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# 3 Whaling tradition along the Cantabrian coast: Public perception towards cetaceans

- 4 and its importance for marine conservation.
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### **18 DECLARATIONS**

The authors declare that this study was not funded by public or private grants. Authors also declare that to their knowledge there are no conflicts of interest regarding this article. This study was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the Principality of Asturias with reference number 79/19. All participants agree to participate as volunteers in this research study and all of them agree to publish the results obtained from its participation. All data can be shared upon request.

### 25 ABSTRACT

26 Whaling is currently a controversial practice and the focus of a relevant public debate. According to records, it represented an important socio-economic activity in the North of 27 Spain from the 13<sup>th</sup> to the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The North Atlantic Right Whale (Eubalaena 28 glacialis) was the main target species of this activity. As a consequence of the rising of 29 whaling, the North-East Atlantic population of this species was severely depleted, and it 30 has not recovered since then. This work presents a study on public perception of cetaceans 31 and whaling along the Cantabrian coast (North of Spain) and evaluates the differences with 32 respect to several non-coastal regions. More than 400 anonymous surveys were conducted 33 34 in 12 study areas to examine knowledge about cetaceans and whaling, as well as attitudes and willingness to take action in whale and dolphin conservation. Results showed that 35 whaling has a great cultural imprint on the Cantabrian coast inhabitants, which plays a 36 37 relevant role in citizens' perception. Participants from areas with whaling tradition demonstrated higher levels of knowledge about the history of this activity, but less positive 38 attitudes with respect to cetacean conservation than respondents from inland provinces. 39 Additionally, we observed that there are other influencing factors, such as gender or age. 40 41 Our findings indicate that positive attitudes towards the protection of whales and dolphins are not always sufficient for citizens to collaborate for this cause. Therefore, an 42 improvement in education programmes and awareness campaigns about the importance of 43 protecting cetaceans and their environment is needed to achieve real and effective marine 44 45 citizenship.

Keywords: Public awareness, Public engagement, Whaling ports, Cultural heritage,
Cetacean conservation.

#### 48 1. INTRODUCTION

The exact time in which whaling was initiated in Spain is not clear. There are evidences 49 that show several societies, such as the Vikings, used to obtain resources from whales 50 51 (Hennius et al. 2018). Other studies suggest the possibility that whaling was also conducted by the Romans (López 2014; Rodrigues et al. 2018; Hurk et al. 2021). However, 52 the earliest records of industrial whaling activities correspond to Cantabria in the year 1230 53 (González-Echegaray 1978), Asturias in 1232 (Graells 1889), the Spanish Basque Country 54 in 1237 and Galicia in 1286 (Ciriquiain-Gaiztarro 1961). Consequently, this activity spread 55 56 progressively all over the North of Spain (Aguilar 1986).

Whales provided a wide range of products: oil made from the blubber, tools made with 57 the baleens, different structures made with the bones and meat that was mainly exported to 58 markets in France, England, Flanders, Friesland, Scandinavia and others (Salvador and 59 Nores 2017; Hurk 2020). Therefore, whaling represented a very important economic 60 activity on the Cantabrian coast (North of Spain), mainly from the 13<sup>th</sup> to the 18<sup>th</sup> century 61 (Azpiazu 2000). Moreover, it also had a great cultural importance, which has been 62 63 transmitted through generations. The presence of illustrations related to whaling can still be observed on the current coats of arms of many towns that used to have whaling ports, 64 especially in the Basque Country (Campos-Santacana and Peñalba-Otaduy 2000). In 65 addition, the recovery of whaling historical information by several museums, festivities 66 and even street art pieces can be found at different locations along the Cantabrian coast 67 68 nowadays.

69 The main target species in the Cantabrian Sea was the North Atlantic Right Whale 70 (*Eubalaena glacialis*). This has not only been proved by historical records (López 2014), 71 but also confirmed by molecular studies of historical remains (Rey-Iglesia et al. 2018). The 72 North Atlantic Right Whale represented an easy target for whalers, since it swims slowly

and mother-calf associations show a preference for shallow waters (Greene and Pershing 73 2004; Salvador and Nores 2017). Furthermore, their buoyancy after death made it easier 74 for whalers to pull the carcass out of the water (Greene and Pershing 2004). The catching 75 method consisted in using small rowing boats to approach and harpoon the whales. 76 Moreover, some ports presented 'Atalayas' (look-out towers) to spot whales more easily 77 (Aguilar 1986). This whaling method was mainly directed at calves, since they were easier 78 to hunt and their catch normally enabled killing the mother as well. For this reason, the 79 overexploitation of calves caused a significant decrease of the North-East Atlantic 80 population of this species (Aguilar 1986). 81

The expansion of whaling to other areas in the North of Europe from the 14<sup>th</sup> century, as 82 well as to the North-West Atlantic during the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, aggravated the 83 84 detrimental effects of this activity on the species (Aguilar, 1986). Moreover, during the 18th century, the industrial revolution helped improve the hunting methodology and 85 consequently, deteriorated the status of the species. Pre-whaling abundance of the North 86 Atlantic Right Whale has been estimated to be between 9,000 and 21,000 individuals 87 (Monsarrat et al. 2016). Nevertheless, the most recent estimate is of 409 whales (Pettis et 88 al. 2020). Even though this species used to be common along both sides of the North 89 Atlantic, the number of sightings in the North-East Atlantic in the last decades is really 90 91 scarce. Therefore, the North Atlantic Right Whale is currently catalogued as critically endangered by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) (Cooke 2020). 92

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, only four whales were caught. Nevertheless, Graells (1889) claimed that whaling in the Cantabrian Sea was sustainable. He also affirmed that many whales were present in the area. This document remains controversial and is not endorsed by many other authors (Aguilar, 1986; Teixeira et al. 2014; Salvador and Nores, 2017). The last capture of a North Atlantic Right Whale specimen in the North of Spain occurred

in 1901 in Orio, Spanish Basque Country (Salvador and Nores 2017). However, several 98 99 whaling companies were founded in Spain after that date. During that period, the main 100 target species were fin whales (Balaenoptera physalus) and sperm whales (Physeter macrocephalus), due to the previous depletion of the North Atlantic Right Whale 101 population (Sanpera and Aguilar 1992). These companies presented their base ports mainly 102 in Galicia and in the Strait of Gibraltar (Sanpera & Aguilar, 1992; Hansen, 2015). Their 103 104 activity lasted for decades, until the last whale was caught in 1985 (Aguilar 2013). One year later, Spain adopted the commercial whaling moratorium established by the 105 International Whaling Commission (IWC) and whaling has been banned in this country 106 107 since then (IWC 1986). Contemporarily, the social movement rising during the 80s against whaling had a great impact on the social perception of this activity. 108

