

SYMPOSIUM OUTCOMES

VOICES FROM THE OCEAN - LESSONS FROM THE WHALES

INTRODUCTION

The following recommendations were agreed by an international symposium on the opportunities for building local, sustainable “blue” tourism and combating the threats to marine mammals in the Caribbean, held at Sainte-Luce, Martinique, 18-21 February 2010. The more than 40 participants, from 22 countries, included representatives of the whale watching industry worldwide, scientists, educators, civil society groups, experts, journalists, and national and international NGOs. The experiences shared and lessons learned from whale watching operations and long-term benign scientific research carried out in several countries of the Wider Caribbean Region, the Pacific Islands, the Indian Ocean and the Americas, informed the discussions and gave rise to the recommendations contained herein.

In addition to these recommendations, the symposium also agreed two public statements by consensus. The first of these, an appeal to Caribbean Governments to support the development of well-regulated whale watching as a contribution to local livelihoods and marine conservation efforts, was issued at the end of the symposium as a media release. The full text is attached as Annex 1. The second public statement was an Open Letter to the International Whaling Commission (IWC) members and observers attending a meeting of the IWC’s Small Working Group in St Pete Beach, Florida, USA, 2-4 March 2010. This letter was transmitted to delegates at the start of the Florida meeting, and is attached here as Annex 2.

PREAMBLE

This symposium, dedicated to promoting the conservation of whales and to identifying appropriate strategies for developing “blue tourism” in the Wider Caribbean Region (WCR) through properly regulated marine mammal observation activities, was the first of its kind to be held in the region in celebration of the International Year of Biodiversity.

The symposium ascertained that whale watching, when carefully regulated and backed by a sound education and public awareness programme involving the local communities in which it is based, does and can provide considerable benefits to the tourism industries of Caribbean countries at a time when tourism has become the most important single contributor to their economies.

Whale watching in conjunction with non-lethal, long-term research in some countries is furthermore providing valuable information on the Region’s cetaceans, their behaviour, migrations and population structure, contributing to the fulfilment of national commitments regarding international biodiversity goals and to improving knowledge of the Region’s marine biodiversity.

National sanctuaries and protected areas can be powerful catalysts for increased awareness, education, funding, international collaboration and tourism, and the Caribbean is no exception. They are in the economic interest of Caribbean countries,

and their support for these areas would enhance their image as environmentally friendly and responsible.

Threats to marine mammals are, as in other regions, numerous and not always well understood. The effects of a changing climate on migrations, food supplies, breeding patterns, ecosystem relationships and health are still to be determined but make precautionary approach to any, even non-lethal, use of marine mammals a prerequisite. In addition, human-induced pollution, both land-based and at sea, acoustic disturbances, vessel traffic through migration routes, and other threats compound the risks.

The symposium welcomed the Action Plan for the Conservation of Marine Mammals (MMAP) approved and adopted by the Thirteenth Intergovernmental Meeting on the UNEP Action Plan for the Caribbean Environment Programme and the Tenth Meeting of the Contracting Parties to the Convention for the Protection and Development of the Marine Environment of the Wider Caribbean Region in St. John's, Antigua and Barbuda on the 12 September 2008, and expressed support for its goals and for the framework that it provides to advance marine mammal conservation and observation in the Region.

The symposium also recognised the important and long-standing contributions made by NGOs and the private sector to advancing these goals, and to building a harmonious relationship between these majestic creatures and the peoples of the Caribbean to the benefit of all.

The Conseil Régional de la Martinique (CR) and their Comité Martiniquais de Tourisme (CMT) were urged to call on France within the context of ACP/EU agreements to take up all of the recommendations.

In furtherance of all of the above, the symposium agreed by consensus the following recommendations.

A PLEA FOR HAITI

The meeting received a first-hand account of the disastrous effects of the January 2010 earthquake on Haiti from Mr Exil Lucienna of the Haitian Ministry of the Environment and expressed its deepest sympathy and strongest solidarity with the people of Haiti.

The Symposium took note that while humanitarian aid, and relief and reconstruction efforts, are vital to the rebuilding of Haiti and the improvement of the quality of life of the Haitian people, assistance in continuing and furthering developing Haiti's 1999 Plan of Action for the Environment is also important for the country's progress.

The Symposium also took note of the need of the Haitian Government for assistance in building national capacity for devising, managing, regulating and implementing environmental projects, including ones related to biodiversity, in the interest of Haiti and the wider international community.

1. The Symposium therefore recommended that the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), other IGO's and NGOs respond to the expressed need of the

Haitian Government for capacity building, and that, in doing so, they work with the Haitian Ministry of Environment to coordinate their cooperation for the most efficient and effective delivery of technical and financial assistance, including for training at all levels (e.g. University scholarships, short-term courses and on-site training) and a conservation programme for all terrestrial and marine species including financial support to the local population.

