

2ND MEETING OF THE SIGNATORIES TO THE PACIFIC CETACEANS MOU

28-29 July 2009

Heritage Hotel, Auckland, New Zealand

The 2nd Meeting of the Signatories to the Pacific Islands Cetaceans Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), concluded today (Wednesday 29 July, 2009) in Auckland, New Zealand. Thirteen Pacific Island states and territories met for two days to agree a way forward to conserve the whales and dolphins of the Pacific Islands Region.

Many species in the region, such as the blue whale, the humpback whale, the orca and the bottlenose dolphin, are endangered by a number of threats, including entanglement in fishing gear and by-catch, direct hunting, climate change, habitat degradation, pollution, underwater noise and collisions with ships.

Accordingly, the signatories agreed a four-year action plan, outlining priorities for the conservation of whales and dolphins in the Pacific Islands region. The Action Plan places emphasis on increasing capacity, awareness and understanding in the region. It outlines how communities can benefit from whale- and dolphin-based tourism. Involving local communities in conservation activities is a key to the success of such an initiative.

Today, the governor of Pitcairn Islands signed the agreement, and the territory became the 12th member. Pitcairn Islands became the smallest signatory in human terms, with a resident population of only 53 people. However, its exclusive economic zone extends over 800,000 square km of ocean in the middle of the Pacific, a huge habitat for migratory whales which traverse the ocean between feeding and breeding grounds.

Two new collaborating organisations, Whales Alive and the South Pacific Whale Research Consortium also joined. Both are actively involved in research and conservation in the region, and join other NGOs in providing advice and support to the Pacific Island countries and territories.

A dedicated website was launched as a platform for regional information exchange for the Signatories: www.pacificcetaceans.org.