Nowadays, whaling can be classified into commercial and aboriginal. Commercial
whaling is authorized in Japan, Norway and Iceland. On the other hand, aboriginal whaling
occurs in several places in the world, including the Caribbean island of Bequia, Greenland,
Alaska, Russia and Indonesia (Ellis 2018; Hofman 2019). However, and regardless of
whether it is commercial or aboriginal, there is a growing citizen perception of whaling as
an activity that should be banned worldwide.

115 Citizens represent an important agent for marine conservation. Marine citizenship is an 116 emerging concept that describes the rights and responsibilities of an individual towards the 117 marine environment. It recognises the importance of the role of each citizen in addressing 118 marine environmental issues through their behavioural choices (Fletcher and Potts 2007; 119 McKinley and Fletcher 2010). Moreover, it considers how public engagement can be an 120 important driver of national-level marine policies (McKinley and Fletcher 2012).

121 The first and most important factor of marine citizenship is knowledge (McKinley and122 Fletcher 2012). Previous public perception studies observed that participants with high

levels of knowledge of marine animals generally have stronger support for their 123 124 conservation and avoid behaviours that could be detrimental for these animals (Barney et al. 2005; Friedrich et al. 2014). However, other studies suggest that awareness of the 125 marine environment is low and that few people consider the implications of personal 126 behaviour on marine conservation (Williams 2008; Fletcher et al. 2009; Naylor and 127 Parsons 2018). In addition, knowledge and awareness are not the only factors that play a 128 129 role in marine citizenship, since other variables, such as demographic and cultural attributes, also have influence (Barr 2003). For instance, Hamazaki and Tanno (2001) 130 found that citizens from whaling countries have more support for this activity than citizens 131 132 from non-whaling countries. Therefore, environmental knowledge and attitudes towards 133 conservation can vary among different populations (Schultz and Zelezny 2003). For these reasons, it is important to assess knowledge, awareness and attitudes of citizens towards 134 135 different environmental concerns, such as wildlife conservation, and evaluate how these can be influenced by demographic or cultural characteristics. 136

The main objective of this work is to study the role of tradition, knowledge and 137 awareness on attitudes towards engagement of citizens in protecting cetaceans and their 138 environment. We aim to test first the hypothesis that cultural heritage on the Cantabrian 139 coast implies higher levels of knowledge about cetaceans and whaling in people from 140 141 coastal areas, with respect to citizens living in inland provinces. Moreover, a secondary hypothesis to test is that there is a positive correlation between participants' knowledge 142 and positive attitudes towards cetacean conservation. Results from this study could help in 143 144 the design of more effective strategies for conservation and a sustainable management of marine resources. 145

#### 146 2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

## 147 **2.1** Identification of whaling ports and definition of study areas

148 Prior to the definition of study areas, an exhaustive literature review was conducted to identify all harbours that presented whaling settlements at some time between the 13<sup>th</sup> and 149 the 18<sup>th</sup> century along the Cantabrian coast (North of Spain; from Cape Ortegal, in Galicia, 150 151 to the French border). In addition, ports which presented Atalayas (look-out towers) to spot 152 whales were investigated, as well as towns which still have illustrations related to whaling 153 on their coats of arms. A total number of 50 whaling harbours were identified. At least 26 154 of them used to present look-out towers to spot whales. Moreover, nine towns where those ports are located still have illustrations related to whaling on their coats of arms (seven 155 situated in the Basque Country and two in Cantabria; Table 1). 156

Coastal study areas were established by selecting the whaling harbours that were more 157 frequently cited in the literature and grouping them into areas according to their proximity 158 (groups were formed by harbours located less than 20 km away). A total number of nine 159 study areas (comprising 17 whaling ports) were defined along the Cantabrian coast. Non-160 coastal study areas were established in regions that were at least 200 km away from the 161 coast, and 100 km away from each other. The selected inland areas correspond to 162 Salamanca, Valladolid and Madrid; which are located at a distance of 335km, 250km and 163 425km, respectively, to the closest Cantabrian port (Fig. 1). 164

165 Table 1

166 Ports along the Cantabrian coast that presented whaling settlements at some time between

167 the 13th and the 18th century. Harbours that presented look-out towers are highlighted and

168 harbours located in towns that still have whaling-related illustrations on their coats of arms are

169 marked with asterisks. Sources: Ciriquiain-Gaiztarro (1961), Castañón (1964), González-

170 Echegaray (1978), Azpiazu (2000), Escudero (2006), Ruano and Lonbide (2006), Unsain (2012)

171

Galicia	Asturias	Cantabria	<b>Basque Country</b>
Basma - Ría de Foz (Lugo)	Avilés	Castro Urdiales*	Bermeo (Vizcaya)*
Bares (A Coruña)	Bocines	Comillas	Deva (Guipúzcoa)
Burela (Lugo)	Cadavedo	Quejo	Elanchove (Vizcaya)
Nois (Lugo)	Candás	Laredo*	Fuenterrabía (Guipúzcoa)*
Ribadeo (Lugo)	Cudillero	San Vicente de la Barquera	Guetaria (Guipúzcoa)*
Rinlo (Lugo)	Entrellusa	Santander	Lequeitio (Vizcaya)*
San Ciprián (Lugo)	Figueras	San Martín de Arenas	Motrico (Guipúzcoa)*
	Gijón	Santoña	Ondárroa (Vizcaya)*
	Lastres	Uriambre	Orio (Guipúzcoa)
	Llanes		Pasajes (Guipúzcoa)
	Luanco		Plencia (Vizcaya)
	Luarca		San Sebastián (Guipúzcoa)
	Niembro		Zarauz (Guipúzcoa)*
	Ortiguera		Zumaya (Guipúzcoa)
	Puerto de Vega		
	Ribadesella		
	San Pedro de		
	Bocamar		
	Tapia de Casariego		
	Tazones		
	Viavélez		

172



173 Fig. 1 Map showing the location of the study areas. Each area is indicated by its174 corresponding number and includes from one to three sites, which are indicated by red dots

# 175 **2.2 Questionnaire design**

The questionnaire was divided into eight sections: 1) Demographic variables, 2) General knowledge about cetaceans, 3) Knowledge about the history of whaling in Spain, 4) Knowledge about current whaling, 5) Opinion towards whaling, 6) Opinion towards cetacean conservation, 7) Opinion on the current measures to protect cetaceans and 8) Willingness to take action in cetacean conservation. The complete questionnaire is included in Supplementary Materials A.

