Report of Responsible Whale Watching Workshop

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Presenters:
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Workshop participants (in addition to the above):
There were more than 100 participants at the workshop, from biologists and marine mammal researchers to Government and NGO representatives. An estimated 30% of the participants were consolidated researchers, such as laboratory and working group leaders; about 10% were Uruguayan Government representatives from the Ministry of Tourism; the remaining 60% of assistants were mostly biology and ecology students interested in conservation.

Objectives:
The purpose of the workshop was to share and discuss ideas and recommendations on the development of responsible whale watching.

Presentations on whale watching related to socioeconomic aspects, regulations, marine protected areas and research; were the basis for further discussion. Following these case studies the group exchanged ideas and recommendations were suggested.

Presentation summaries as well as workshop recommendations are listed below.

Background

Aimee Leslie (IFAW): *Whale Watching around the Globe*
IFAW promotes responsible whale watching as a sustainable alternative to commercial whaling. But as a growing industry, it is important to take preventive measures to avoid harm on these marine mammals and their habitats, by implementing effective regulations based on sound science. Well developed, whale watching is a valuable socioeconomic alternative for coastal communities around the world, especially in the face of the rising fisheries crisis. Whale watching provides benefits in education, science and public awareness on the importance of protecting these species and their marine environment.

Mónica Lozano (Ministry of Tourism, Uruguay): *Whale watching in Uruguay*

Whale watching first started in the country in 2000, with 5 modules and 9 platforms for coastal observation. In 2002 regulations were developed for whale watching at sea. Nowadays there are certification courses on responsible whale watching.
The first Friday of October is the national day for the protection of Right whales. Between September and October is the week of South Atlantic Right whales.
In 2007 Uruguay rejoined the International Whaling Commission (IWC), actively participated in the plenary by 2008. That same year, an institutional agreement for the development of responsible and sustainable tourism with emphasis on whale watching was established.

Socioeconomic Aspects

Miguel Iñíguez (Fundación Cethus, Argentina): *Status of whale watching in Latin America*
91 communities in 18 countries of Latin America have a whale watching industry. There are 786 tourism operators with a total of 1189 boats. It is expected that by 2010, the amount of tourists that go whale watching in our region will rise to 1,400,000. The industry continues to grow in the region benefiting many coastal communities, but clear policies and regulations are needed. For more information, please refer to the recent report on whale watching in Latin America[1].

Recommendations
Responsible whale watching is a socioeconomic alternative for coastal communities. It is also a substitute to captivity, even at an educational level. Yet it is important for countries to start recollecting systematic information on the activity. There are examples, like Mexico, where studies have been made on the direct and indirect income that the activity generates. It is also important to increase reinvestment in scientific research, because currently whale watching monitoring is done mostly with external funds.

Whale Watching Regulations

Julio Herrera (Fundación Yubarta, Colombia): *Whale watching: the Colombian Pacific Experience*
An issue when establishing whale watching regulations, is the lack of knowledge on species biology and the effects the industry has on their marine environment. Once in place, monitoring regulation compliance is another problem.
In Colombia the Permanent Directive N° 001 of DIMAR regulates whale watching since 2001. It establishes that there should be no more than 5 boats around one group of whales, and that these should leave the group after 30 minutes. It also defines a minimum distance of 200 meters between the ships and whales. The approach of the boats should be slow and parallel, coming up slightly from behind the animals. It is prohibited to trail females with calves. Also, resolution 1531 restricts whale watching within the National Park Gorgona, allowing only casual encounter, which is also regulated.

There is a Whale Committee in Colombia where the private sector, as well as the local and national Government, is involved in planning activities concerning the whale watching activity, such as capacity building workshops that operators have the obligation of participating in.

Recommendations
When designing whale watching regulations, it is usual to replicate models from other countries. It is important to have local studies that facilitate fitting regulations for a specific site, taking into account the objective specie (or species) and methodology (such as boat size, motor types, etc.). Of the 18 Latin American countries where there is whale watching; only 7 have regulations. Even so, the existence of regulations doesn't guarantee an effective implementation. Control should be a priority since the start of the activity in accordance with the precautionary principle. A good reference is Carole Carlson's global regulation analysis which is updated every year for the IWC[2].
When elaborating regulations, it is important to take all involved players into account; such as whale watching operators, Government authorities, social and natural science researchers, NGOs, etc. Agreed norms result in better compliance, which is especially necessary since lack of vigilance is an issue in almost all countries.
The inclusion of Odontocetes and Pinnipeds is going a step ahead for the activity usually starts with whales and expands to other local species.
Finally, the lack of funds for regulating whale watching was highlighted by participants as an issue to overcome.

