



**CONVENTION ON
MIGRATORY
SPECIES**

CMS/PIC/MOS4/Doc.3.2

Date: 23 July 2021

Original: English

FOURTH MEETING OF THE SIGNATORIES TO
THE MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING FOR
THE CONSERVATION OF CETACEANS AND THEIR
HABITATS IN THE PACIFIC ISLANDS REGION

5-6 August 2021, *Online*

**DRAFT PACIFIC ISLANDS REGIONAL MARINE SPECIES PROGRAMME /
WHALE AND DOLPHIN ACTION PLAN 2022-2026**

Pacific Islands Regional Marine Species Programme 2022-2026



DRAFT VERSION ONLY



SPREP
Secretariat of the Pacific Regional
Environment Programme



An Initiative of the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of
States Funded by the European Union



1972-2022



Department of
Conservation
Te Papa Atawhai

Pacific Islands Regional Marine Species Programme

2022-2026

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This document has been compiled by Hannah Hendriks and Karen Baird. We would like to extend a massive thank you to the following people for their review and many helpful edits and comments on all aspects of this document: Y Amepou, O Andrews, N Barefoot, A Chin, C Cleguer, R Constantine, W Dimmlich, C Duffy, J Fischer, I Freeman, H Frisch-Nwakanma, N Hodgins, C Garrigue, M Grant, C Hof, D Kwon, F Le Bail, D Lundquist, H Marsh, D Mitchell, M O’Toole, N Pilcher, J Russel, M Satoa and other representatives of the Samoan government, A Stewart, L Tamata, H Tao, D Walker, N Young, and representatives of the Sharks MOU.

Special thanks to go to Stephanie Borrelle, Chris Gaskin and Mark O-Brien (BirdLife Pacific) for the drafting of the new seabird action plan. Also, to Unity Roebeck for assistance with drafting the programme, particularly aspects of the turtle action plan.

We would like to acknowledge Michael Donoghue for the previous Regional Marine Species Programme iterations and drafts from which these plans were largely built off.

ACRONYMS

ACAP	Agreement for the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels
ACPMEA	Multilateral Environmental Agreements in African, Caribbean and Pacific countries.
ALDFG	Abandoned, Lost and Discarded Fishing Gear
BIEM	By-catch and Integrated Ecosystem Management
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
CEFAS	Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science, UK government
CITES	Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora
CMM	Conservation and Management Measure
CMS	Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals
CROP	Council of Regional Organisations of the Pacific
CSO	Civil Society Organisations
CTI-CFF	Coral Triangle Initiative on Coral Reefs Fisheries
DD	Date Deficient
EBA	Ecosystem-Based Adaptation
EEZ	Exclusive Economic Zone
EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment
FAD	Fish Aggregating Device
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations
FFA	Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency
GEF	Global Environment Facility
IGO	Intergovernmental Organisation
IMMA	Important Marine Mammal Areas
IOSEA	Indian Ocean and South-East Asia
ISRA	Important Shark and Ray Areas
ISSF	International Seafood Sustainability Foundation
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
IUU	Illegal, unreported, and unregulated
IWC	International Whaling Commission
KBA	Key Biodiversity Area
LMMA	Locally Managed Marine Area
MCS	Monitoring, Control and Surveillance
MEA	Multilateral Environmental Agreement
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
MPA	Marine Protected Area
MSC	Marine Stewardship Council
MSP	Marine Spatial Plans
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
OECM	Other Effective area-based Conservation Measures
PCARAP	Pacific Coral Reef Action Plan
RFMO	Regional Fisheries Management Organisation
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SEA	Strategic Environmental Assessment
SPC	Pacific Community
SPREP	Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme
SSIP	Shark Search Indo-Pacific

TK	Traditional Knowledge
TREDS	Turtle Research and Monitoring Database System
UK	United Kingdom
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
USA	United States of America
WCPFC	Western Central Pacific Fisheries Commission
WCPO	Western and Central Pacific Ocean
WWF	World Wide Fund for Nature

DEFINITIONS

Cetacean	All species of whale, dolphin or porpoise.
Sharks and rays	All species known as elasmobranchs, e.g. sharks, rays, skates and chimaeras.
Key Biodiversity Area (KBA)	The KBA Programme supports the identification, mapping, monitoring and conservation of KBAs to help safeguard the most critical sites for nature on our planet.
Regional	The use of the word ‘regional’ in this plan references the whole Pacific islands region. When referring to things on a national and regional scale, this includes sub-regional cooperation between countries within the region.
Marine species	For the purpose of this programme, the use of ‘marine species’ refers to dugongs, marine turtles, whales and dolphins, sharks and rays, and seabirds only unless otherwise stated.
Take	Taking, hunting, fishing, capturing, harassing, deliberate killing, or attempting to engage in any such conduct (as per the CMS Convention text Article I.1.i).
Direct take	Targeted removal for use.