A total number of fourteen items were established, including optional follow-up questions, which were only asked when participants answered the first question affirmatively. For instance, the question 'Was there whaling in Spain in the past?' was 185 followed by other questions such as 'Where in Spain?' or 'Which was the main target 186 species?'

Five of the items included yes/no/don't know options, five were open questions and four were multiple choice questions, each of them with five possible answers. Some of the open and multiple choice questions were categorised as a 5- point Likert scale (Nardi 2015) and others had correct/incorrect/don't know answers. Furthermore, control questions were included to enhance the reliability of the survey. For example, the question 'Do you know what a cetacean is?' was followed by the question 'Could you give some examples of cetacean species?' which tested the truthfulness of the first answer.

The reliability of the questionnaire was estimated by calculating Omega coefficient (acceptable reliability was set at 0.7 following McDonald 1999). The validity was evaluated by conducting a pilot test on 20 individuals. In addition, a panel consisting of three experts in marine citizen science or public perception of marine conservation analysed the questions and the answers to ensure all items were unambiguous and easy to understand (Olson 2010).

200

### 2.3 Data collection and ethics statement

201 Face-to-face surveys were conducted from December 2018 to April 2019. Opportunistic sampling was used for the collection of data. Potential respondents were approached in a 202 friendly way and asked if they could answer a short anonymous survey for scientific 203 research purposes. Participants who verbally agreed to participate in the survey were 204 205 initially asked about the locality where they were from, and only citizens from the study 206 area were interviewed. The interviews were developed like a conversation and lasted no longer than ten minutes. All answers were recorded in writing. In addition, anecdotal 207 comments given by participants were also written down. All respondents were over 18 208

years old. A minimum number of 30 surveys per study area were conducted to ensure
statistical significance (Charmaz 2006). The total number of respondents per study area is
included in Supplementary Table S1.

Data confidentiality was ensured for all social data. All surveys were anonymous. Participants were not photographed and their voices were not recorded to respect privacy. This study was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the Principality of Asturias with reference number 79/19.

#### 216 **2.4 Data analysis**

217 Questionnaire responses were coded after their completion to allow a quantitative analysis. A total number of four indexes were established to cluster items related to the 218 same concept, corresponding to 'General knowledge about cetaceans' (Kc), 'Knowledge 219 about old whaling in Spain' (Kow), 'Knowledge about whaling in the present' (KPW) and 220 221 'Opinion towards whaling' (Ow) (Table 2). The rest of questions were analysed as an individual item, and were used to assess support for cetacean conservation, opinion on the 222 223 current measures to protect cetaceans and engagement in the protection of cetaceans, respectively. 224

In order to make appropriate comparisons, the values of all indexes and responses to individual questions were transformed into a 0-1 scale, with values closer to 1 indicating higher levels of knowledge, more positive attitudes towards cetacean conservation, and greater willingness to get involved in cetacean conservation, respectively, for each index/question. The control questions previously explained were included as part of the indexes used to assess knowledge, lowering the score of the index when the control question proved the first answer to be untrue.

11

232 Table 2

**Indexes and their corresponding formulas.**  $K_D$  = score of question 1;  $K_{SP}$  = score of question 1.1;  $K_{WP}$  = score of question 2;  $K_P$  = score of question 2.1;  $K_S$  = score of question 2.2;  $K_{CS}$  = score of question 2.3;  $K_E$  = score of question 2.4;  $K_{WN}$  = score of question 3;  $K_{PC}$  = score of question 3.1;  $O_G$  = score of question 4;  $O_R$  = score of question 4.1 (see Supplementary Materials A for corresponding questions).

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Index	Formula
General knowledge about cetaceans (K <sub>C</sub> )	$K_{\rm C} = K_{\rm D} \mathbf{x} \ K_{\rm SP}$
Knowledge about old whaling in Spain ( $K_{OW}$ )	$K_{\rm OW} = K_{\rm WP} \ x \ \frac{K_{\rm P} + K_{\rm S} + K_{\rm CS} + K_{\rm E}}{4}$
Knowledge about whaling in the present $(K_{PW})$	$K_{PW} = K_{WN} x K_{PC}$
Opinion towards whaling (O <sub>W</sub> )	$O_W = O_G X O_R$

239

Statistical data analyses were conducted using the program Past 3.20 (Hammer, Harper 240 and Ryan 2001) and IBM SPSS Statistics 25. The values of the calculated indexes and the 241 242 responses to individual questions not included in the indexes were taken into account for all analyses. Non-metric Multidimensional Scaling (nMDS) analyses were conducted to 243 check if the study groups corresponding to each area were clustered or if they were more or 244 less scattered across the plot (indicating similarities or differences between the responses 245 of each group, respectively). Euclidian distances were applied. The pairs of ranks were 246 plotted (Shepard plot) and stress of obtained over target ranks was calculated (<0.2 was 247 considered acceptable following Oksanen et al. 2019). Normality was checked using 248 Shapiro-Wilk test, in order to decide which statistical test was more appropriate for 249 250 comparisons among groups. Comparisons were made for all the established groups to

elucidate if there were any differences between study areas, age groups and/or genders. 251 252 These comparisons were carried out using one-way ANOVA (in case data followed a normal distribution) or Kruskal-Wallis (in case of significant deviation from normality). 253 254 When significant differences were detected, Dunn's post hoc test (Dunn 1964) was applied to determine which groups were different. Frequencies of all responses were calculated to 255 256 assess the profile of each study group. Pairwise correlations were analysed using 257 Spearman's rs (Spearman's rank correlation coefficient). Statistical significance was set at p < 0.05. Bonferroni correction of the significance level was applied for multiple 258 comparisons and correlations. 259

260 **3. RESULTS** 

# 261 **3.1 Demographics and survey reliability**

In total, 404 participants were interviewed, of which 208 were males (51.49%) and 196 females (48.51%). Additionally, 296 (73.27%) were citizens from areas located along the Cantabrian coast and 108 (26.73%) from non-coastal areas. The largest age group was between 31 and 60 years old (50.5%), followed by respondents over 60 years old (29.7%) and, finally, individuals between 18 and 30 years old (19.8%).

