



PO Box 240, Apia, Samoa
 E: sprep@sprep.org
 T: +685 21929
 F: +685 20231
 W: www.sprep.org

The Pacific environment, sustaining our livelihoods and natural heritage in harmony with our cultures.



Twenty Seventh SPREP Meeting of Officials

Alofi, Niue

19 – 21 September 2016

Agenda Item 9.1.2 : Year of the Whale Update

Purpose

1. To advise Members of recent activities conducted as part of the Year of the Whale programme; and to invite the meeting to approve initiatives proposed and to adopt the work programme for the Year of the Whale in 2017.

Background

2. SPREP Members have designated 2016 and 2017 as the Pacific Year of the Whale. The Protect Pacific Whales campaign uses whales as the vehicle to deliver broader messages about the state of our oceans and SPREP's mission in ocean conservation.
3. In association with a Steering Committee of six Members, including USA and Tonga, SPREP has developed a work programme of research projects, training, and artistic and cultural events for the Year of the Whale. Four flagship projects are fully or partially funded, but funding is still required for implementation of many of the proposed training programmes to build capacity to manage whales in the region. Further details, including a proposed work programme, are available on the SPREP website.
4. The four flagship projects are:
 - Featuring the Year of the Whale in SPREP's activities at the **World Conservation Congress** in Honolulu in September included:
 - Communication by all the va'a crews when they arrived to open the Congress on 1 September;
 - A workshop convened by SPREP on the subject of 'Ecotourism as a tool to protect iconic marine species in the Pacific islands';
 - A major event for 1900 people on featuring a film on humpback whales in Tonga, Hawaii and Alaska, with an address by the SPREP Director-General;
 - Communication material at the SPREP booth in the Pacific Pavilion, including the screening of a new documentary 'Sonic Sea', on the impacts of noise in the ocean on whales.

- Sponsoring **an exhibition by Pacific and New Caledonian artists** in Noumea, who will be creating art works linking the conservation of whales and oceans, to open in March 2017 at the Tjibaou Cultural Centre, Noumea. SPREP is supporting artists Ruha Fifita from Tonga, John Pule from Niue and George Nuku from New Zealand to attend the residency. SPREP partners for this event are the Governments of New Caledonia and New Zealand, the PEW Charitable Trusts and Fonds Pacifique.
- **'Whales in a Changing Ocean'** – a major regional conference to be held in early 2017 in Nuku'alofa, Tonga. SPREP's current partners are the Auckland Institute of Studies, the Okeanos Foundation and the Government of Tonga. Further funding is required to achieve the final goal below. This conference will:
 - Provide an update on the status and trends of whales in the Pacific islands region;
 - Assess emerging threats to whales from changes occurring in our oceans;
 - Review the economic value of whale-watching in the Pacific islands;
 - Promote the benefits to coastal communities from the development of best practice whale-watching throughout the region; and (subject to the provision of funding)
 - Provide an opportunity for Member governments to develop a coordinated programme for whale conservation in the region.
- A series of workshops are being held around the world to identify **Important Marine Mammal Areas**. In association with the IUCN Joint Marine Mammal Protected Areas Task Force, SPREP is an organising partner of a workshop to be held at the SPREP campus in early 2017 to identify IMMAs in the Pacific islands region. This workshop will be an opportunity for a focus on the Protect Pacific Whales campaign and the identification of critical habitats for marine mammals in the SPREP region.

Recommendation

5. The Meeting is invited to:

- **note with approval** the implementation of activities organized by the Secretariat for Year of the Whale, and **agree** (subject to the provision of funding support) to ensure their representation at the conference, Whales in a Changing Ocean, to be held in Nuku'alofa in February 2017; and
- **invite** members, supporters and potential collaborators, including the International Whaling Commission and the Convention on Migratory Species, to provide technical and financial assistance in the planning and implementation of 2016 - 2017, Pacific Year of the Whale, in particular for Whales in a Changing Ocean, to be held in Nuku'alofa in February 2017.