, our efforts were significantly impacted by a series of unforeseen challenges. Irish politics, in particular, proved to be a key factor in shaping the policy landscape. The ongoing cost-of-living crisis dominated the national agenda, placing added pressure on political leaders to prioritise economic stability over environmental concerns. As a result, crucial policies aimed at addressing the urgent needs of our oceans faced delays, hindering much-needed progress.

Marine Protected Areas: Despite growing support for the designation of MPAs and public awareness campaigns led by IWDG and partners in the Fair Seas coalition, the long-anticipated Marine Protected Areas Bill remains in draft form. Its delay continues to hold back the establishment of new MPAs and the implementation of management plans for existing ones, reducing the legal protection of critical habitats for cetaceans.

Fishing inside 6nm: The ongoing consultation on trawling activity inside the 6 nautical mile limit highlighted deep divisions between stakeholders. IWDG's advocacy for stronger protections for forage fish such as sprat gained traction, but the absence of a ministerial decision continues to leave Irish inshore waters vulnerable to overfishing. A unified approach among NGOs was a strong step forward, but without policy implementation, environmental damage persists.

Offshore Renewable Energy: While progress has been made with the rollout of Designated Maritime Area Plans (DMAPs) and stakeholder consultations, the rapid pace of offshore wind development continues to outstrip the establishment of robust biodiversity safeguards. IWDG has maintained pressure to ensure marine mammals are considered in all stages of ORE planning, but we face challenges in ensuring proper mitigation measures are enforced.

Support for Live Stranding Network: The Live Stranding Network remains under-resourced despite a growing need for trained responders and equipment. IWDG continues to rely heavily on volunteers and minimal funding from DAFM. Attempts to secure additional funding in 2024 were unsuccessful, limiting the network's ability to expand and respond effectively to an increasing number of live strandings. The need for increased state support remains urgent.

Future Projects and Goals

Advocating for the MPA bill to be published: IWDG will continue to advocate for the publication of the long-awaited Marine Protected Areas Bill. We remain committed to working with the Fair Seas coalition to push for the designation of at least 30% of Irish waters as MPAs by 2030. In 2025, we will continue to provide robust evidence and data from our recording schemes and research projects to inform future MPA planning and design.

ORE Development: IWDG will continue consultation with all relevant stakeholders in the ORE development space and will engage constructively in upcoming work in 2025 including the SC-DMAP Marine Biodiversity and Ornithology Working Group, the upcoming consultation on new underwater noise guidance in Ireland, and an international workshop on the same topic at the European Cetacean Society Conference. Work on Phase 1 EIARs is ongoing, and IWDG now sits on the Technical Group for the next monitoring phase for the Marine Strategy Framework Directive Descriptor 11 underwater noise.

Important Marine Mammal Areas (IMMAs): There is a need for extensive data gathering to allow for identification of further IMMAs and expansion of species and criteria within existing IMMAs. It is intended that IMMAs should be a step on the road to designation of MPAs but for example, it is clearly not possible currently to designate the Dingle to Mizen Head as an important IMMA for common dolphin breeding which is recognised as key to protection of this Annex IV species. While the species clearly breeds in the area there is no targeted research. Without baseline data focused on the IMMA criteria there can be no meaningful designation of IMMAs and consequently MPAs. While the IWDG contributes hugely to baseline data there needs to be state involvement in offshore areas and this remains an issue. Studies need to focus on the key life cycle criteria of feeding, breeding and migration to highlight and call for protection of these where they occur. Where IMMA data is inadequate for designation or recognition of key criteria it will also be so for MPAs. Current species data needs to be examined and areas for further study highlighted. There is currently no sign of a data acquisition program despite designation of vast areas of the marine.

IWDG Local Groups Roadshow: The IWDG is seeking Capacity Building Funding to launch a nationwide Local Group Roadshow aimed at strengthening and expanding our grassroots network. This initiative will involve a series of in-person meetings with local groups across Ireland, providing opportunities for members to meet key IWDG officers, learn about our strategy and upcoming initiatives, and explore ways to get more involved. The roadshow will also offer training and guidance on citizen science, strandings reporting, and conservation advocacy. To reinforce group identity and a sense of belonging within the wider organisation, each participating local group will receive a custom IWDG Local Group flag.