267 The obtained Omega coefficient value for the questionnaire was 0.75, which indicates268 a good level of reliability (McDonald 1999).

269 **3.2** 

# 3.2 Coastal vs. non-coastal regions

The surveys global analysis showed a clear difference in answers between coastal and non-coastal areas (Fig. 2). When comparing the answers to each question given by

participants from the Cantabrian coast with the ones of respondents from inland areas,several significant differences were detected (Fig. 3).



Fig. 2 Non-metric Multidimensional Scaling of the twelve study areas located in coastal
and non-coastal regions. A: Scatter plot. B: Shepard plot. Areas located along the
Cantabrian coast and in inland provinces are represented with dots and crosses, respectively.
The number of the area is given. C = coastal regions, NC = non-coastal regions. The stress value
of the Shepard plot is <0.2</li>

First, significant differences were found regarding the index 'General knowledge about cetaceans' (Kruskal-Wallis H (chi<sup>2</sup>) = 12.84; H<sub>c</sub> (tie corrected) = 14; p = 0.0002). Citizens from coastal regions showed lower levels of knowledge about cetaceans (K<sub>C</sub> =  $0.36 \pm 0.32$ ) than inhabitants of non-coastal areas (K<sub>C</sub> =  $0.49 \pm 0.35$ ). Although a similar proportion of participants from both groups affirmed to know what cetaceans are (84% vs. 83%, respectively), a lower number of individuals from coastal regions were able to give at least one example of cetacean species (53% vs. 67%, respectively).

The index 'Knowledge about old whaling in Spain' was also significantly different among coastal and inland areas (Kruskal-Wallis H = 22.61;  $H_c = 23.03$ ;  $p = 1.595 \times 10^{-6}$ ). Citizens from the North of Spain showed higher levels of knowledge about this topic (K<sub>OW</sub> =  $0.56 \pm 0.26$  vs. K<sub>OW</sub> =  $0.36 \pm 0.36$ , respectively). A larger proportion of them knew that there was whaling in Spain in the past (82% vs. 50%, respectively) and were able to mention at least one region in which this activity was carried out (74% vs. 34%, respectively).



Fig. 3 Mean and standard deviation of several aspects concerning public perception of 293 cetaceans and their conservation, in coastal and non-coastal areas.  $K_C$  = General knowledge 294 295 about cetaceans, K<sub>OW</sub> = Knowledge about old whaling in Spain, K<sub>PW</sub> = Knowledge about 296 whaling in the present,  $O_W = Opinion$  towards whaling. The obtained values of the indexes and 297 responses to individual questions were transformed into a 0-1 scale (going from lowest to 298 highest levels of knowledge, positive attitudes towards cetacean conservation and engagement, respectively). Significant differences are indicated with asterisks (\* p < 0.05, \*\* p < 0.01, \*\*\* p299 300 < 0.001)

Significant differences were found for the index 'Opinion towards whaling' (Kruskal-Wallis H = 4.59; H<sub>c</sub> = 5.63; p = 0.0177). Participants from the Cantabrian coast showed less opposition to whaling ( $O_W = 0.59 \pm 0.31$  vs.  $O_W = 0.67 \pm 0.29$ , respectively). Even though the majority of them affirmed to be against whaling, the proportion of participants 305 who supported this activity was higher than in non-coastal areas (25% vs. 8%,306 respectively).

The opinion towards the establishment of measures for the protection of whales and dolphins was also significantly different between respondents from the North of Spain and from inland provinces (Kruskal-Wallis H = 5.14; H<sub>c</sub> = 6.83; p = 0.0089). Although in both groups the greatest majority considered that it is very important or important to establish measures for the conservation of cetaceans, the proportion was lower in participants from the North of Spain (92% vs. 98%, respectively).

The final item for which significant differences were found was the willingness to engage in the protection of whales and dolphins (Kruskal-Wallis H = 8.87;  $H_c = 11.35$ ; p = 0.0007). The number of respondents who affirmed that they would collaborate in the conservation of cetaceans was lower on the Cantabrian coast than in non-coastal areas (52% vs. 71%, respectively).

Regarding knowledge about whaling in the present and opinion towards the current measures to protect whales and dolphins, no significant differences were found among citizens living in coastal and inland areas.

# **321 3.3 Public perception along the Cantabrian coast**

The mean value of the index 'General knowledge about cetaceans' for respondents residing in the North of Spain was  $K_C = 0.36 \pm 0.32$ , which indicates a low level of knowledge. Whereas 83% of participants affirmed to know what a cetacean is, only 53% were able to give at least one example of cetacean species and solely 2% knew four or more species.

In the case of 'Knowledge about old whaling in Spain', the mean value was Kow =  $0.56 \pm 0.26$ , indicating a moderate level of knowledge A percentage of 82% participants

from the Cantabrian coast asserted that there was whaling in Spain in the past. However, only 18% knew that this activity was carried out all over the North of Spain, while the majority (54%) were only aware of whaling activities that took place in the town where they live or places nearby. Solely 1% knew which the main target species was, but 49% believed that the species is currently endangered or extinct as a consequence of hunting. Finally, most respondents (69%) affirmed that whaling was economically important or very important.

