

The Global Status and True Value of Whale Watching:

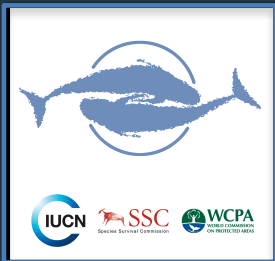
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**Whales in a Changing Ocean
Conference
Tonga**



**WHALE AND
DOLPHIN
CONSERVATION**

The logo for Whale and Dolphin Conservation (WDC) features a large, stylized white curly brace on a dark blue background. To the right of the brace, the letters 'WDC' are written vertically in a large, bold, white sans-serif font.

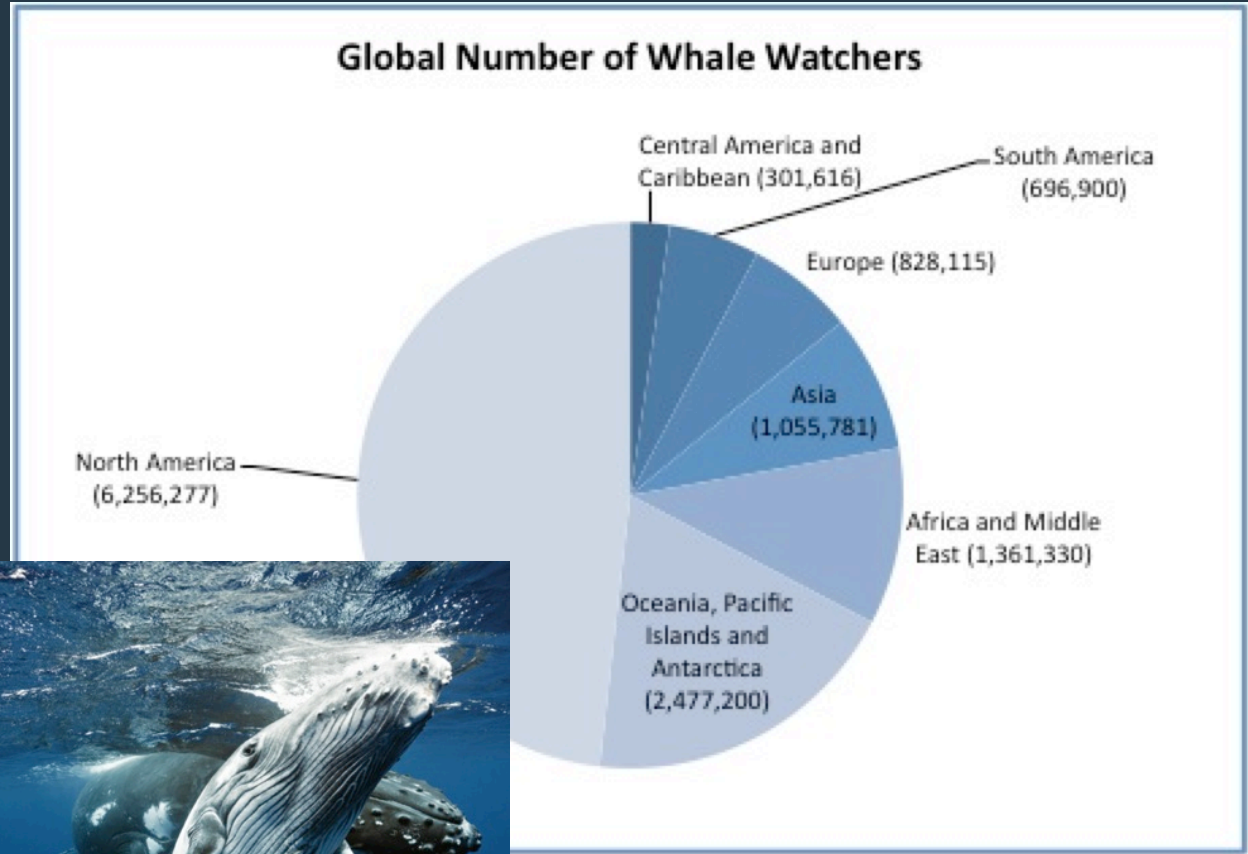
2009 IFAW report on whale watching: *Key Findings*

- Nearly 13 million people are going whale watching per year (as of 2017: >15 million?)
- WWs are spending > \$2.1 billion USD
- 13,000 jobs supported worldwide
- Whale watching has been described as “an industry that provides a new model for use of natural resources, an industry that relies on whales in a non-extractive way that when well-managed can be truly sustainable.” *It’s not really “new” anymore.*
- In some areas whale watching continues to show strong growth against overall tourism: Iceland, for example. In other areas it is mature or declining.



