

SUSTAINABLE WHALE AND DOLPHIN WATCHING TOURISM NETWORK



A Message from Paula Perrett

We are delighted to be working with the IORA Secretariat to coordinate the Sustainable Whale and Dolphin Watching Tourism Network.

The special connection that humans and cetaceans have had throughout history is reflected in cultural practice, mythology and art around the world. As threats to our oceans and cetaceans increase, it's more important than ever that people learn about unique ocean ecosystems and take the opportunity to observe cetaceans in their natural habitats. Whale and dolphin watching tourism can contribute significantly to the economies of coastal communities and can be a life changing experience—all without negative impacts on cetaceans, if done in the right way.

IORA member states have an opportunity to be world leaders in promoting best practice for sustainable whale and dolphin watching tourism. The Network encourages members to share information, exchange skills and expertise, and work together to set a gold-standard example internationally. This year we hope to help develop new Network initiatives that encourage collaboration. We would love to hear from you if you have any ideas and suggestions. Thank you for your engagement.



Paula Perrett

*Australian Government—Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment
Assistant Secretary—Marine and International Heritage Branch*

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The Sustainable Whale and Dolphin Watching Tourism Network

The IORA Sustainable Whale and Dolphin Watching Tourism Network was established in 2016 to foster regional cooperation through information sharing, capacity building, and providing access to expertise. The Network is led by IORA Member States who take turns coordinating on a voluntary basis. The Australian Government is currently undertaking this role. The Network works in partnership with the International Whaling Commission (IWC).

Over time, the Network hopes to establish relationships with other key partners. The Network is open to everyone with an interest in sustainable whale and dolphin watching tourism, including tourism operators, local communities, governments, conservation groups and academia.

Information, news and resources relevant to the Network are shared through this biannual newsletter.

To join the Network, send your contact details to hq@iora.int and copy whales@environment.gov.au

The World Whale Watching Conference—Hervey Bay, Australia October 2019



By Sophie Lewis—
World Cetacean Alliance

The World Cetacean Alliance (WCA) is the world's largest marine conservation partnership focused on protecting whales, dolphins and porpoises around the world. The WCA have over 100 Partners in 40 countries, with a diverse range of stakeholder members including non-profit organisations, artists, lawyers, campaigners and commercial whale and dolphin watching companies.

The most important event in the WCA calendar is the biennial World Whale Conference and Whale Heritage Site Summit that bring together WCA Partners and experts from around the world to discuss the latest research and initiatives encompassing the fields of responsible cetacean tourism, conservation, education and the arts.

The 2019 World Whale Conference and Whale Heritage Site Summit was held in October in Hervey Bay, Australia. The conference was a great success with a diverse range of topics covered by speakers and delegates including: the role that social media plays in responsible tourism; using art to inspire and educate the public to protect our oceans; international whale celebratory routes; cetacean behavioural responses to marine tourism; global sustainability initiatives and many more.

The subject of swimming with wild cetaceans, an often controversial activity, emerged as a key discussion point. This particular aspect of the whale watching industry is growing in several locations globally. Lessons, experiences and research was shared from around the world, often showing concerning implications and highlighting the urgent need for strict guidelines, enforcement and continued monitoring of the impacts to cetaceans.

Vital discussions were also had around the role of indigenous cultures and communities in sustainable tourism, marine conservation and education. The need to foster greater inclusivity and harnessing cultural knowledge was acknowledged as a key priority moving forward.

This was an exciting year for the Whale Heritage Site Summit with Whale Heritage Site status being awarded to the conference host, Hervey Bay in Australia and The Bluff in Durban, South Africa. We can't wait to see which site will be next!

Earlier this year the WCA launched the world's first global certification initiative solely focused on responsible whale and dolphin watching. The WCA 'Responsible Whale Watching Certification' programme was developed by the global whale watching industry. WCA Certified operators represent the gold standard of whale watching in terms of animal welfare, customer experience and sustainability.

Following on from the conference the WCA Partnership will continue its focus on responsible tourism for cetaceans. We are already seeing how the WCA Responsible Whale Watching Certification and the Whale Heritage Site award status is helping the industry move towards best practice whilst recognising those who are already there.

Find out more about the **World Cetacean Alliance** and **Whale Heritage Sites**.
www.worldcetaceanalliance.org | www.whaleheritagesites.org





Outstanding Operator—Raja & the Whales, Mirissa, Sri Lanka



Raja & the Whales is based in the beautiful Mirissa on the south coast of Sri Lanka.