336 Significant differences among the nine study areas on the Cantabrian coast were detected (Kruskal-Wallis H = 26.28; H<sub>c</sub> = 26.82; p = 0.0008). The groups that were 337 significantly different corresponded to areas 7 -Santoña and Laredo- and 8 -Plencia-338 339 (Dunn's post hoc p = 0.0444), as well as areas 7 and 9 - Lequeitio, Ondárroa and Motrico-340 (Dunn's post hoc p = 0.0037). Participants residing in areas 8 and 9 showed higher levels of knowledge about whaling in Spain in the past ( $K_{OW} = 0.62 \pm 0.28$ ;  $K_{OW} = 0.68 \pm 0.17$ , 341 342 respectively) than citizens from area 7 (Kow =  $0.42 \pm 0.29$ ). In general, Kow was higher in areas located in the Basque Country (8 and 9) than in the rest (Fig. 4A). With respect to the 343 other indexes and questions, no significant differences were found between areas along the 344 Cantabrian coast. The mean value and standard deviation obtained for each of them in each 345 346 study area are included in Supplementary Table S1.

The mean value of the index 'Knowledge about whaling in the present' was  $K_{PW} =$ 0.32 ± 0.25, which indicates a low level of knowledge. A proportion of 84% of the interviewed citizens from coastal areas affirmed that whaling activities are conducted nowadays. Even though half of them (51%) were aware of whaling activities taking place in Japan, only 6% knew that there is whaling in Norway and 1% were aware of this activity being conducted in Iceland.

Regarding the index 'Opinion towards whaling', the mean value was  $O_W = 0.59 \pm$ 353 354 0.31, indicating moderate opposition to whaling. Almost two thirds (65%) of participants from coastal regions asserted that they are against whaling. Less than one fourth (22%) 355 supported whaling only under certain regulations and solely 3% were completely in favour 356 of this activity. Furthermore, 92% affirmed that establishing measures to protect whales 357 and dolphins is very important or important. A percentage of 57% believed that the current 358 359 measures to protect whales and dolphins are not sufficient or very insufficient and no more than 10% asserted that they are sufficient or that cetaceans are overprotected. 360

Lastly, 52% of respondents residing on the Cantabrian coast affirmed that they would be willing to contribute to the protection of whales and dolphins (by participating in campaigns, volunteering, doing donations to associations, etc.) and 47% said they would not contribute (40% because they were not interested and 7% due to lack of time, physical incapacity or economic difficulties).

366 Significant differences were found between females and males concerning the three knowledge indexes:  $K_C$  (Kruskal-Wallis H = 4.13;  $H_c = 4.56$ ; p = 0.0327), Kow (Kruskal-367 Wallis H = 15.6;  $H_c = 15.92$ ;  $p = 6.596 \times 10^{-5}$ ) and  $K_{PW}$  (Kruskal-Wallis H = 12.79;  $H_c =$ 368 14.1; p = 0.0002). In all cases, males showed higher levels of knowledge than females. 369 Moreover, the opinion towards the establishment of measures to protect whales and 370 dolphins was also significantly different between genders (Kruskal-Wallis H = 4.09;  $H_c =$ 371 372 5.24; p = 0.022). In this case, females showed stronger support for conservation than men (Fig. 4B). 373

Significant differences were found between age groups regarding Kc (Kruskal-Wallis H = 11.57;  $H_c = 12.77$ ; p = 0.0017). Middle-aged participants (31-60 years old) demonstrated higher levels of general knowledge about cetaceans than younger (18-30 years old; Dunn's post hoc p = 0.0013) and older respondents (>60 years old; Dunn's post

hoc p = 0.0154). Significant differences between age groups were also found concerning 378 379 the opinion towards the establishment of conservation measures to protect cetaceans (Kruskal-Wallis H = 7.85;  $H_c = 10.06$ ; p = 0.0065) as well as regarding willingness to 380 contribute to cetacean conservation (Kruskal-Wallis H = 10.77;  $H_c = 13.34$ ; p = 0.0013). 381 Citizens older than 60 years of age showed less support for cetacean conservation than 382 middle-aged (Dunn's post hoc p = 0.0352) and young individuals (Dunn's post hoc p =383 384 0.0151). Moreover, they were less willing to engage in the protection of whales and dolphins than middle-aged (Dunn's post hoc p = 0.0264) and young respondents (Dunn's 385 post hoc p = 0.0019) (Fig. 4C). 386

The three knowledge indexes (K<sub>C</sub>, K<sub>OW</sub> and K<sub>PW</sub>) were positively correlated. 387 388 Correlations between the different sections of the survey are presented in Table 3. 389 Furthermore, Ow, the opinion towards the establishment of cetacean conservation 390 measures and the opinion towards the current measures to protect cetaceans were also 391 positively correlated. Even though there was a positive correlation between the two questions concerning measures to protect whales and dolphins and participants' 392 willingness to engage in cetacean conservation, there was no correlation between Ow and 393 engagement. 394







396 Fig. 4 Mean and standard deviation of several aspects concerning public perception of 397 cetaceans and their conservation, in study areas located along the Cantabrian coast (A), 398 females and males (B) and age groups (C).  $K_C$  = General knowledge about cetaceans,  $K_{OW}$  = Knowledge about old whaling in Spain,  $K_{PW}$  = Knowledge about whaling in the present,  $O_W$  = 399 400 Opinion towards whaling. The obtained values of the indexes and responses to individual questions 401 were transformed into a 0-1 scale (going from lowest to highest levels of knowledge, positive 402 attitudes towards cetacean conservation and engagement, respectively). Significant differences are indicated with asterisks (\* p < 0.05, \*\* p < 0.01, \*\*\* p < 0.001). A: asterisks indicate which areas 403 404 are significantly different from area 7. C: asterisks indicate which of the three age groups is 405 significantly different from the others for each section

406 **Table 3** 

407 Pairwise Spearman's rs correlation results for participants residing along the Cantabrian 408 coast. The rs and p values are above and below the diagonal, respectively. Significant 409 correlations (after Bonferroni correction) are indicated in bold and significant p values are marked with asterisks (\*\*\* p < 0.001). General knowledge about cetaceans (K<sub>C</sub>), knowledge 410 411 about old whaling in Spain (Kow), knowledge about whaling in the present (KPW), opinion 412 towards whaling (O<sub>W</sub>), opinion about the importance of establishing conservation measures to 413 protect cetaceans, opinion towards the current cetacean conservation measures and willingness 414 to collaborate in whale and dolphin conservation are shown