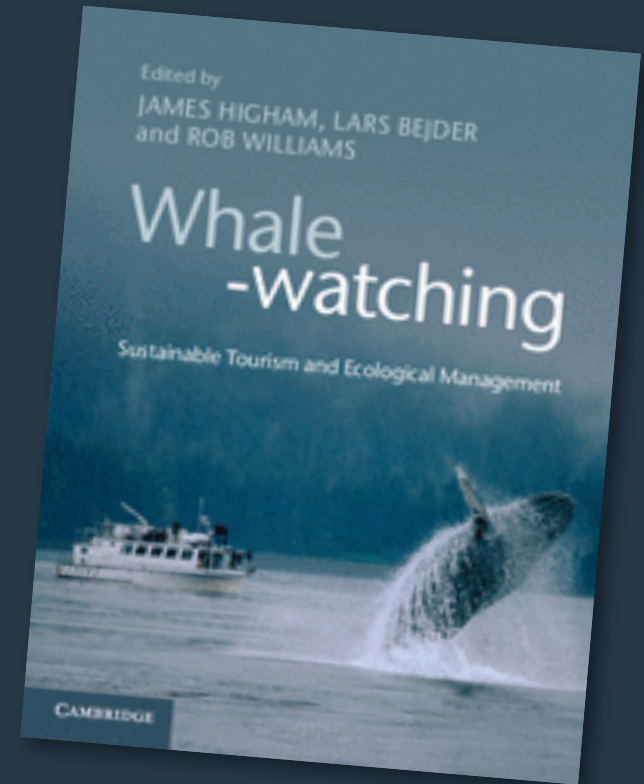
Global Whale watching by region

- About 17% of whale watching worldwide occurs in the Pacific islands.
- Most whale watching happens in North America (48%) with 38% in the USA alone.
- Fastest growing whale watching may be Iceland 20% avg annual growth rate per year.



Current thinking on whale watching: status, problems, diverse views

- Recent book that takes the current temperature of whale watching in all its dimensions.
- Whale watching in many areas is being criticized for various reasons: The impact on whales & dolphins; tourism footprint (traffic, strain on services & infrastructure, litter); unpredictable nature, seasonality of the business.
- Growing scientific proof that (particularly) small odontocetes are impacted by whale watching.
- Concern about large whales and whale watching, that the short-term reactions may translate to long-term impacts.



Trends in Whale Watching

- Trend 1: Whale watching in established areas is becoming more diverse (there are new ways to go whale watching). Yet at the same time whale watching is becoming more competitive.
- Trend 2: The numbers of boats & people on the water have put some populations in danger & diminished the tourist experience.
- Trend 3: Whale watching tourists want closer & closer encounters with whales, & operators are advertising & feel they need to offer closer & closer encounters.

Trends in Whale Watching

& ideas for how to respond

- Trend 1: Whale watching in established areas is becoming more diverse (there are new ways to go whale watching). Yet at the same time whale watching is becoming more competitive.

Embrace diversity; be creative

- Trend 2: The numbers of boats & people on the water have put some populations in danger & diminished the tourist experience.

MPAs & sanctuaries have whale watching but whales also need sanctuaries from whale watching

- Trend 3: Whale watching tourists want closer and closer encounters with whales, and operators are advertising and feel they need to offer closer and closer encounters.

Change tourist expectations

Trend 1: Whale watching in established areas is becoming more diverse

WW is:

- WW Boat - Whales
- WW Boat - Dolphins
- Kayak
- Inflatable (RIB)
- General Nature Tour
- Land-based
- WW from Air

But WW is also:

- WW / Marine Wildlife Centres, WW Festivals, Whale Trails and WW Special Events



Trend 1: Whale watching in established areas is becoming more diverse

Positive aspects:

- Spreads the impact across many more species and areas, etc.
- Offers more chances to attract a wider range of tourists
- Provides more employment
- This makes things more competitive.
- Emphasis on reducing risk...



Trend 1: Whale watching in established areas is becoming more diverse

Negative aspects:

- Tourists compare & book whale watching with more than 1,000 operators in 100+ countries. They can easily select one country over another & choose birding, shark, nature cruises & treks.

—> Getting the competitive edge: e.g., develop more tourist options (tour products), put more value into the trips (good guides, slow whale watching, enhanced customer care).



