



INTERNATIONAL WHALING COMMISSION

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RESEARCH PROPOSAL REQUEST

1. RELEVANT AGENDA ITEM (NO. AND TITLE)

WW ITEM 10. Consider Emerging Whalewatching Industries of Concern

2. PROJECT TITLE

Emerging whale watching industry in Oman

3. BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT AND WHY IT IS NECESSARY TO SUB-COMMITTEE

In 2013, the sub-committee **recommended** that, given the precarious status of the Arabian Sea humpback whale population and the potential for growth of unregulated whale watching in the region, whale watch vessel operator training workshops should be conducted with a view to promoting best practice for whale watching and to aid the interpretation and implementation of revised whale watching guidelines.

The goals of the three year project (2013 to 2016) are to improve, educate and stimulate the emerging cetacean watching industry in Oman, especially in areas where Arabian Sea humpback whales are sighted. The ultimate outcome is to raise the standards and economic viability of cetacean watching tourism in Oman in order to actively support conservation of cetaceans and their habitat by:

- maximising industry benefits;
- enhancing industry standards;
- minimising impacts to cetaceans; and
- obtaining information on cetaceans distribution and occurrence.

Year 1 (2013-14)

A series of workshops held over the past year focused on delivering and demonstrating whale and dolphin watching guidelines and featured on-water training sessions. A poster and boat sticker were designed and distributed to operators, promoting the guidelines. The Ministries of Tourism, Fisheries Wealth, Agriculture and Environment and Climate Affairs were consulted in the process and visited with operators in Muscat, Salalah and Dhofar. Positive feedback and request for further training was received from many participants. In support of the objective to promote data collection from whale-watching vessels, the research team has received 17 sighting records of humpback whales since February from an operator involved in the initiative, providing valuable records to the Oman Whale and Dolphin sightings catalogue. Continued funding support is requested to consolidate this work, including development of an Oman Whalewatchers Association to make

the initiative self-sustaining, and to focus specific training on operators in the Halaniyat Islands, where they are interacting with Arabian Sea humpback whales.

Tasks for Years 2 and 3 (2015 and 2016)

To promote a responsible and sustainable approach to dolphin/whale watching by:

- continuing hands-on training of operators by area and priority species;
- identifying a liaison among operators who will represent the industry to continue to monitor guidelines and compliance. It also is intended that the liaison position will work the Ministries to identify resources for carrying capacity assessment and subsequent regulation of the industry;
- continuing to support the data collection process during training exercises to increase knowledge of cetacean occurrence for science and management;
- discussing the development of a cooperative of operators with mutual benefit to all members

4. TIMETABLE

January 2015 to December 2016

5. RESEARCHERS' NAME(S)

Principal Investigator: Rob Baldwin, 5-Oceans Environmental Services

- Suuad Al Harthi, ESO
- Carole Carlson Center for Coastal Studies
- Greg Kaufman, Pacific Whale Foundation

6. ESTIMATED TOTAL COST (WITH BREAKDOWN AS NEEDED, E.G. SALARY, EQUIPMENT)

Training and materials	£450
Publishing and printing materials.....	£400
Accommodation, local travel and subsistence for expert trainers:.....	£3000
Salary of trainers.....	in-kind
Total Budget Requested from IWC:.....	£3850

For 2015

Training and materials	£450
Accommodation, local travel and subsistence for expert trainers:.....	£3000
Salary of trainers.....	in-kind
Total Budget Requested from IWC:.....	£3450