

MARINE MAMMALS *of the* CENTRAL & SOUTHERN NORTH SEA

The North Sea

Connected to the Atlantic Ocean through the English Channel in the south and the Norwegian Sea in the north, **the Greater North Sea** covers more than 570,000 square kilometres. It has mean depths of around 90 meters, except for the Norwegian trench in the north, which is up to 700 meters deep. Whilst the Central North Sea is characterized by its sand banks such as the Dogger Bank and Cleaver Bank, the Southern North Sea consists of the mudflats and intertidal sands of the Wadden Sea, a UNESCO world heritage site.

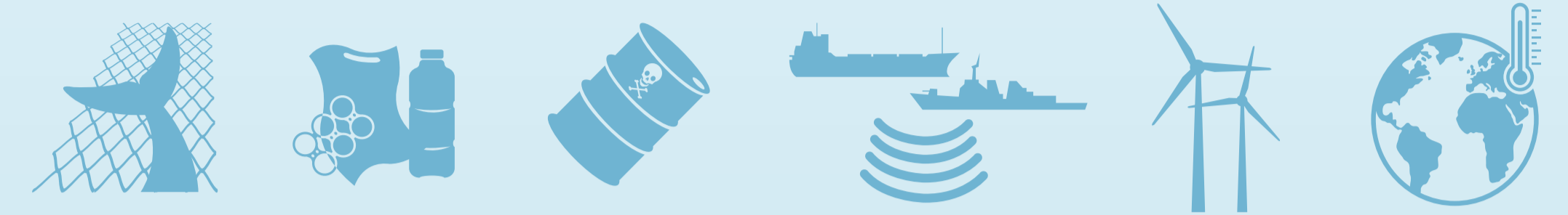
Inhabitants and Visitors

Harbour porpoises are the most abundant marine mammal in the North Sea, with numbers estimated at around 350,000 individuals. Other resident species include the white-beaked dolphin, bottlenose dolphin and Minke whale. Besides cetaceans, two species of pinnipeds can be considered true inhabitants of the North Sea: the harbour seal and the grey seal. The connection to the Atlantic Ocean means that many other species frequently visit the North Sea. The increasing frequency of common dolphin and humpback whale sightings may indicate that the central and southern North Sea could become a more permanent home to these species. Deep-diving species, like beaked whales, sperm whales and pilot whales may stray into the North Sea from the open ocean, though often fail to navigate through this shallow area and find themselves stranded.