415

	K <sub>C</sub>	K <sub>OW</sub>	K <sub>PW</sub>	O <sub>W</sub>	Conservation	Current measures	Engagement
K <sub>C</sub>		0.3248	0.3441	0.0215	0.0867	0.0883	0.0717
K <sub>OW</sub>	2.24x10 <sup>-3</sup> ***		0.2998	0.0371	0.1756	0.0796	0.1704
K <sub>PW</sub>	2.48x10 <sup>-4***</sup>	3.07x10 <sup>-2***</sup>		0.0201	0.0958	0.0514	0.0786
Ow	1	1	1		0.2967	0.2667	0.1249
Conservation	1	0.051	1	4.16x10 <sup>-2</sup> ***		0.4122	0.3125
Current measures	1	1	1	6.84x10 <sup>-1</sup> ***	3.03x10 <sup>-8</sup> ***		0.3424
Engagement	1	0.0688	1	0.6633	8.30x10 <sup>-3</sup> ***	3.03x10 <sup>-4</sup> ***	

416

#### 417 4. DISCUSSION

In this study, face-to-face surveys were used to provide insights into public perception 418 towards cetaceans and whaling on the Cantabrian coast and assess differences with respect 419 420 to areas without whaling tradition. Questionnaires are the most widely used data collection method for evaluating human behavior (White et al. 2005; Radhakrishna 2007, Rowley 421 422 2014), such as perceptions or attitudes towards conservation (Kerr and Cullen 1995; Obiri and Lawes 2002; White et al. 1997, 2005). Nevertheless, the use of questionnaires may 423 424 include several limitations, which should be taken into account for a correct interpretation 425 of the results. In this work, some additional demographic variables, such as educational level, occupation or income level, could have played a role in the obtained results. The 426 427 educational level was initially included in the survey. However, numerous participants 428 were reluctant to provide this information and, consequently, this question was removed from the questionnaire. This might represent a drawback of face-to-face surveys, in which 429 the presence of an interviewer can make respondents feel less anonymous and avoid 430 431 answering certain personal questions (Duffy et al. 2005).

432 More specifically, the educational level could have influenced the results obtained when comparing coastal and non-coastal areas. The selected inland areas have a bigger 433 population size, which could imply an overall higher educational level. This could explain 434 the higher levels of general knowledge about cetaceans observed in non-coastal areas (Fig. 435 3). Nevertheless, participants from coastal regions showed higher levels of knowledge 436 about whaling in the past. This evidences the importance of the historical and cultural 437 tradition related to this activity along the Cantabrian coast. Furthermore, most of the 438 interviewees were only aware of whaling activities that took place in the town where they 439 live or areas nearby, which indicates the relevance of whaling as local cultural heritage. 440

Citizens from non-coastal areas exhibited stronger opposition to whaling, stronger 441 support for cetacean conservation and greater willingness to engage in the protection of 442 443 whales and dolphins (Fig. 3). This might indicate that culture plays an important role in the perception towards cetaceans of individuals from areas with or without whaling tradition. 444 However, this finding could also be related to higher levels of education in the selected 445 inland areas. Despite it being hard to determine which factor is the main driver of this 446 447 difference, the absence of a correlation between the established knowledge indexes and more positive attitudes towards conservation (Table 3) might indicate that the influence of 448 449 education in all these aspects is low. In addition, several of the anecdotal comments given 450 by participants from the Cantabrian coast express their view of cetaceans as resources, 451 which has been transmitted through generations. For example, some participants affirmed they still consume dolphin meat. Similarly, previous studies observed more positive 452 453 attitudes towards hunting whales in whaling than in non-whaling countries, which has been attributed to cultural differences and the view of whales as consumptive resources 454 (Freeman and Kellert 1994; Hamazaki and Tanno 2001). Although support for whaling is 455 notably higher in regions where whaling is conducted nowadays than on the Cantabrian 456 457 coast, the findings of this study indicate, as stated by Nagasaki and Misaki (1994), that 458 public views of cetaceans and whaling are reflections of sociocultural circumstances.

In coastal areas, participants living in the Basque Country showed higher levels of knowledge about old whaling than citizens from other study areas (Fig. 4A). This can be explained by the fact that the Basques were not only among the pioneers of this activity (Aguilar 1986), but also the last commercial whalers on the Cantabrian coast (Gracia-Cárcamo 1996; Azpiazu 2000; Escudero 2006). Moreover, the highest value of Kow was found in towns that still present whaling illustrations on their coats of arms (Lequeitio, Ondárroa and Motrico, corresponding to Area 9), which was indicated by several respondents and probably has an influence on the higher levels of historical knowledge ofthe inhabitants of these areas.

468 It is remarkable that the proportion of participants who knew that old whaling in Spain had a great economic importance was higher than the one corresponding to those who were 469 470 aware of its consequences. Nowadays, the North Atlantic Right Whale is catalogued as critically endangered by IUCN (Cooke 2020) and has practically disappeared from its 471 472 North-East Atlantic distribution. Accordingly, almost two thirds of respondents who knew 473 about old whaling believed the target species is currently endangered or extinct as a consequence of this activity, but there was still more than one third who affirmed it had no 474 negative consequences or ignored the effects it had on the whale population. This could be 475 476 explained by the transmission of whaling as a heroic activity related to bravery, rather than 477 an activity with serious environmental consequences.

A previous study about public perception of cetaceans carried out in different 478 countries around the world (Naylor and Parsons 2018) found that more than half of 479 480 respondents were aware of whaling operations being currently conducted in Japan, whereas only a small proportion indicated other countries where whaling is conducted. Similarly, 481 slightly more than half of participants of our study were aware of whaling taking place in 482 Japan, while less than a tenth knew this activity is also conducted in Norway and Iceland. 483 Despite not having high levels of knowledge about cetaceans and whaling, the majority of 484 485 participants showed positive attitudes towards whale and dolphin conservation. Almost two thirds of respondents affirmed to be against whaling, more than 90% asserted that it is 486 very important or important to establish measures to protect whales and dolphins and more 487 488 than a half stated that current cetacean conservation measures are not sufficient or very insufficient. This overall public concern about cetacean conservation has been previously 489 observed in other places of the world (Scott and Parsons 2005; Howard and Parsons 2006; 490

491 Luksenburg and Parsons 2014; Naylor and Parsons 2018). Our findings show, in 492 congruence with Naylor and Parsons (2018), that knowledge is not a prerequisite of 493 positive attitudes towards cetacean conservation, which might be related to the general 494 vision of whales and dolphins as charismatic animals.