This responsible whale watching venture was founded in 2008 by Raja (Rendage Sameera Madushanka), a former fisherman who stopped fishing to dedicate his life to protecting the marine wildlife in the Sri Lankan Indian Ocean region. Raja and his crew—all family members—share a big love for the sea born from their close association with it from early childhood.

Raja and his crew take responsible whale watching seriously. They adhere to the Whale and Dolphin Conservation and Whale Wise guidelines and ensure their operations meet all the criteria so that both tourists and cetaceans have a safe and peaceful experience. They don't offer snorkeling or diving with the whales or dolphins because these activities can disrupt their natural behaviours. Their low-impact approach is paying off—Raja & the Whales has been a TripAdvisor Certificate of Excellence winner from 2012–2019!

"Our love for the ocean and our fascination of marine wildlife, especially blue whales guided us in learning more about these creatures and created the need to protect them. The whale watching industry created a different income possibility for fishermen (one without killing). However, out of around 60 whale watching operators in our local area, only two are following international guidelines."—The Raja Crew.

Raja & the Whales is also collaborating with the Biosphere Foundation and University of Ruhuna on a project to prevent more blue whales from being killed in ship strikes. High densities of blue whales overlap with one of the world's busiest shipping routes off the southern coast of Sri Lanka. The partners started the Indian Ocean Marine Mammal Research Unit in Sri Lanka for science, conservation and education. Data collected by Captain Raja during whale-watching tours has been published in the Journal of Cetacean Research and Management and the company regularly takes university students for field trips, where they can learn about the marine wildlife of the Indian Ocean and work on cetacean identification and studies.

You can find out more about Raja & the Whales or book a whale watching experience on their website or Facebook—www.rajaandthewhales.com / www.facebook.com/ratwcrew

Are you a business or operator in the IORA region with a sustainable approach to whale-watching? We would love to feature you as one of our 'Outstanding Operators'. Please contact whales@environment.gov.au





A Deep Dive into: the Sultanate of Oman

Guidelines for whale and dolphin watching in Oman were developed in 2014 as part of the International Whaling Commission's Whale Watching Handbook—an interactive online resource that offers comprehensive, impartial and free resources on whale, dolphin and porpoise watching.

Oman is rich in impressive natural landscapes and charismatic cetacean populations. The whale watching Industry in Oman started in 1998, with a single operator in Muscat, and has grown and spread over the past 30 years to include multiple operators in different locations. Managing the potential impacts on already vulnerable species such as the Indian Ocean humpback dolphin and the Arabian Sea humpback whale is important as the industry grows. Oman's Ministry of Environment and Climate Affairs collaborates with NGO groups including the Environment Society of Oman (ESO) and Five Oceans Environmental Services (SOES) to ensure the sustainability of the practice.

There are fewer than 100 Arabian Sea humpback whales remaining, making this one of the world's rarest and most-isolated whale populations. It is important that whale watching activities do not add to the threats already facing this population. It is important that existing operators set a positive precedent for others to follow—establishing responsible operations leads to an expectation of ethical standards among operators and customers.

To find out more information about sustainable whale watching in Oman, please visit Five Oceans Environmental Services LLC (www.5oes.com) and the Environment Society of Oman (www.eso.org.om).

IORA Member States are encouraged to contribute case studies and country profiles to the IWC Whale Watching Handbook by emailing secretariat@iwc.int. The Handbook is available in English, French and Spanish and can be accessed on the IWC's webpage: <https://wwhandbook.iwc.int/en/>



Science spotlight



Whale watching safely and the role of social media—Chantal Pagel

Chantal Denise Pagel is a PhD candidate at Auckland University of Technology, New Zealand, studying tourist motivations, risk and safety, and the role of social media within in-water interactions with marine wildlife.

Over the past few decades, human-wildlife interactions, particularly in the marine environment, have become very popular. Inexperienced participants are exposed to unpredictable marine megafauna in open-water environments, and there is a need to better understand the risks of these ventures.

In-water encounters have become part of the 'must-do' lists for many avid travellers who widely distribute the visual testimonies of their experiences (e.g. images of wildlife, wildlife-selfies, and footage of wildlife) on social media such as Facebook, Instagram and YouTube.

Social media trends, such as the wildlife-selfie, may lead to unrealistic expectations of wildlife encounters that could put humans and animals at risk. Through her research, Chantal hopes to gain an understanding of the influence of these images so that tourists and operators can make informed choices about safety and species protection.