VISION

The Marine Species Programme of the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) outlines a regional strategy for the conservation and management of dugongs, marine turtles, whales and dolphins, sharks and rays, and seabirds, referred to throughout this document as 'marine species'. The programme, which will be implemented through Action Plans during 2022–2026, will enable Pacific islanders to take a primary role in achieving the following vision:

A healthy Pacific Ocean with thriving populations of whales, dolphins, marine turtles, dugongs, sharks and rays, and seabirds and the associated ecosystems on which they depend, which assures the aspirations of Pacific island peoples and protects their natural and cultural heritage.

INTRODUCTION

The Pacific islands region served by SPREP covers 32 million km² and is in the largest continuous marine habitat on the planet, the Pacific Ocean. This region is home to a diverse range of large marine animals, including cetaceans (whales and dolphins), sirenians (dugongs), testudines (marine turtles), elasmobranchs (sharks and rays) and seabirds. Over half of the world's known species of cetaceans are found in the region, seven are threatened with extinction, many of them interacting with tuna fisheries. The Pacific Ocean supports some of the world's largest remaining populations of dugongs (listed as Vulnerable), and green (Endangered), hawksbill (Critically Endangered) and loggerhead turtles (Vulnerable). Sharks and rays are increasingly threatened globally, particularly from overexploitation. Nearly all the shark and ray species recorded from the Pacific (189 species) have been assessed by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), with around half listed as threatened (vulnerable, endangered, critically endangered) or near threatened. Seabirds have most recently been added to the suite of migratory marine species covered by this programme. Around 40 species are known to breed across the Pacific with many more migrating across and breeding outside the region. Eleven species are threatened with extinction (vulnerable, endangered, critically endangered) and one is near threatened. For some species, the location of their breeding grounds is unknown.

Dugongs, turtles, whales, dolphins, sharks, rays, seabirds and other large marine species play a significant ecological role in the functioning of coastal and oceanic habitats and systems. The life history characteristics of many of these species are long-lived with low reproductive potential. This makes them vulnerable to direct and indirect harvesting, environmental pressures, and protracted population recovery. Some species, such as humpback whales, are widely regarded as flagship species for Pacific marine ecosystems and often feature prominently in promotional tourist materials for many Pacific island countries and territories. The contribution of these species to ecosystem services and livelihoods is increasingly under threat. Protection and recovery of populations of migratory species is critical for maintaining a healthy Pacific Ocean.

CULTURAL IMPORTANCE

These marine animals are also recognised as being a fundamental element of Pacific island culture and heritage. Many Pacific island cultures have legends, stories and traditional uses of marine species, which highlights the importance of these animals to people's identities, way of life and heritage.

Dugongs and turtles have been hunted extensively in the region, both for traditional and subsistence purposes, and more recently for commercial gain. They are now considered endangered throughout their range and many small and/or isolated populations are vulnerable to extinction. For example, in some Pacific islands, dolphins have been sought after for food, e.g. through local drive hunts.

However, for many SPREP members, marine mammals are considered taboo. These species remain highly valued as a food item (meat, fat and oil), for medicine (oil and bone), and for jewellery and ornaments (turtle shells, and skin and bones from dugongs and cetaceans). Dugong bone (New Caledonia) and the teeth of small cetaceans (in Papua New Guinea (Manus Province) and the Solomon Islands (Malaita)) have been important in certain ceremonies (e.g. marriages and funerals). In Fiji, *tabua* (historically harvested sperm whale teeth) are a highly valued commodity in cultural ceremonies and exchanges. In New Ireland, Papua New Guinea, local people of the Mandak language practice the cultural fishing method of 'shark calling'. On wooden paddle canoes, fishers sing and tap a stick that is fixed with loosely tied coconut shells against the underside of the canoe. The pulsing rhythm created draws sharks to the surface next to the canoe where they are captured, often by hand. Seabirds also have a valued place in the cultures of the Pacific, e.g. as oceanic guides to fish schools and for navigational support. For all marine species, there is a growing awareness of their non-consumptive values and benefits to local communities (e.g. boat or shore-based tourism activities, such as whale watching).