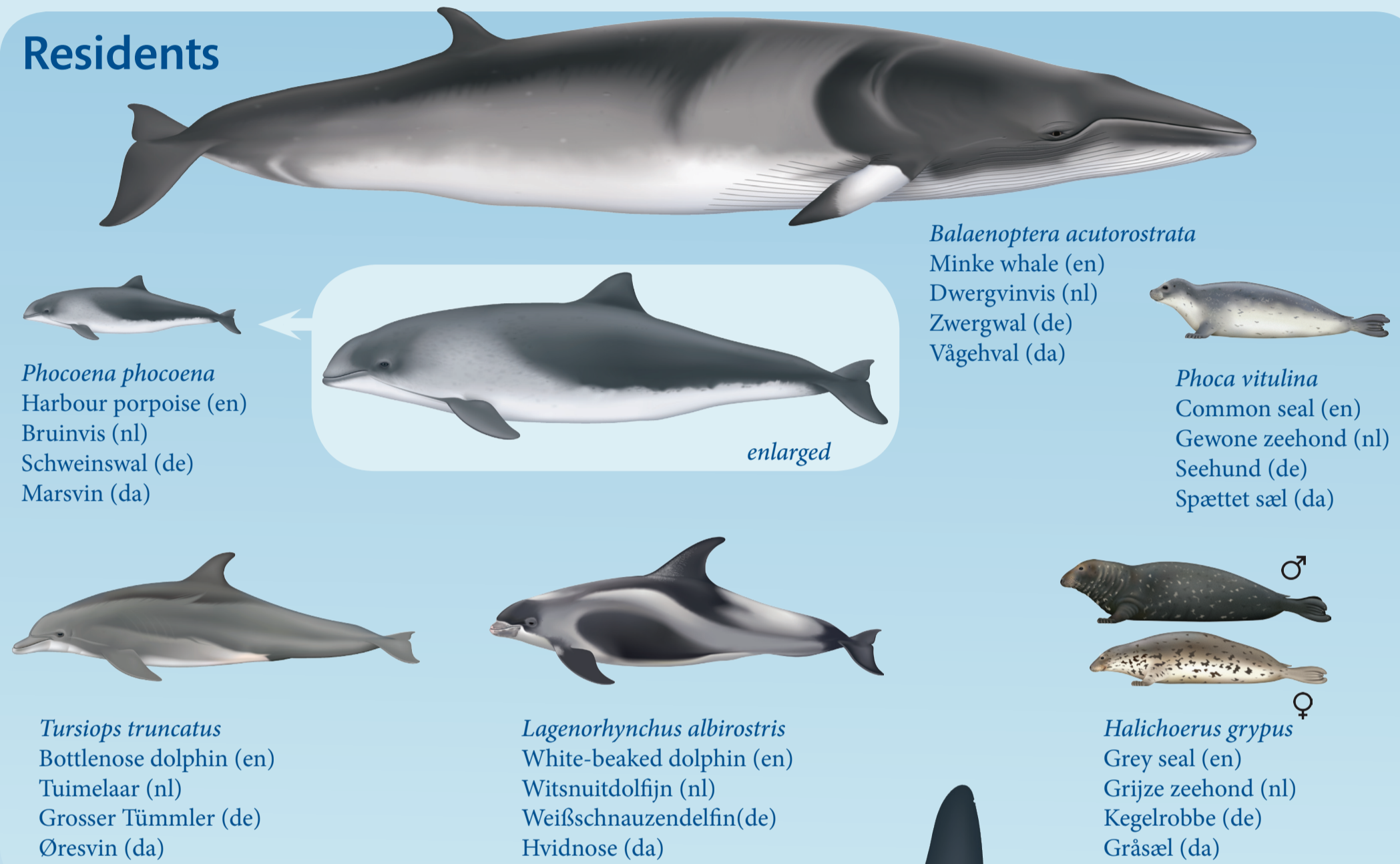


Human Activities

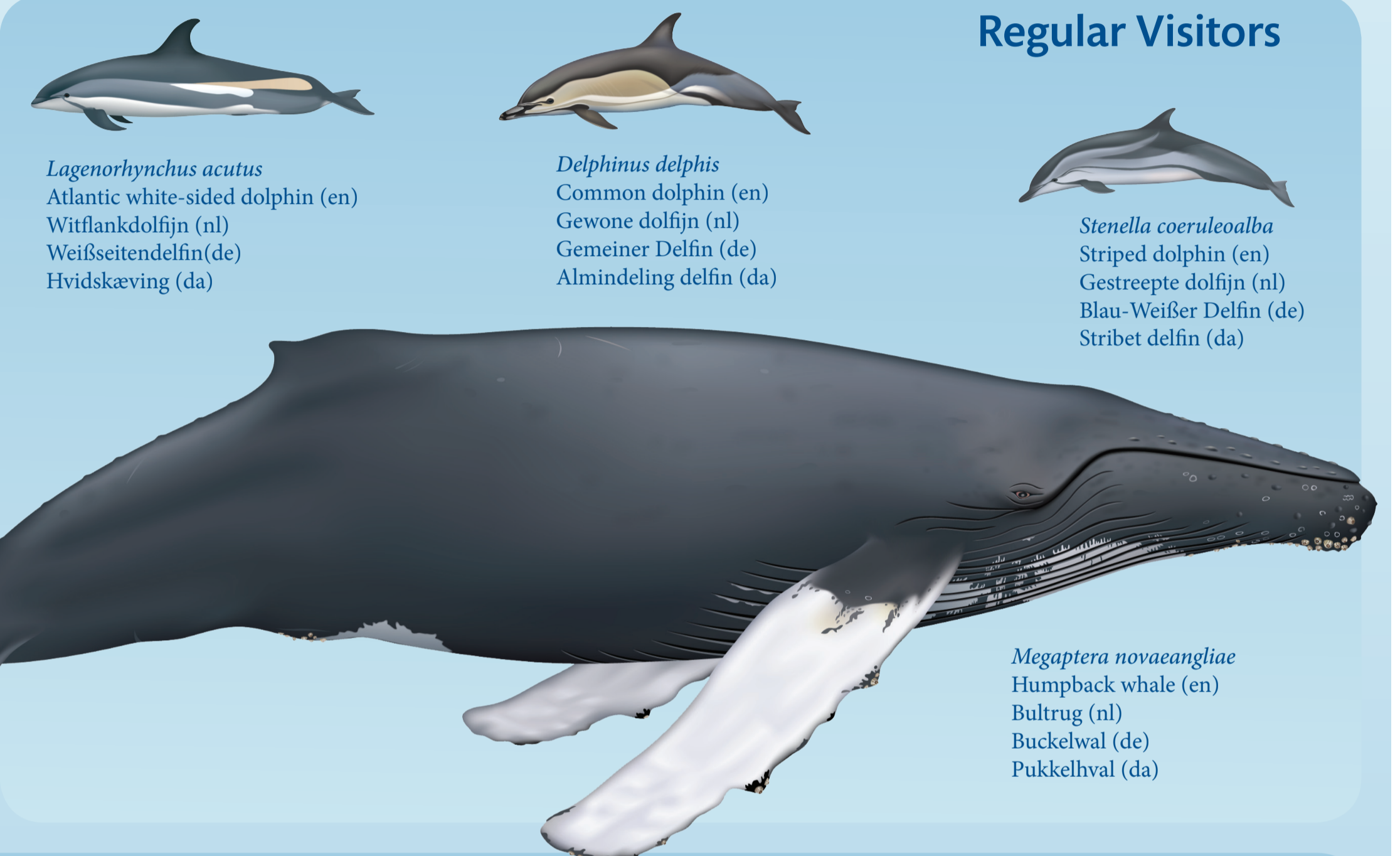
The countries bordering the North Sea are heavily populated and there is a high level of industrialization. Marine mammals are impacted by fishery activities, chemical pollution, and noise pollution from shipping, seismic surveys and unexploded ordnance detonations. More recent threats include habitat degradation and changes in food quality and quantity, due to, among other things, the construction of offshore wind farms as well as climate change. These **single and cumulative stressors** threaten the direct survival of individual animals, but may also induce nonlethal effects impacting population viability. Studying trends in abundance, distribution, strandings and causes of death gives insights into the effects of human activities on marine mammal occurrence and their health state.



Residents



Regular Visitors



Rare Visitors & Vagrants