Digital developments - New PWA: IWDG is in the process of upgrading its Reporting Application to a Progressive Web Application (PWA). This modernisation will significantly improve accessibility, usability, and long-term sustainability. The new platform will make it easier for members of the public, researchers, and citizen scientists to record and submit whale and dolphin sightings and strandings. By streamlining data collection, the upgraded app will support more effective monitoring and conservation of cetaceans in Irish waters.

FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

Income and Expenditure

Income

In 2024, IWDG generated €938k, a decrease of 30% compared to 2023 (€1.34m). This reduction was expected, as several major consultancy projects concluded in 2023 and no new projects of similar scale commenced during the year.

Consultancy and Overheads remained our largest source of income at €471k (50% of total), though this was down 46% from 2023.

- Grants and funding grew significantly to €273k (+33%), reflecting continued support for our programmes.
- Membership income increased by 13% to €39k, demonstrating growing public engagement.
- Courses and education income doubled to €32k, with more training opportunities delivered.
- Celtic Mist cruises provided €35k (+17%), reflecting a successful season.
- Other areas such as RIB hire, publications, and merchandise saw modest declines, while miscellaneous income rose 42% (€5k).

Overall, the broad base of income streams continues to provide stability, even as large consultancy projects fluctuate year to year.

Expenditure

Total expenditure in 2024 was €914k, a decrease of 18% from 2023 (€1.11m).

The largest reduction was in consulting-related costs (€544k, -25%), aligned with lower consultancy income.

- Celtic Mist expenditure fell sharply to €30k (-63%), reflecting lower repair and maintenance costs in 2024.
- Staff costs rose by 24% to €258k, reflecting five additional staff roles (one temporary) and the return of one team member from maternity leave.
- Courses and education costs more than doubled to €4k, in line with the increase in activity.
- Core running costs rose modestly to €53k (+8%), reflecting inflationary pressures, new equipment, and insurance.

This balance between reduced consultancy costs and increased investment in staff and education ensured IWDG maintained strong delivery capacity across research, conservation, and outreach.

Income Statement for the year ended 31 December 2024

Item	2024 (€)	2023 (€)	% Change
Income	938,168	1,342,091	-30.1%
Expenditure	(913,928)	(1,113,075)	-17.9%
Surplus before interest	24,240	229,016	-89.4%
Interest receivable and similar income	331	10	+3,210.0%
Surplus for the year	24,571	229,026	-89.3%

Income Analyses

Income from	Note	Total Funds 2024 (€)	Total Funds 2023 (€)
Celtic Mist Cruises	1	35,085	29,996
Gifts & Donations	2	15,708	20,473
Grants / Funding	3	272,738	204,971
Core Funding	4	46,831	58,744
Consulting & Overheads	5	471,315	878,245
Membership	6	38,562	34,194
Courses & Education	7	32,273	16,127
Equipment Hire	8	-	32,960
RIB Hire	9	9,680	51,650
Publications & Merchandise	10	10,506	10,890
Miscellaneous income	11	5,470	3,841
Total income		938,168	1,342,091

Expenditure Analyses

Expenditure on	Note	Total Funds 2024 (€)	Total Funds 2023 (€)
Celtic Mist	12	30,389	82,212
Consulting incl. outlay & travel	13	544,154	728,861
Marketing / Website	14	7,990	23,634
Courses & Education	15	4,197	2,000
Staff	16	257,978	207,973
Merchandise	17	4,134	8,638
Insurance	18	12,439	10,819
Core Running Costs	19	52,647	48,938
Total expenditure		913,928	1,113,075

Surplus and Reserves

The year closed with a modest surplus of €24.6k, compared with €229k in 2023. While lower than last year's exceptional result, this maintains positive reserves and financial resilience.

- Cash reserves increased by 20% to €656k, ensuring IWDG is well placed to support planned projects in 2025.
- Debtors fell by 57% to €60k, reflecting strong collection of income due.
- Overall net assets grew by 3% to €791k.

The Board continues to prioritise financial stability, with reserves maintained at a prudent level to safeguard operations and ensure continued impact in protecting whales, dolphins, and their habitats.

Financial Position

Balance Sheet	2024 (€)	2023 (€)	Change
Fixed Assets	119,994	122,467	-2%
Current Assets			
– Stock	20,681	23,144	-11%
– Debtors	59,788	137,574	-57%
– Bank / Cash	655,511	548,378	+20%
Total Current Assets	735,980	709,096	+4%
Current Liabilities			
– Creditors / Accruals	(65,451)	(65,611)	0%
Net Current Assets	670,529	643,485	+4%
Total Assets less Current Liabilities	790,523	765,952	+3%

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