CONSERVATION CHALLENGES

Marine species face a wide and increasing range of human induced threats to their survival. Overfishing, fisheries by-catch and abandonment, lost or discarded fishing gear including poor management of Fish Aggregating Devices is an ongoing threat to all five groups of species discussed here. Marine pollution including from point sources, poor catchment and coastal development, and discharges from shipping accidents is continuing to increase. Marine plastic pollution is of great concern to Pacific island member states. Marine species are directly affected through direct interactions and through consumption causing mortality or long-term health impacts for populations. While marine tourism can provide much needed income for Pacific countries and local communities, impacts from development of tourism infrastructure to direct impacts from operations to view marine species need to be carefully managed.

Climate change impacts to marine ecosystems and habitats are a major cause for concern for these marine species and a particular focus for the 2022-2026 programme. They include everything from impacts from rising temperatures, ocean acidification and resulting impacts to food availability and distribution, to loss of beach nesting habitat from increasing frequency and intensity of storms. There is growing evidence that a major threat to all marine species in the region is the changes in suitable breeding habitat and changes in prey availability due to climate related environmental change.

While subsistence hunting of dolphins, dugongs and turtles may have been sustainable in the past, the cumulative impacts of increasing human populations and coastal development, pressure from other threats such as pollution and ocean noise, and the introduction of new harvesting technologies (e.g. outboard motors and gill nets) has severely impacted many marine megafauna species, resulting in fragmentation of populations and even local extinctions. For many species of large whales, commercial whaling during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, largely by countries from outside the region, has reduced the breeding populations of South Pacific whales to extremely low levels, possibly to local extinction for some species. Now there are also increasing threats to smaller whales and dolphins from fisheries interactions. The global harvest of turtles in the 1960s reached a record 17,000 tonnes due to the high demand in international trade for turtle and turtle products but due to conservation efforts, including interventions by the Convention on International Trade of Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), there has been a significant decline in the global trade of turtle products. Direct take of turtles is still widespread

throughout the Western Pacific. Some islands have restricted their take to subsistence only but there is evidence of common illegal captures for domestic and international trade.

Most of these species have distribution and migratory pathways that extend across and beyond the Pacific and international boundaries, further contributing to their vulnerability. Thus, Pacific island countries and territories have a shared responsibility to ensure the recovery and maintenance of viable populations of these species and their habitats, including under the provisions of various international and regional agreements such as CITES, the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS), and Regional Fisheries Management Organisations (RFMOs). Partners have a responsibility to support Pacific island countries and territories to implement these conventions. In recent years, there has been a growing awareness of the increasingly threatened status of many of these iconic species and of the need for a concerted and coordinated approach among Pacific island countries to reverse declining population trends.

In addition to the above-mentioned threats to these species, the overarching problems and challenges surrounding conservation efforts in the Pacific islands region include:

- Lack of data and information, including basic population parameters, migration routes and long-term data sets.
- Lack of identification and quantification of the threats facing marine species.
- Absence and lack of ongoing and long-term research, survey and monitoring programmes.
- Limited public awareness and education programmes.
- Limited in-country capacity to provide leadership in marine species research and conservation management.
- Limited national prioritisation and management mechanisms to protect marine animals and their habitats.
- Lack of resources, including accessing sustained funding.
- Limited information exchange, linkages and collaboration at the national and regional levels.
- Lack of Monitoring, Control and Surveillance (MCS) capacity.

STRATEGIC APPROACH

Pacific island peoples are stewards of their marine environment and depend on marine resources for their way of life. The 2022–2026 Marine Species Programme supports them by:

- Increasing knowledge, awareness and understanding of marine species and their habitats, and their ecological and economic values including through sharing best practice.
- Appropriate incorporation and recognition of cultural knowledge and traditional conservation practice must be the starting point for public awareness.
- Building capacity and securing human resources to enable implementation of the Action Plans.
- Securing sustainable financing to support implementation of the Action Plans.
- Identify and address emerging threats, and avoid, reduce or mitigate current threats.
- Improving the condition of marine species and their habitats through improved management and protection.
- Promoting appropriate customary management practices and traditional stewardship.
- Ensuring that marine species populations recover and continue to fulfil their ecological roles.
- Promoting the socio-economic benefits of non-consumptive use through responsible tourism.
- Enhancing cooperation and coordinated action at national, sub-regional, regional and international levels.
- Fostering opportunities for ecosystem-based multi-species management approaches.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

These Action Plans and their implementation are the collective responsibility of SPREP member states, the SPREP Secretariat, partner non-governmental and inter-governmental organisations and private sector organisations.

