Communiqué

Journées Bleues (Blue Days) Regional Conference on Iconic Marine Species Ecotourism Hosted by the Government of French Polynesia, Tahiti, 4 June 2015

THE PARTICIPANTS ATTENDING THE JOURNÉES BLEUES REGIONAL CONFERENCE HOSTED BY THE GOVERNMENT OF FRENCH POLYNESIA AND SPREP WITH SUPPORT FROM CO-FUNDERS:

1. Aware of the importance of the growing economic value of ecotourism in the Pacific Islands Countries and Territories (PICTs) and of its potential to bring economic benefits to communities;
2. Aware of the importance of preserving iconic species to ensure the development of the marine ecotourism sector and the need to encourage sustainable tourism activities;
3. Aware of the commitment by our countries to reaching the Aichi Targets and to preserve the species and habitats which support ecotourism;
4. Aware that many of the marine species included in tourism activities are listed as vulnerable, endangered or critically endangered on the IUCN Red List or other nationally relevant criteria;
5. Noting that humpback whales and other marine mammals, including dugongs, marine turtles, seabirds, and many species of sharks and rays are given priority for the implementation of management measures by their inclusion in the texts or annexes of the Convention of Migratory Species (CMS), and of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES);
6. Recognising the value and principles of Marine Protected Areas to safeguard marine species targeted by ecotourism activities;
7. Recognising that marine tourism may have irreversible effects on iconic vulnerable marine species and their habitat, as well as indigenous cultures, if the sector is not sustainably managed;
8. Recognising that the long-term conservation of iconic marine species and their habitats and sustainable tourism development that involve watching, diving, swimming with these species requires a consistent and regulated framework that guides such activities at national levels throughout the Pacific Islands region;
9. Recognising that well-managed ecotourism can benefit both species conservation and sustainable livelihood development at all levels;
10. Considering the need for the SPREP’s member countries and territories to collaborate in the field of tourism, to encourage regional cooperation and South-South economic development;
11. Recognising the importance of the participation of all PICTs, indigenous communities, as well as Regional Organisations, NGOs and the private sector in collaborative action related to the conservation of marine species and management of their habitats.

THE PARTICIPANTS THEREFORE

1. Note that the Pacific can become an even more globally recognized destination in terms of marine ecotourism due to its biodiversity, commitment to sustainable practices and traditional knowledge;
2. Recognize that ecotourism is a major opportunity for the development of the economic sector in the region, for the benefit of the local communities and conservation goals;
3. Recognize the importance of local, cultural and scientific knowledge and practices for the sustainable economic development of this niche market;
4. Recommend that actions at the national level be implemented in an integrated multi-sectorial approach;
5. Recommend that actions at a national level be implemented with the support of key stakeholders at a regional level;
6. Endorse the development of a multi-year programme based on the framework agreed to during this conference, to provide the opportunity for Pacific countries and territories to coordinate efforts and to meet their shared expectations;
7. Recommend institutional reforms be undertaken in our respective countries, if required, to support community-based well-managed ecotourism initiatives and directly and indirectly benefiting local communities;
8. Propose that institutional reforms be undertaken in our respective countries and territories, if required, to support the conservation of marine species and their habitats with resources generated by tourism sector;
9. Agree that the endorsement of the regional strategy proposed by the South Pacific Tourism Organisation (SPTO) would be beneficial for the development of marine ecotourism in each country or territory according to local context;
10. Propose that each country and territory represented at this conference should consider making a firm commitment to supporting existing, or establishing pilot, marine ecotourism projects combining economic development with marine species conservation and sustainable management of natural resources, according to the framework agreed by participants;
11. Recommend that countries and territories represented at this conference establish a mechanism for all the stakeholders involved in marine ecotourism to regularly exchange information and experiences;
12. Endorse the development of an eco-certification label for tourism infrastructures, private operators and travel agencies, along with relevant training programmes, to improve and harmonise the quality and sustainability of ecotourism services and the protection of iconic species;
13. Recommend that countries and territories consider the establishment of a regional label linked with the destination Pacific islands, without affecting existing efforts in the region;
14. Recommend that countries and territories review and consider the adoption of regional guidelines related to responsible and sustainable marine species-based tourism and ensure its promotion at national and regional levels;
15. Recommend that countries integrate community-based ecotourism principles into national development policies and legal frameworks, including raising awareness and capacity building for the local community and tourism industry on preserving marine life, developing this niche for sustainable economic and livelihood development;
16. Request SPREP to forward this Communiqué and other relevant outputs of this Conference to the 2015 SPREP Meeting, to Tourism and Environment Ministers in member governments, and to all CROP agencies involved in tourism development and marine resources management in the Pacific islands, and to the relevant multilateral environmental agreements (such as the Convention on Biological Diversity and Convention on Migratory Species); and furthermore
17. Invite countries taking part in this Conference who are members of such treaties and agencies to also bring to their attention the relevant outputs of this Conference;
18. Endorse SPTO and SPREP as the organisations to lead development of the regional guidelines framework, to collaborate in seeking funding and implementing the multi-year programme.