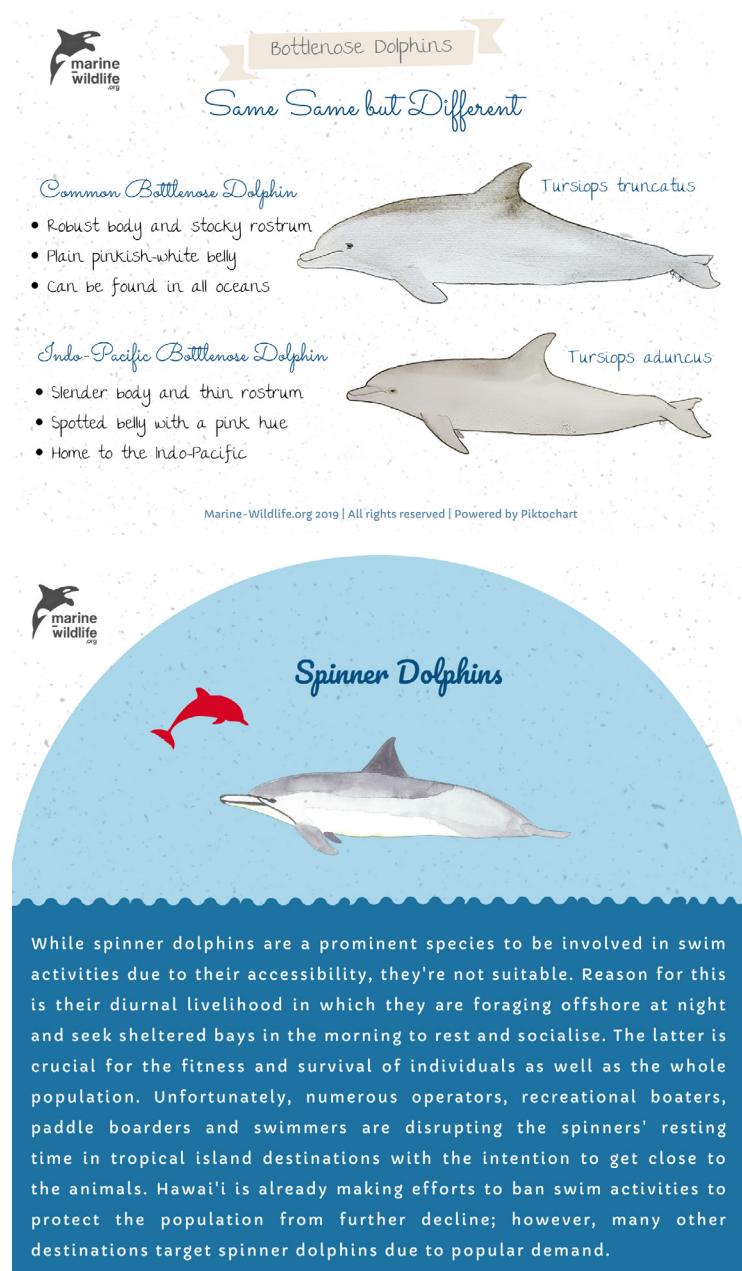
One of Chantal's papers, **#BiteMe: Considering the potential influence of social media on in-water encounters with marine wildlife** has recently been published.



As a conservation biologist, Chantal has studied sustainable wildlife watching since 2010 and been involved in many projects to promote responsible whale watching. Chantal has volunteered with the Mauritius Marine Conservation Society (MMCS), where she helped increase the understanding of the local dolphin watching industry. She is currently a member of the reviewing panel for the first global responsible whale-watching certification programme, initiated by World Cetacean Alliance, which seeks to identify best-practice operators in the sector.

Alongside her doctorate programme, Chantal has launched a website on the marine wildlife tourism experience to educate wildlife enthusiasts about respectful animal encounters. To understand social media trends such as the wildlife-selfie phenomenon, she runs an Instagram profile that features educational infographics for the public, that integrate own watercolour artwork.

These infographics help raise awareness and educate people about the differences between cetacean species, how to identify them, and which species are suitable or not suitable for different tourism encounters. For example, people might be surprised to learn that Spinner dolphins, while commonly targeted by whale-watching ventures in many countries, are not a suitable species. These dolphins rest during the day, so any disruption can be stressful and detrimental to the health of individuals and populations.