SPREP will continue to play an important role in facilitating the exchange of information, coordinating efforts, building capacity, securing resources, and regularly monitoring and reporting on Action Plan implementation.

Other partner organisations have technical expertise including conventions to which some members are parties or signatories such as CITES, the International Whaling Commission (IWC), the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) and its daughter agreements and MOUs. SPREP hope to forge new relationships with the Agreement for the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels (ACAP) and the Australasian Seabird Group (ASG) to support and advise members along with BirdLife International as we begin implementation of our new Action Plan on Seabirds. SPREP also acknowledge technical support from the South Pacific Whale Resource Consortium (SPWRC) and its members. Technical and financial assistance is gratefully acknowledged.

COMMITMENT, FUNDING AND HUMAN RESOURCES

It is recognised that, beyond existing in-country capacity, significant resources will be needed to achieve the aims and objectives of these Action Plans. Further efforts will be directed towards identifying potential sources of funding for implementing the Action Plans at regional and national levels.

Objective A: Ensure resources are available to effectively implement the Marine Species Programme.		
Number	Actions	Responsibility
A.1	Continue to identify and seek opportunities to secure funding and technical support through donor partners, universities, NGOs, institutions and initiatives and prepare funding proposals that specifically address marine species issues identified in these action plans.	SPREP, Partners, Members
A.2	Continue the regular provision of information related to upcoming funding opportunities.	SPREP
A.3	Continue to identify through appropriate mechanisms (e.g. CMS Dugong MOU, Pacific Cetacean MOU, IOSEA Marine Turtle MOU, Coral Triangle Initiative (CTI-CFF), IUCN species specialist groups of the Species Survival Commission, IWC) technical advisors and secure opportunities for their support of the Marine Species Action Plans.	SPREP
A.4	Continue to actively support marine species biodiversity conservation by committing appropriate resources including staffing and funds.	SPREP, Members
A.5	Continue to seek members' commitment via fora such as the annual SPREP meeting and other marine focused regional meetings for marine species and biodiversity conservation.	SPREP
INDICATORS:		TIMEFRAME:
i. Funding opportunities are identified, secured and available to support marine species programmes identified in this programme.		i. 2026
ii. Opportunities for funding are communicated to contact points via Listservs in a timely manner.		ii. Ongoing
iii. Appropriate technical advisors are identified for each species group.		iii. 2022
iv. Projects addressing marine species issues and priority actions identified in the Action Plans are implemented.		iv. 2026

IMPLEMENTATION AND COORDINATION

Objective B: Ensure successful Marine Species Programme implementation through effective and sustained management, coordination and communication.		
Number	Actions	Responsibility
B.1	Continue to provide sustained regional and national facilitation and coordination of the Marine Species Programme via a regional advisor.	SPREP

B.2	Identify contact points/national officers/CMS MOU contact points for implementation and reporting on the Marine Species Programme.	Members
B.3	Develop and implement a Communication Strategy for the Marine Species Programme that ensures effective outreach and support at the national, regional and international levels targeted appropriately at politicians, local communities, donor agencies, IGOs, NGOs, technical experts, etc.	SPREP
B.4	Identify opportunities to promote the integration of the Marine Species Programme and Action Plans priorities into regional and international strategies, plans and projects as appropriate and relevant to regional and international needs.	Members, SPREP, Partners
INDICATORS:		TIMEFRAME:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. The Threatened and Migratory Species Advisor is retained as a permanent position and is supported as required by temporary or permanent staff. ii. Each member has identified at least one contact point for the Marine Species Programme. iii. A Communication Strategy is produced, promoted and available on the SPREP website and is used to guide engagement on the programme. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Ongoing ii. 2022 iii. 2023

NETWORKING, REPORTING AND INFORMATION MANAGEMENT

SPREP will take the primary responsibility for networking, information management, archiving and regional reporting. SPREP will continue to rely on reporting and information from members and partners to achieve this.