495 Congruent with previous findings of Hamazaki and Tanno (2001), stronger opinions against whaling were correlated with more support for the establishment of cetacean 496 conservation measures and the belief that current measures are insufficient (Table 3). 497 498 However, we did not observe a correlation between any of the three knowledge indexes and positive attitudes towards conservation, as we hypothesized and contrary to the results 499 of other studies (Barney et al. 2005; Flamm 2006). This might be explained by the overall 500 501 conservation concern that was observed for most participants, regardless of their level of 502 knowledge. Furthermore, the majority of participants affirmed that whaling had high 503 economic importance, which can lead to a more positive perception of whaling and the 504 view of whales as resources, as it was commented by several citizens.

505 Consistent with these findings, results did not show a correlation between any of the three knowledge indexes and engagement in cetacean conservation (Table 3). This 506 knowledge-action gap has been observed by other authors, indicating that behavioural 507 responses are influenced by other factors, such as attitudes, culture or demographic 508 variables (Kollmuss and Agyeman 2002; Friedrich et al. 2014). On the other hand, we 509 510 observed a positive correlation between the two questions about conservation measures and engagement. This demonstrates, as stated by Flamm (2006), that attitude is further 511 connected to behaviour. Nevertheless, stronger opposition to whaling was not correlated to 512 513 taking action to protect cetaceans. In addition, the proportion of participants who showed positive attitudes towards cetacean conservation was greater than the one corresponding to 514 those who declared to be willing to engage in the protection of these animals, which 515

indicates that positive attitudes towards conservation are not always sufficient for citizensto contribute to the protection of whales and dolphins.

518 When analysing demographic factors, significant differences between females and males residing on the Cantabrian coast were found (Fig. 4B). Males showed higher levels 519 of knowledge than females regarding cetaceans, old whaling and current whaling. 520 Nevertheless, females demonstrated stronger support for the establishment of measures to 521 protect whales and dolphins. This is consistent with previous studies, which found that, 522 523 even though men generally have more knowledge about wildlife, females have more concern regarding the protection of animals and value them as objects of affection (Kellert 524 and Berry 1987; Miller and McGee 2000; Naylor and Parsons 2018). 525

526 In this study, middle-aged participants showed higher levels of general knowledge 527 about cetaceans than young interviewees (Fig. 4C). Similarly, Barney et al. (2005) found higher levels of knowledge about bottlenose dolphins in older than younger respondents. 528 However, in our case, citizens older than 60 years of age showed less knowledge than 529 530 middle-aged individuals. Moreover, the oldest group demonstrated less support for the establishment of conservation measures, as well as less willingness to engage in cetacean 531 conservation, than middle-aged and young citizens. This might be related to the perception 532 that they do not have the appropriate physical conditions to participate in campaigns or 533 volunteering activities, according to the personal comments of several participants. 534

In accordance with previous studies (Steel et al. 2005; Scott and Parsons 2004), our results show that there is little knowledge about the marine environment among the general public. This has been attributed mainly to a lack of information available to citizens, which should be improved by implementing more marine education programs (Steel et al. 2005; Castle, Fletcher and McKinley 2010). Despite increasing public general knowledge about cetaceans and whaling activities is important, our findings indicate that this would not

further result in greater engagement in cetacean conservation. According to the concept of 541 542 marine citizenship, individuals who take responsibility towards the protection of the ocean 543 exhibit awareness of the marine environment and its issues, an understanding of the impacts of personal behaviour on the marine environment and motivation to change 544 personal behaviour to reduce their impact on the marine environment (McKinley & 545 546 Fletcher 2010). Therefore, in order to increase citizens' engagement in cetacean 547 conservation, it is important to raise awareness of the threats cetaceans are currently exposed to, such as collisions with ships, by-catch, reduction of fish stocks, anthropogenic 548 noise, habitat loss, pollution and climate change (e.g. Murphy et al. 2015; Dolman et al. 549 550 2016; Jepson et al. 2016; Pennino et al. 2017; Dolman and Brakes 2018; Sheppard 2018). Furthermore, and more importantly, it is necessary to increase citizens' understanding of 551 552 the importance of the role of each individual in addressing marine environmental issues 553 and promote motivation and positives attitudes towards the protection of cetaceans and the marine ecosystem. 554

## 555 **5. CONCLUSIONS**

Citizens from the Cantabrian coast have higher levels of knowledge about old whaling 556 in Spain than individuals from non-coastal regions of this country. Therefore, traditional 557 whaling has major cultural importance in areas where it used to be conducted. The 558 majority of participants of this study showed strong support for cetacean conservation, 559 independently of their level of knowledge about these animals. However, less positive 560 attitudes towards the protection of whales and dolphins and lower opposition to whaling 561 562 were observed on the Cantabrian coast than in inland regions. This could indicate that inhabitants of areas with whaling tradition tend to have more positive views of this 563 activity. Overall, public engagement in cetacean conservation is influenced by different 564

factors, such as attitudes, cultural tradition and age. In order to increase engagement, it is necessary to promote awareness of current marine environmental issues, the behaviours citizens can change to contribute to the protection of whales and dolphins and the importance of the role of each individual in cetacean conservation.

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### Supplementary Materials A. Survey used to evaluate public perception of cetaceans.

Gender:	М	F	0	Locality:
Age:	18-30	31-60	>60	Date:

1. Do you know what a cetacean is? Yes No

1.1 Could you give some examples of cetacean species?

- 2. Was there whaling in Spain in the past? Yes No I don't know
  - 2.1 Where in Spain?
  - 2.2 Which was the main target species?
  - 2.3 What consequences did whaling have on this species?
    - A. The species became extinct.
    - B. The species is endangered.
    - C. It served as control and decreased the species' overpopulation.
    - D. It had no consequences.
    - E. I don't know.