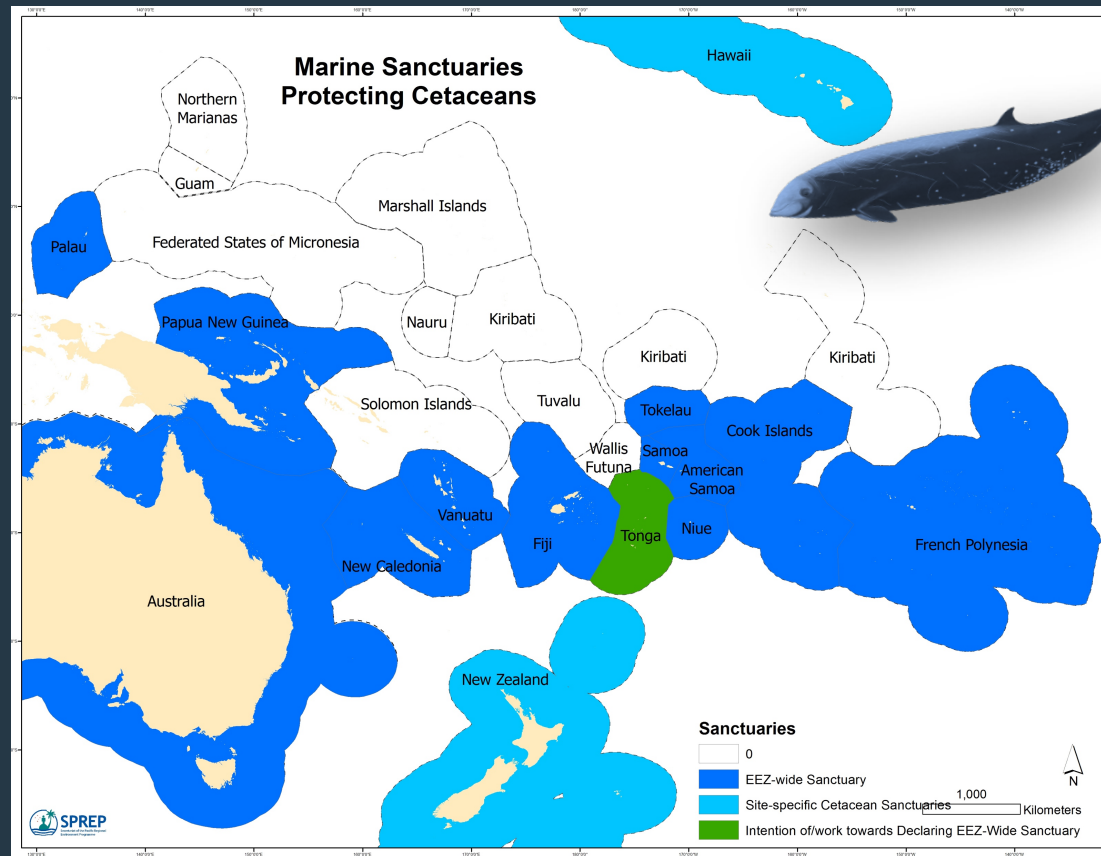
• “ Powerful Whale Watching “Brands”

- Gray Whale Lagoons of Mexico: El Vizcaino Biosphere Reserve
- Sanctuary of the Dominican Republic
- Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary
- Robson Bight Ecological Reserve for killer whales
- The Whales of Iceland