To support this process there will be an annual review so that SPREP, members, partners and donors can keep track of progress. This will be set up as an online reporting form on SPREP's Inform portal. This will enable SPREP to report on achievements over the life of this plan in a comprehensive and effective way. [Link to come.](#)

Objective C: Implementation of the plan is supported by networks and accessible resources, and progress is measured through reporting.		
Number	Actions	Responsibility
C.1	Set up a knowledge resource (information portal) through SPREP's virtual library for each species group to assist with easy access to resources, including links to available global resources.	SPREP
C.2	Develop and maintain information management systems that are accessible and promotes information sharing by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maximising online access to Action Plan information and databases. 	SPREP

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Securing archiving of relevant reports and information through the SPREP Library and Information Centre. • Ensuring the information management system is readily available and easily accessible. • Ensuring that any restrictions on source information should be respected. 	
C.3	<p>Continue to build and strengthen marine species networks, consisting of SPREP members and partners including intergovernmental organisations (IGOs), nongovernmental organisations (NGOs), donors, technical experts and other interested parties by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintaining Listservs. • Maintaining a contacts database. • Disseminating relevant information related to the Action Plans to the network list of contacts on a regular basis. • Keeping the SPREP website up to date. • Encouraging in-country networks. • Facilitating access to information and resources including scientific and technical reports. 	SPREP
C.4	Support the creation of a network to focus on ocean cultural connectivity.	SPREP, Partners, Members
C.5	Use the SPREP reporting tool to provide annual updates on implementation of the actions in the Marine Species Programme.	SPREP, Partners, Members
C.6	Incorporate information from Action Plan reports into other national reporting mechanisms, where possible and appropriate (e.g. CBD, CMS, UNFCCC, CITES, CTI-CFF, IOSEA, SDGs, UN Ocean Commitments).	Members
C.7	Using information provided by members via the reporting tool, prepare an annual report on Marine Species Programme implementation for SPREP meetings, with a focus on in-country progress, including successes and constraints, and implementation of arrangements under CMS; strengthen the need for producing annual progress reports (as opposed to end of plan report).	SPREP
C.8	Undertake mid-term and final review of Marine Species Programme implementation, including lessons learned, and providing status report to SPREP members and partners.	SPREP, Partners, Members
INDICATORS:		TIMEFRAME:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Relevant information is available on the SPREP website. ii. Reports and information are securely stored with appropriate security. iii. Listservs are created or reinstated for each species group to enable knowledge sharing and networking and are used to disseminate relevant information regularly. iv. A contacts database is available and regularly updated. v. A network to support ocean cultural connectivity has been established. vi. Members are using the online reporting tool to record progress against actions. vii. Progress on marine species conservation in the Pacific islands region is presented annually to the SPREP meetings. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. 2022 ii. 2022 iii. 2022 and ongoing iv. 2022 v. 2022 vi. 2026 vii. Annually viii. 2026

<p>viii. The Marine Species Programme is reviewed at the end of the term to capture progress on actions, feedback on the plans, and lessons learnt. This information is captured for use in developing the next series of plans.</p>	
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MULTI-SPECIES ACTION PLAN

Many actions that can be undertaken to support the conservation of our marine species and their habitats are more general in nature and implementing them will provide benefits across ecosystems, such as managing pollution and coastal development. Additionally, there are actions that need to be completed for each species group and are not specific to just one or two of these taxa. These are outlined in this multi-species action plan to reduce redundancy across the programme. This multi-species plan should be read in conjunction with the species-specific plans to get the complete picture of conservation actions for marine species in the Pacific.

THEMES AND OBJECTIVES

THEMES	OBJECTIVES
1. Research and Monitoring	1. Improve understanding of marine species distribution, migratory paths, population abundances and trends.
2. Climate Change	1. Increase marine species resilience to climate change by reducing other threats and advocate for lower emissions.
3. Ecosystems and Habitat Protection	1. Critical habitat and migratory pathways for marine species are identified and protected.
4. Threat Reduction	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Quantify and prioritise threats to marine species and habitats. 2. Reduce impact of pollution and coastal development on marine species and habitats. 3. Reduce impact of tourism and watercraft on marine species. 4. Reduce impact of by-catch and entanglement on marine species. 5. Reduce trade of marine species and their parts.
5. Cultural Significance and Value	1. Recognise the value of traditional knowledge, customs and marine tenure and ensure it is incorporated into conservation management.
6. Legislation, Policy and Management	1. Improve protection of marine species through monitoring, control and surveillance (MCS), legal frameworks and national action plans.
7. Ecotourism and Livelihoods	1. Ensure the development of marine species tourism is sustainable and conducted responsibly, with minimum impact to the environment and species and maximum education and economic returns.
8. Capacity Building and Collaboration	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Increase capacity at national and community level for monitoring and management of marine species populations. 2. Increase national, regional and international collaboration and partnership.
9. Education, Awareness and Communication	1. Improve awareness and understanding about marine species conservation issues, and importance of marine species in ecosystems, recognising the importance of culture.