2. Urge all countries in the region to work through regional organizations such as the Cartagena Convention and its Protocol concerning Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife (SPA) to ensure inclusion of Haiti in programmes of education, research, training, restoration etc. in an effort to help with ecological conservation and restoration and environmental health, the provision of technical and financial assistance for training and capacity building with regard to project development relative to marine life conservation as an economic lever for communities and explore how best programmes may be developed to create a “blue tourism” element into the revival and survival of Haitians.

The Symposium further recommends that action be taken by the relevant stakeholders to:

WHALE WATCHING and REGULATION OF THIS ACTIVITY

3. Ensure a precautionary approach with regard to the expansion and management of whale watching in the Wider Caribbean through the development of common regional guidelines, using existing models such as those mediated by the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) in the Pacific Islands region, for marine mammal observation, which may be proposed to the upcoming SPAW/MMAP workshop in 2011;
4. Use the following over-arching principles to guide the development of regional guidelines for the Wider Caribbean Region:
 - Ensure the conservation of cetaceans and their habitats in the Wider Caribbean Region;
 - Ensure a precautionary approach to the development and management of whale-watching in the region;
 - Minimise the impact of whale-watching activities on cetacean populations in the region;
 - Provide long-term benefits for the livelihood of local communities;
 - Promote local knowledge and understanding of marine mammals and the marine environment through training, education and dedicated research.
5. Take into account local specificities for sustainable, responsible whale watching, including enhanced involvement by local communities, and that they therefore ensure that measures are included in any regional guidelines that will provide for:
 - a. The engagement of community based, local operators and guides
 - b. Compliance with local and national guidelines or regulations
 - c. Education, research and marine conservation projects and programmes

- d. Capacity-building through partnerships and training programs, including in fishing communities
6. Support the development of pioneer work in new communities wishing to embrace marine mammal conservation projects - especially in pro-whaling countries, through training and vigorous public awareness outreach and education programs;
7. Minimise the impact of whale watching activities on cetacean populations, their habitats and breeding zones so that local communities through indirect and direct involvement in this industry may derive long-term benefits;
8. Stress the need for marine mammal education for pleasure craft and tourists, including information on regulations, for example as in the ECCEA pamphlet <http://www.eccea.org>, and ensure the inclusion of such communications in local and international tourist guides.
9. Promote local knowledge and understanding of marine mammals and the marine environment through training, education and dedicated research.

CONSERVATION AND USERS OF THE SEA

10. Urge all Governments of the Wider Caribbean Region, which have not yet done so to ratify the UNEP Protocol Concerning Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife (SPA) and the Protocol Concerning Pollution from Land-Based Sources and Activities (LBS) and launch the implementation of the Marine Mammal Action Plan (MMAP).
11. Invite all CARICOM member states and Parties to the SPAW Protocol to address the issue of pollution and contaminants that can affect marine mammal health and that of humans and in this perspective support the venue of a dedicated contaminants workshop.
12. Urge the promotion of transparent interaction between users of the sea in order to reduce threats to marine mammals and to share information in relation to seismic testing, oil and gas exploration and shipping lane conflict with migration routes for large cetaceans.
13. Prioritize the assessment of submarine acoustic threat through the creation of pilot projects.

SANCTUARIES

14. Encourage support from institutions and civil society for on-going initiatives to establish new national sanctuaries and encourage the linkages between existing sanctuaries in order to protect transboundary species.
15. Urge the Governments of the U.K. and the U.S.A. to join France and the Netherlands Antilles in the Caribbean to work jointly and in a coordinated manner with other island nations on the promotion and extension of marine mammal sanctuaries such as "Agoa" so that in the future these zones will become a linked Caribbean wide Marine Mammal Sanctuary.

NON-LETHAL RESEARCH

16. Urge WCR environmental ministries and agencies to enforce a policy of non-lethal research on marine mammals and include cetacean research and conservation among their priorities, given the importance of cetaceans as a natural heritage of potential economic benefit to the Caribbean nations
17. Urge the Standardization of protocols, training of veterinarians and encourage data exchange among photo identification programs and stranding networks in the WCR as recommended by the UNEP/SPAW MMAP.

PUBLIC OUTREACH

18. Urge the dedication of more resources to media outreach and to informing opinion-making groups in the WCR on the benefits of whale watching versus whale hunting and on the importance of marine biodiversity conservation in general.
19. Underline the benefits of current marine mammal and ocean life conservation programmes through a targeted media campaign inside Japan with the objective of improving marine mammal conservation and enhancing relationships within and outside that country.

FUNDING

20. Encourage governments and the private sector to work cooperatively to identify projects regarding the development of sustainable 'blue' tourism, conduct feasibility studies intended to leverage funding from international and regional financial institutions and the private sector, and provide expertise to see such projects through. Additional projects could include those designed to preserve marine life and biodiversity and those which target marine mammal habitats, migration corridors, breeding and feeding grounds and the monitoring of sustainable activities within marine protected areas (MPA's) and sanctuaries in the WCR.