

Report on the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) Sustainable Whale and Dolphin Watching Tourism Workshop

Submitted by Australia

BACKGROUND

- The 'Building sustainable whale and dolphin watching tourism in the Indian Ocean region' workshop was held in Colombo, Sri Lanka from 24-26 February 2016. The workshop was developed and delivered in partnership by the Australian Government, the International Whaling Commission (IWC), the IORA Secretariat, the Sri Lankan Institute of Policy Studies and Murdoch University's Cetacean Research Unit.
- The workshop was attended by government representatives from IORA Member States: Australia, Bangladesh, Union of the Comoros, Indonesia, Islamic Republic of Iran, Kenya, Madagascar, Malaysia, Mauritius, Mozambique, Sultanate of Oman, Seychelles, Somalia, Sri Lanka, Tanzania and Thailand. Whale and dolphin watching tourism experts from Indonesia and Sri Lanka, the IWC Scientific Committee's Whalewatching Subcommittee and Murdoch University's Cetacean Research Unit also attended.
- The Workshop was funded through a grant from Australia to the IWC's Voluntary Conservation Fund.
- The workshop agenda and recommendations are at: <http://www.iora.net/events/whale-dolphin-tourism/additional-materials.aspx>.

AIM AND OBJECTIVES

- The objectives of the workshop were to:
 - Promote regional cooperation between IORA Member States.
 - Build relationships between public sector organisations in IORA Member States to build capacity to undertake government-related functions to achieve sustainable whale and dolphin watching tourism.
 - Support the development of a regional, best practice approach to sustainable whale and dolphin watching (including IWC materials).
 - Improve understanding among IORA Member States of whale and dolphin watching tourism as an important blue economy sector.
 - Promote women's leadership and economic empowerment in whale and dolphin watching tourism in the region.
- The Workshop contributed to the delivery of Objective 3 (capacity building) of the IWC's Five Year Strategic Plan for Whalewatching 2011-2016 to 'identify methods to facilitate cooperation and information/expertise sharing between Contracting Parties and others to support the development of a responsible whalewatching sector and the provision of benefits to local communities'.

OUTCOMES

Workshop participants:

- Recognised they face common challenges in managing whale and dolphin watching tourism, including lack of capacity and resources particularly for compliance and enforcement. They identified possible solutions ranging from regulations to community education.
- Discussed the scale of the whale watching industry in their countries and the extent of best practice guidance and regulation in place. Some countries had very low level to no whale watching tourism, others had a more developed industry ranging from 80 boats (Sri Lanka) up to 300 boats (Indonesia, Iran). The challenges relating to compliance and enforcement were discussed, and the need for improved access to information on sustainable whale watching, species biology and best practice approaches was highlighted.
- Were unanimous in their support to establish a regional network to allow IORA Member States to work together to share best practice, knowledge, experience and expertise. They recognised:
 - The economic, social and ecological benefits of sustainably managing this fast growing industry.
 - The expertise contained within the IWC's Conservation and Scientific Committees and Murdoch University, as well as their potential to collaborate with, and provide capacity building to, IORA Member States.

KEY WORKSHOP RECOMMENDATIONS

Workshop participants:

- Support sharing information and expertise among IORA Member States to sustainably manage whale and dolphin watching tourism operations to ensure the economic, social and ecological sustainability of this industry by:
 - Sharing information, best practice, experience and expertise including through online communication on the IORA website.
 - Sharing international expertise by collaborating with key actors such as the IWC which may be able to assist with mitigation of threats to cetaceans, capacity building and facilitate access to funding and development organisations.
 - Undertaking capacity building and training for Member States.
 - Acknowledging the need for baseline scientific information to inform sustainable management.
 - Helping develop and disseminate education materials such as brochures to tour and boat operators for tourist education.
 - Establishing an IORA sustainable whale and dolphin watching tourism network
 - : Member States to identify a Dolphin and Whale Tourism Watching Focal Point, and up to six representatives including tourism, marine and fisheries representatives, as well as academic/expert and industry representatives.
 - : IORA Secretariat is requested to develop a terms of reference for the Network including mechanisms and priorities.

- Request the IORA Secretariat, with support from Member States, to circulate examples of guidelines and legislation from Member States and other examples as a way of sharing existing mechanisms and providing guidance to other Member States who have not yet developed their own mechanisms.
- Propose the IORA Secretariat, with support from Member States, publishes a short brochure summarising the case studies from this workshop to be shared on the IORA website to showcase Indian Ocean expertise and experience, and which will also be shared with international partners such as the IWC to inform the Whale watching Handbook which is a compendium of international best practice.
- Seek further opportunities to strengthen scientific, academic and technical cooperation including connecting whale and dolphin researchers in IORA Member States and collaboration such as the IORA journals, Indian Ocean Academic Group (IORAG), IORA Centre of Excellence in Ocean Sciences and the Environment, and with the IWC and Murdoch University.

NEXT STEPS

- The workshop's recommendation to establish a network was noted by the IORA Committee of Senior Officials at its meeting on 22-23 May 2016 and will be considered by the IORA Council of Ministers in October 2016.
- The workshop's recommendations will be presented to the IWC's Scientific Committee in June 2016 and its Conservation Committee and the Commission in October 2016.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE INTERNATIONAL WHALING COMMISSION, ITS CONSERVATION COMMITTEE AND SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE

- The IWC will need to consider its role in supporting the Network should it be endorsed by IORA. Australia proposes that the IWC could support the IORA Network and continue to implement Objective 3 of the IWC's Strategic Plan for Whalewatching by:
 - Sharing information, best practice, experience and expertise with IORA Member States including through the development of the Whale watching Handbook, including with case studies relevant to the IORA region.
 - Providing capacity-building and training for IORA and its Member States as appropriate.
 - Providing guidelines on best practice and other IWC resources to the IORA Secretariat for circulation among IORA Member States.
 - Seeking to engage with the IORA Secretariat and the IORA Network through scientific and technical cooperation and, where appropriate, seeking funding, to support sustainable whale watching in the IORA region.