THEME 1: RESEARCH AND MONITORING		
Objective 1: Improve understanding of marine species distribution, migratory paths, population abundance and trends.		
Number	Action	Responsibility
1.1.1	Identify and prioritise gaps in knowledge of each marine species group.	SPREP, Partners
1.1.2	Develop protocols for response to marine species strandings, including investigation into factors contributing to cause of death. Provide protocols, training and response kit to members.	SPREP, Partners
1.1.3	Identify repositories for animal samples of each marine taxa (and their traded products), form agreements for transporting and processing samples and provide equipment and technical expertise to build in-country capacity.	SPREP, Partners
1.1.4	Identify and document best practice for approaches to local communities for research and monitoring approval (community entry protocols).	SPREP, Partners
INDICATORS:		TIMEFRAME:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Gaps in knowledge are identified and prioritised and available to potential research providers, managers and communities. ii. Stranding protocols are produced for each taxa and include standard data, measurements, photos, and samples to collect and where to submit, store, or send these. iii. Repositories for samples from each taxa are identified along with appropriate protocols. iv. Community entry protocols for research and monitoring have been developed and shared. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. 2024 ii. 2024 iii. 2025 iv. 2023

THEME 2: CLIMATE CHANGE		
Objective 1: Increase marine species resilience to climate change by reducing other threats and advocate for lower emissions.		
Number	Action	Responsibility
2.1.1	Support global action to keep global greenhouse gases, e.g. carbon dioxide, to 350ppm to protect biodiversity including marine species.	All
2.1.2	Promote and support research and monitoring of key marine species to track the impact of climate change on biodiversity.	SPREP, Members, Partners
2.1.3	Build species resilience to climate change by enhancing existing effective mechanisms and developing innovative solution case studies. Implement, monitor, document and share results widely.	Members, Partners
2.1.4	Support ecosystem-based adaption by supporting 30% of ocean covered by marine protection targets including 10% in high levels of protection.	Members
INDICATORS:		TIMEFRAME:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. The Pacific continues to present a strong united voice at international forums for a target of 1.5°C and the post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework targets. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. 2022 ii. 2023 iii. 2022

ii.	Identify and track the impact of climate change (e.g. sea level rise, sand temperature increase) in at least one key habitat in each country.	iv.	2030
iii.	Ways to minimise the impact of species are being implemented in Pacific member states.		
iv.	30% of Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ) are under a high level of protection.		

THEME 3: ECOSYSTEMS AND HABITAT PROTECTION		
Objective 1: Critical habitat and migratory pathways for marine species are identified and protected.		
Number	Action	Responsibility
3.1.1	Identify and map priority feeding, breeding and aggregation habitats for marine species to inform creation of Key Biodiversity Areas for protection and as inputs into development of Marine Protected Areas and Marine Spatial Plans.	SPREP, Members, Partners
3.1.2	Provide links to resources to assist with designing MPAs and MSPs such as produced by SPREP, e.g. coastal tourism environmental impact guidelines and marine spatial planning toolkit.	SPREP
3.1.3	Develop and provide a toolkit or template enabling community-led marine species protection that relevant country authorities and agencies can use to assist local villages and communities with local management action.	SPREP, Partners, Members
INDICATORS:		TIMEFRAME:
i.	Key Biodiversity Areas are identified and used in development of MPAs and MSPs.	i. 2026
ii.	A resource list for marine protection is available on the SPREP website.	ii. 2022
iii.	Toolkit for community-led marine species protection is developed and available on the SPREP website.	iii. 2024