Marine Protected Areas and Whale Watching

Javier Rodríguez Fonseca (Fundación PROMAR, Costa Rica): *Non lethal use of cetaceans and Marine Protected Areas in Costa Rica*
Non lethal use does not compromise the individual or group existence of a specie, in the short, medium or long term. Whale watching is the non lethal choice by excellence. In Costa Rica whale watching regulations were approved in 2005, based on the results of an impact study on the activity.
MPAs facilitate the process of coastal management and local administration, allowing a better segmentation according to the category of management and strengthening vigilance and protection of cetaceans and their environment. For example, there is a management plan proposal for National Park Marino Ballena that divides areas of low or no whale watching concentration from those of high density, and establishes two routs for boat departures. Promar is developing a proposal of sustainable marine tourism as part of their marine education program.

Recommendations
A big part of whale watching in Latin America is done in MPAs, more than in any other region of the world. This helps to regulate the activity and to work in MPAs through these species. In Costa Rica's case, the detection of cetacean habitat use in an area is one of the three criteria used to justify the expansion of an MPA. There is a synergy between MPAs and whale watching regulation. MPAs already have a legal foundation, more

funding opportunities are available, and it is easier to develop a participative process. There is also more international support and interest from NGOs, as well as the general public.
An idyllic situation empowers the MPA administration to implement whale watching regulations. An example of this is National Park Mancilla in Ecuador, where rangers can sanction tourism operators, while in other coastal areas there is no control at all.
For sustainable tourism local community involvement is vital. A responsible tourism certification as a sustainability tool is useful as well.
As whale populations rise, these animals begin to be seen in areas outside those that were assigned. Management in these new areas can only be established through political decisions.

Research

Gisela Heckel (Centro de Investigación Científica y de Educación Superior de Ensenada - CICESE, Mexico): *Research on marine mammals and whale watching*
Marine observation tourism includes whales and many other marine mammals. It is an income alternative and decreases loss of animals due to whaling or bycatch. But it can also be a threat due to lack of regulation or management, with consequences such as behavior changes; such as site abandonment, variable biological effects, as well as putting tourists in danger of injury or disease.
In the case study of Grey whales in Ensenada, Baja California, Mexico, there is a whale watching management proposal based on a study of the effects boats have on whales (1998-99[4]). The proposal includes controlled and restricted areas according to Mexican Norms[5].
Evaluation methodology should adapt to the specific site, specie and type of activity being monitored. There are many aspects that can be evaluated and different techniques to do so. To evaluate behavior, breathing rate is measured, evasion or attraction, among other variables. Energy consumption is measured by the breathing rate combined with speed. Bioacoustics and demography should be considered when making measurements. If measurements have been taken without boat presence (control), it is an advantage to compare the same variable when ships are at sea. The experimental design of each area of observation can give an objective and reliable evaluation.

Recommendations
One of the problems within our region and the world is that different research methodologies are used, which makes it difficult to compare data. Nonetheless each site is different, so the way impact is evaluated cannot be standardized. It is preferable to evaluate land based, but assessments taken from ships are also valuable, as well as aerial studies. One can work with operators to recollect certain information as well. Evaluating ecosystem load capacity should be considered.
When possible, having a control pattern of a similar area, where there is no whale watching, is very helpful. The best and most extensive information resource about methodology and study results is the Whale Watching Sub-Committee of the IWC[6].

There is also a need to strengthen funding options for marine research in Latin America, particularly through the IWC in the case of cetacean research.

Cited literature:

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[3] Sistema Nacional de Áreas de Conservación (SINAC)-Ministerio del Ambiente y Energía (MINAE). 2007. Documento para Oficialización del Plan de Manejo del Parque Nacional Marino Ballena. Proyecto para la elaboración de los planes de manejo de las áreas protegidas del Área de Conservación Osa (ACOSA). SINAC/MINAE-TNC-ELAP/UCI. San José, Costa Rica. 132 pp.

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