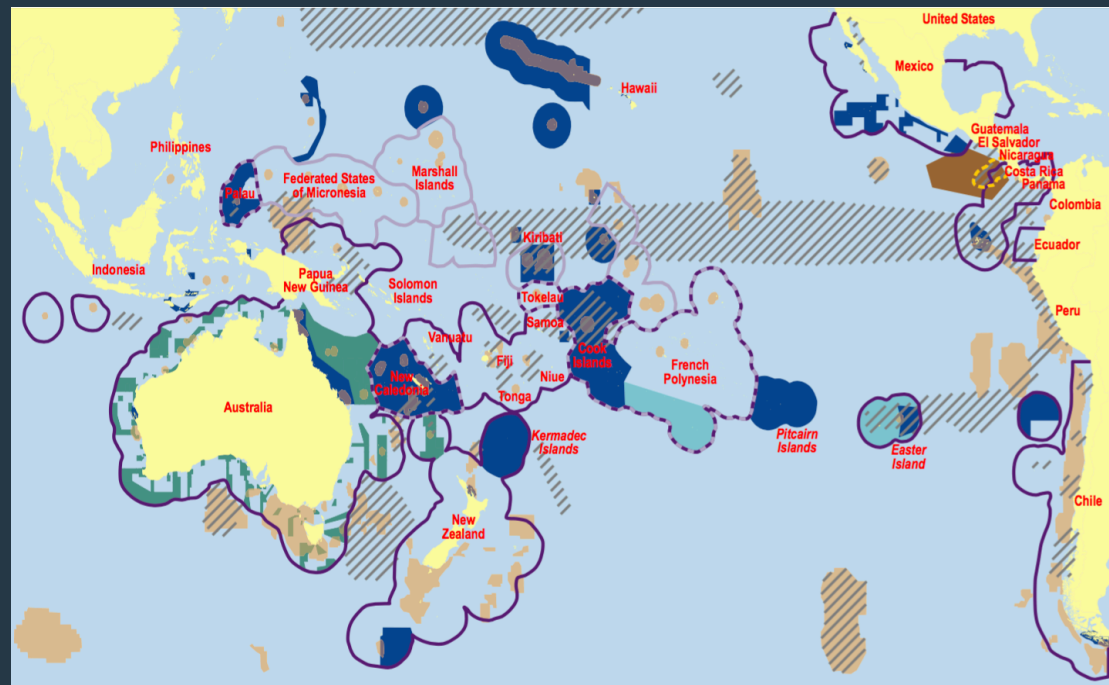


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EEZ sanctuaries for whales and dolphins in the Pacific...are “brands”

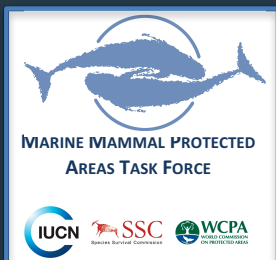


Overview of Pacific Marine Biodiversity & Work Toward Protection...more branding possibilities



Asia Pacific Marine Mammal and Marine Bird Biodiversity

- Marine protected areas with identified areas of high biodiversity and abundance for marine mammals throughout the central and South Pacific region
- Marine protected areas with identified areas of high biodiversity and abundance for marine mammals in Australian waters
- Proposed marine protected areas
- Costa Rica Dome blue whale feeding and breeding area including high biodiversity site for various whale and dolphin species, sea turtles and sharks. Smaller area with dashed line indicates Central American Dome EBSA as agreed by CBD technical workshop Sept. 2012
- Ecologically or Biologically Significant Areas (EBSAs) identifying marine mammal habitat through the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)
- Important Bird Areas (IBAs) for marine birds identified by BirdLife International (includes confirmed, proposed and candidate areas) (Data from Marine e-atlas, <https://maps.birdlife.org/marineIBAs/default.html>)
- Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) declared as national sanctuaries :
- Cetacean sanctuaries
- Shark sanctuaries
- Cetacean and shark sanctuaries



Trend 2: The numbers of boats & people on the water have put some species in danger & diminished tourist experience

Problem areas:

- Doubtful Sound, NZ documented harm to bottlenose dolphins
- Puget Sound-Salish Sea southern community orcas: > 100 whale watching boats
- Anywhere with congested boat traffic

- > Need to determine K for whale watching with permit system
- > Develop more land-based whale watching, other ecotourism (multiple species and ecosystems and land and water) to spread the impact
- > One third time & space rules; zoned MPAs for management & branding

Trend 2: The numbers of boats & people on the water have put some species in danger & diminished tourist experience

Compounding issues around whale watching boat traffic:

- Recreational boats, container ship traffic, yacht races
- Overfishing and bycatch: 300,000+ whales and dolphins caught in nets accidentally every year – bycatch
- Military sonar exercises & seismic surveys for oil / gas exploration deafens whales & dolphins
- Threat of oil spills and other pollution



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Trend 3: Whale watching tourists want closer & closer encounters with whales, & operators are advertising & feel they need to offer “encounters”

Problems:

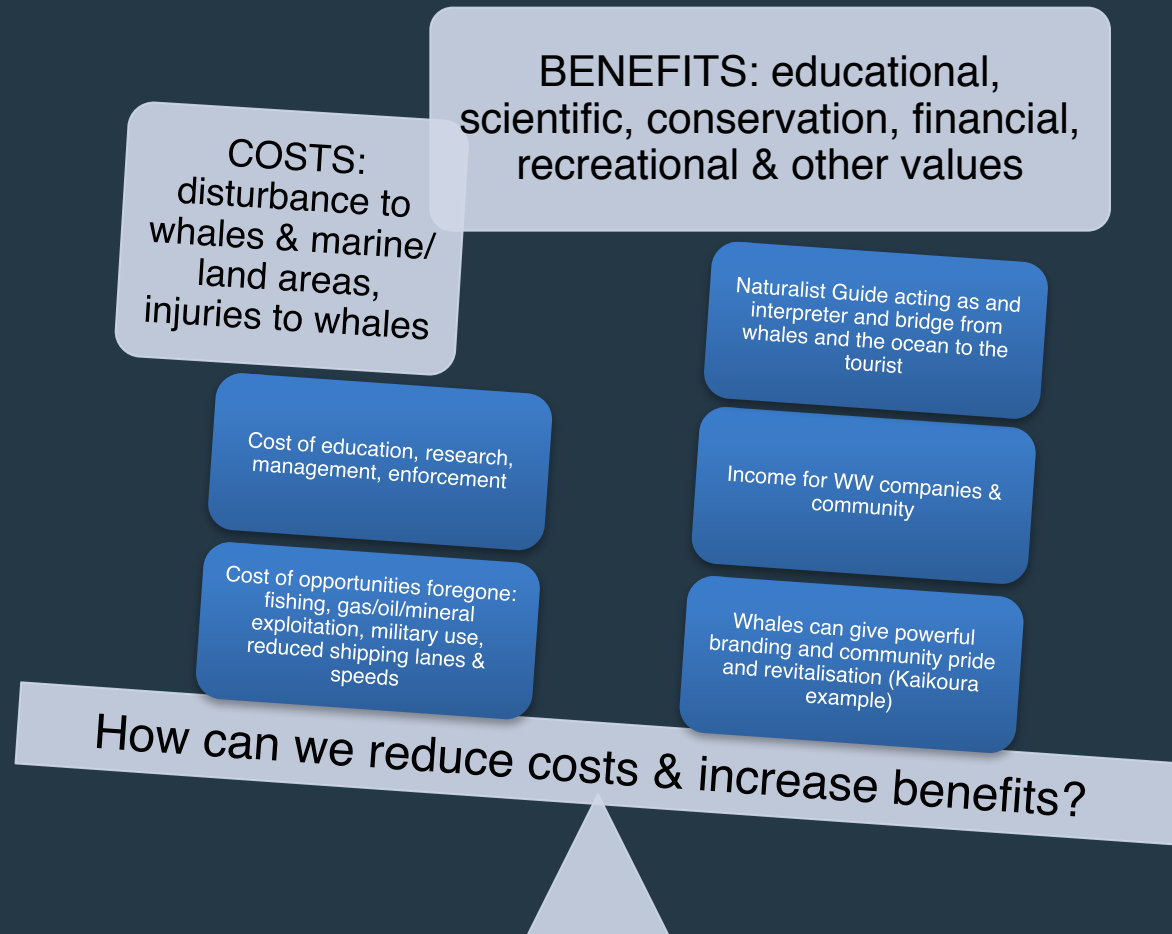
- too much contact with humans does not have survival value for most wild animals (approach too close to whalers, fishers with guns, etc.)
- are we hugging the whales too much?
- * even if you don't approach close to whales, they come close to you
 - > Customer care and education is part of the answer.
 - > Researchers or experienced naturalist guides can help interpret behavior to ensure WW boats are not encroaching on the whales; they can also help reset passenger expectations about closeness.
 - > Get back to ethic of watching natural behavior without disturbing it.

Conclusion: Road to high quality & responsible tourism never ends

Potential ideas for responsible, sustainable whale watching:

- Good naturalist guides and educational programmes
- Establish K carrying capacity and limits to growth with permit system
- Diversify/ Experiment with new WW Tour products & income streams (B&B, café, whale centre, lookouts, to spread the impact on whales, enrich the experience and provide alternative activities.
- Monitoring + internal / external evaluations and periodic re-evaluations
- Every few years, whale watch operators, tourism managers and community stakeholders should re-dedicate their energy and passion, fine-tune or re-invent their company mission and look at practices
- Make a Benefit Cost analysis to increase benefits and reduce costs.

Toward Sustainable Whale Watching: Cost-benefit scenario & economic valuation



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WHERE do we want to be in 5 years?
It is not enough to show whales to
people and make some money. Whale
watching operators, guides and
communities have a mission to educate
and connect people to the ocean in a
way that is beneficial for whales, too.