THEME 4: THREAT REDUCTION		
Objective 1: Quantify and prioritise threats to marine species and habitats.		
Number	Action	Responsibility
4.1.1	Identify, assess and prioritise threats to marine species groups and their habitats in space and time in the Pacific at the national and regional level.	SPREP, Partners, Members
INDICATORS:		TIMEFRAME:
i.	A review of known threats is produced for each marine species group and are available on the SPREP website for use in national and regional research and management planning. National scale information is included where possible.	i. 2026
Objective 2: Reduce impact of pollution and coastal development on marine species and habitats.		
4.2.1	Protect water quality by promoting sustainable land use practices (e.g. ridge-to-reef and community-based	SPREP, Members

	management) to protect and conserve coastal marine species habitats and foraging grounds such as seagrass meadows.	
4.2.2	Ensure environmental impact assessment (EIA) processes for coastal development take account of and avoid, reduce or mitigate any impacts to marine species, their habitat and foraging grounds, especially coral reefs and seagrass beds, including impacts of run-off.	SPREP, Members
4.2.3	Consider the impacts of other development, such as seabed and sand mining, in national legislative and EIA processes. Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Guidelines for Pacific island countries and territories are available to ensure environmental and social considerations are integrated in national and sectoral development plans, policies, strategies and programmes.	Members, Partners
4.2.4	Enforce compliance with international and national regulations regarding vessel discharges containing oil and other toxic substances including plastic, and report breaches.	SPREP, Members, Partners
4.2.5	Implement the Pacific Marine Litter Action Plan and the International Maritime Organisation's Marine Litter Action Plan, including strengthening the collaboration between relevant government agencies.	Members
INDICATORS: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. SPREP's EIA and SEA guidelines have been shared and promoted to members and are being used to assist with policy development and EIA and SEA processes. ii. Examples of effective EIAs and SEAs are available for reference. iii. Documentation of reported incidents/cases/offences received and actioned for vessels discharging oil or other toxic substances. iv. Appropriate policies are in place and enforced in Pacific island countries and territories to reduce the impacts of waste and pollution on marine species. 		TIMEFRAME: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. 2023 ii. 2023 iii. 2026 iv. 2026
Objective 3: Reduce impact of tourism and watercraft on marine species.		
4.3.1	Promote SPREP's EIA guidelines for Coastal Tourism Development as best practice for developments in Pacific island countries or territories. Use SPREP website to provide lessons learned and best practices in environmental management resources.	SPREP
4.3.2	Review and promote guidelines for responsible watercraft operations, consider reductions in boat speed, distance or limits on the number of vessels in proximity to marine species, or spatial/temporal closures where needed to prevent injury and death of marine species.	SPREP, Members
INDICATORS: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Up to date guidelines for responsible watercraft operations are available on the SPREP website and promoted. 		TIMEFRAME: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. 2022 ii. 2026

ii. Regulations are in place for the operation of watercraft around marine species and further restrictions in areas where this is deemed to be a significant problem.		
Objective 4: Reduce impact of by-catch and entanglement on marine species.		
4.4.1	Prohibit the discarding of fishing gear, especially nets (ghost nets). Encourage ghost net clearing programmes in important marine species habitat areas and on beaches/reefs.	Members, SPREP, CMS Secretariat, WCPFC
4.4.2	Require fishery licence holders to have management plans for each vessel for dealing with old fishing gear including the fate of drifting FADs used in the tuna fishery.	Members
4.4.3	Improve by-catch reporting through the implementation of electronic monitoring. Continue to improve observer programmes to better document, identify and report marine species by-catch. Promote opportunity to use observers to record observations of marine species at sea.	SPREP, Members, WCPFC
4.4.4	Identify the key sources of fisheries mortality or injury for marine species and advise governments on ways to reduce to the greatest extent practicable the incidental capture and mortality of marine species during fishing activities (e.g. spatial and temporal closures and gear modifications).	SPREP, Members, CMS Secretariat, NGOs
4.4.5	Promote best practice guidelines for the safe handling and release of by-caught species in collaboration with partners such as FAO, SPC and UNDP. Support use of non-entangling and biodegradable FADs.	SPREP, Members, WCPFC
4.4.6	Encourage adoption of best practice mitigation methods in small-scale fisheries and in WCPFC fisheries to reduce interactions and mortality with fishing gear.	SPREP, SPC, FFA, Members, Partners
INDICATORS:		TIMEFRAME:
i. Members support measures to reduce fishing vessels as sources of marine litter including derelict fishing gear.		i. 2026
ii. Ghost net clearing programmes have occurred.		ii. 2026
iii. Policies in place requiring waste management plans for each vessel dealing with old unwanted fishing gear including drifting FADs.		iii. 2026
iv. Documentation of marine species by-catch is occurring and recorded in relevant databases, understanding of levels of by-catch is improved.		iv. 2026
v. Best practice guidelines for by-catch mitigation and the safe handling and release of by-catch marine species are adopted throughout fisheries in the Pacific.		v. 2024
vi. Use of non-entangling and biodegradable FADs are required to be used in the WCPO.		vi. 2026
vii. Key sources of fisheries mortality are identified and options for reducing incidental captures and mortality are promoted.		vii. 2023
viii. Recommended by-catch mitigation methods are employed by all fisheries and by-catch of marine species is reduced or eliminated.		viii. 2026
Objective 5: Reduce trade of marine species and their parts.		