To find out more about Chantal's work visit:
marine-wildlife.org/home.html or [@marinewildlifetourism](https://www.instagram.com/marinewildlifetourism) on Instagram.

Sustainable Whale Watching—A Legal Perspective

Stephanie Sorby is a 5th year Phd Student in international and environmental law with the University of Reunion Island. She focuses on the protection of humpback whales in the South West Indian Ocean and her work has been published in the Western Indian Ocean Journal of Marine Science.

Whale watching activities have increased significantly in the past few years in the Western Indian Ocean. To regulate whale-watching activities, each island in the region either has a binding law (or 'hard law'—a legal obligation), non-binding laws (or 'soft law'—such as codes of conduct, charters) or sometimes both.

Soft laws can help to better organise and regulate the whale watching industry, support whale watching as a contributor to sustainable development, and provide a tool for regional cooperation between western Indian Ocean nations. However, the legal value of this approach is debatable as there is no opportunity for enforcement or punishment of non compliance.

Stephanie has been investigating what is needed for cooperative protection of whales across jurisdictions as they travel along migratory routes in the South West Indian Ocean. Whales are at the heart of several international agreements, but these agreements are insufficient to fully protect whales against a variety of threats they regularly face—including ship collision, pollution, and invasive whale watching. Stephanie suggests that supplementary legal approaches need to be considered.

Stephanie proposes that cooperative development and implementation is critical in ensuring that established international agreements, hard laws, and soft laws interact and support each other to offer consistently strong and enforced protection for whales along their migratory routes.



A COMPARISON OF TWO LEGAL APPROACHES:

The pros and cons of 'hard laws' to protect whales:

- **Legal content:** The legal text should be clear and concise leading to effective protection, but it can sometimes be too broad or poorly defined. For example, in some customary laws (or local law), there is no definition of "intentional disturbance" or "harassment" of whales so infringements can't be characterised or punished.
- **Means of control:** There is a need for human resources to ensure surveillance and material resources to measure distance from whales and boats speed. However, these resources are regularly not accounted for or financed.
- **Appropriate sanctions:** To be effective, hard laws need to have a deterrent effect (such as substantial fines), however in many cases non-compliance goes undetected or unpunished.

'Soft laws' are sometimes more appropriate and easier to develop:

- **Legal content:** clear, or in graphic form which is more understandable = better compliance
- **Implementation:** communication/promotion of these laws is easier. For example, they are often easier to understand and can be in the form of guidance or a code of conduct that can be available on every inshore boat.
- **Incentive:** compliance with codes of conduct can lead to ethical certification or accreditation.

Is there an example of whale-watching 'soft laws' (guidelines, codes of conduct, policies) in your region that are working? Let us know! whales@environment.gov.au

Some IORA words for whale!

AUSTRALIA	Indigenous words for whale include: yalingbila (Nughi, Nunukul and Gorenpul clan language, south-east Queensland), mugga mugga (Woppaburra language, Queensland central coast) muryira (Dhurga language, south-east New South Wales), mamang (Noongar language, south-west Western Australia).
BANGLADESH	তিমি
COMOROS, KENYA, TANZANIA	Nyangumi
INDIA	व्हेल
INDONESIA	Paus
IRAN	نهنگ
MADAGASCAR	Trozona
MALAYSIA	Ikan paus
MALDIVES	Bodumas
MOZAMBIQUE	Baleia
OMAN, UNITED ARAB EMIRATES, YEMEN	حوت
SEYCHELLES, MAURITIUS	Baleine, whale
SINGAPORE	鯨魚, Ikan paus, whale
SOMALIA	Nibiri
SOUTH AFRICA	Walvis, Umkhomo, Umnenga
SRI LANKA	කළුමන, திமிங்கிலம்
THAILAND	ปลาวาฬ

*We apologise if your language is not accurately represented (please correct us! whales@environment.gov.au)

Whale Tales—Australia

Every year keen whale watchers in Australia keep an eye out for Migaloo, the nationally-loved white humpback. The name Migaloo comes from Biri and other northern Queensland Indigenous languages, where it means ghost or spirit, and is now also used to mean white person. Because Migaloo is such a unique whale, he has been given 'special status' in Australian waters to protect him from harassment—this prevents any vessels from getting any closer than 500-metres to him or large fines apply. He has even been known to have a police escort in high-tourism areas like the Great Barrier Reef!

We welcome all contributions or ideas for future issues. Please send feedback or content to whales@environment.gov.au



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