2.4 How economically important was whaling?

3. Is whaling currently conducted somewhere in the world? Yes No I don't know

3.1 Where?

4. Do you support whaling? Yes No I don't know

4.1 Why?

5. How important do you think it is to establish measures to protect whales and dolphins?

Very important Important	Slightly imp.	It is not imp.	I don't know
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- 6. Do you think the current measures to protect whales and dolphins are sufficient?
  - A. Yes, in fact, whales and dolphins are overprotected.
  - B. Yes, they are sufficient.
  - C. They are not sufficient.
  - D. They are very insufficient.
  - E. I don't know.
- 7. Would you be willing to contribute somehow in the protection of whales and dolphins (campaigns, volunteering, donations...)? Yes No I don't know

The provided information is voluntary and completely anonymous. The data obtained in this survey will be used for scientific research exclusively.

### **Supplementary Table S1**

Number of respondents per study area and summary statistics obtained for each section of the questionnaire. N = number of respondents.  $K_C =$  General knowledge about cetaceans,  $K_{OW} =$  Knowledge about old whaling in Spain,  $K_{PW} =$  Knowledge about whaling in the present,  $O_W =$  Opinion towards whaling. SD = Standard Deviation. SE = Standard Error. Min = Minimum value. Max = Maximum value. The obtained values of the indexes and responses to individual questions were transformed into a 0-1 scale (going from lowest to highest levels of knowledge, positive attitudes towards cetacean conservation and engagement, respectively). Area 1: San Ciprián and Burela; 2: Puerto de Vega and Luarca; 3: Luanco and Candás; 4: Tazones and Lastres; 5: Llanes; 6 San Vicente de la Barquera and Comillas; 7: Santoña and Laredo; 8 Plencia; 9: Lequeitio, Ondárroa and Motrico; 10: Salamanca; 11: Valladolid; 12: Madrid

4 100	Kc Kow											Kpw				Conservation						sures		Engagement												
Area	IN	Mean	SD	SE	Min	Max	Mean	SD	SE	Min	Max	Mean	SD	SE	Min	Max	Mean	SD	SE	Min	Max	Mean	SD	SE	Min	Max	Mean	SD	SE	Min	Max	Mean	SD	SE	Min	Max
1	32	0.32	0.32	0.06	0.00	0.75	0.51	0.25	0.04	0.00	0.92	0.30	0.26	0.05	0.00	1.00	0.54	0.35	0.06	0.00	1.00	0.75	0.34	0.06	0.00	1.00	0.51	0.46	0.08	0.00	1.00	0.52	0.26	0.05	0.25	1.00
2	37	0.29	0.31	0.05	0.00	0.75	0.59	0.22	0.04	0.00	0.92	0.20	0.23	0.04	0.00	0.75	0.58	0.36	0.06	0.00	1.00	0.89	0.19	0.03	0.25	1.00	0.58	0.39	0.06	0.00	1.00	0.50	0.24	0.04	0.25	0.75
3	35	0.46	0.32	0.05	0.00	1.00	0.60	0.25	0.04	0.00	0.92	0.30	0.25	0.04	0.00	1.00	0.55	0.34	0.06	0.00	1.00	0.87	0.14	0.02	0.50	1.00	0.63	0.42	0.07	0.00	1.00	0.60	0.24	0.04	0.00	0.75
4	33	0.45	0.32	0.06	0.00	1.00	0.60	0.24	0.04	0.00	0.92	0.37	0.25	0.04	0.00	0.75	0.61	0.23	0.04	0.00	0.75	0.77	0.28	0.05	0.00	1.00	0.55	0.41	0.07	0.00	1.00	0.57	0.24	0.04	0.25	0.75
5	32	0.30	0.33	0.06	0.00	0.75	0.48	0.28	0.05	0.00	0.92	0.33	0.23	0.04	0.00	1.00	0.59	0.35	0.06	0.00	1.00	0.86	0.14	0.02	0.50	1.00	0.60	0.39	0.07	0.00	1.00	0.53	0.26	0.05	0.00	0.75
6	32	0.34	0.35	0.06	0.00	1.00	0.52	0.28	0.05	0.00	0.92	0.32	0.24	0.04	0.00	0.75	0.57	0.31	0.05	0.00	1.00	0.85	0.19	0.03	0.25	1.00	0.52	0.37	0.07	0.00	1.00	0.48	0.26	0.05	0.25	1.00
7	31	0.35	0.28	0.05	0.00	1.00	0.42	0.29	0.05	0.00	0.92	0.33	0.29	0.05	0.00	1.00	0.55	0.32	0.06	0.00	1.00	0.83	0.31	0.05	0.00	1.00	0.52	0.43	0.08	0.00	1.00	0.51	0.26	0.05	0.00	0.75
8	31	0.35	0.33	0.06	0.00	1.00	0.62	0.28	0.05	0.00	1.00	0.35	0.24	0.04	0.00	1.00	0.64	0.26	0.05	0.00	1.00	0.93	0.12	0.02	0.75	1.00	0.53	0.44	0.08	0.00	1.00	0.48	0.27	0.05	0.00	1.00
9	33	0.33	0.33	0.06	0.00	0.75	0.68	0.17	0.03	0.25	0.92	0.36	0.22	0.04	0.00	0.75	0.67	0.28	0.05	0.00	1.00	0.89	0.14	0.02	0.50	1.00	0.51	0.44	0.08	0.00	1.00	0.52	0.24	0.04	0.25	0.75
10	37	0.47	0.34	0.06	0.00	1.00	0.49	0.34	0.06	0.00	1.00	0.27	0.23	0.04	0.00	0.75	0.70	0.26	0.04	0.00	1.00	0.94	0.11	0.02	0.75	1.00	0.62	0.43	0.07	0.00	1.00	0.66	0.21	0.03	0.25	1.00
11	35	0.49	0.32	0.05	0.00	1.00	0.37	0.36	0.06	0.00	1.00	0.31	0.26	0.04	0.00	1.00	0.64	0.31	0.05	0.00	1.00	0.95	0.12	0.02	0.50	1.00	0.65	0.35	0.06	0.00	1.00	0.59	0.23	0.04	0.00	0.75
12	36	0.52	0.38	0.06	0.00	1.00	0.21	0.33	0.06	0.00	0.92	0.25	0.25	0.04	0.00	0.75	0.67	0.30	0.05	0.00	1.00	0.85	0.19	0.03	0.00	1.00	0.44	0.45	0.08	0.00	1.00	0.60	0.23	0.04	0.25	0.75