4.5.1	Promote membership of and compliance with relevant international regulations, Conventions and Agreements such as CITES.	SPREP, Partners, Members
4.5.2	Build capacity nationally and regionally to analyse and share genetic data to aid in MCS of traded products.	SPREP, Partners, Members
4.5.3	Undertake community-based use and trade surveys to understand the level, motivations and drivers of taxa use and trade to inform which populations are targeted and are most at risk.	SPREP, Partners, Members
INDICATORS:		TIMEFRAME:
i. Membership of CITES is increased.		i. 2026
ii. Illegal trade in marine species and their parts is reduced or eliminated.		ii. 2026
iii. Capacity to use genetic data to aid MCS has been developed.		iii. 2026
iv. Surveys of community-based use and trade have been undertaken and results summarised in a report.		iv. 2026

THEME 5: CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE AND VALUE		
Objective 1: Recognise the value of traditional knowledge, customs and marine tenure and ensure it is incorporated into conservation management.		
Number	Action	Responsibility
5.1.1	Enable local communities to contribute their cultural knowledge and traditions when conducting research and when developing management and action plans for marine species management.	Members, Partners
5.1.2	Ensure gender and other social inclusion considerations are considered when working with local communities and undertaking research or protection of marine species.	Members, Partners
5.1.3	Centre indigenous knowledge in solutions to threats to marine species through integration of cultural governance and stewardship into development and implementation of conservation actions.	Members, Partners, SPREP
5.1.4	Record and preserve traditional knowledge associated with marine species and provide fair and equitable benefits (monetary and non-monetary) arising from its use to owners of traditional knowledge and customs for conservation and sustainable use.	Members, Partners, SPREP
INDICATORS:		TIMEFRAME:
i. Cultural knowledge and traditions are acknowledged in national action plans.		i. Ongoing
ii. The representation of females, youth, and other under-represented demographics in community research, monitoring and management is increased and reported.		ii. 2026
iii. Cultural governance and stewardship are incorporated when creating and implementing solutions to marine species threats.		iii. Ongoing
iv. Traditional knowledge about marine species is recorded and benefits shared appropriately.		iv. 2026

THEME 6: LEGISLATION, POLICY AND MANAGEMENT		
Objective 1: Improve protection of marine species through monitoring, control and surveillance (MCS), legal frameworks and national action plans.		
Number	Action	Responsibility
6.1.1	Encourage the creation or review of national action plans (or equivalent) for each marine species group.	Members
6.1.2	Support the development and implementation of management plans for established and declared marine sanctuaries, Marine Protected Areas and other ecosystem-based protection mechanisms that include marine species.	SPREP, Partners, Members
6.1.3	Ensure conservation status of threatened and migratory marine species are considered when developing new legislation or policy. When reviewing existing legislation look for inconsistencies between different Acts and policies relating to these species, e.g. between fisheries and environment.	Members
6.1.4	Proactively strengthen marine species and habitat protection in national legislation and policy including National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans. Ensure collaboration between government agencies to achieve cross sectoral integration.	Members
6.1.5	Review and update CITES legislation to facilitate improved management of traded species and support the use of electronic CITES permit systems.	Members
6.1.6	Incorporate relevant traditional knowledge, customary marine tenure and practices into policy, legislation and management plans where appropriate.	Members, Partners
INDICATORS:		TIMEFRAME:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Half of members have national action plans completed or drafted for two or more species groups. ii. Existing national action plans are updated based on the Regional Marine Species Programme 2022-2026. iii. New and reviewed legislation considers the conservation status of threatened and migratory marine species. iv. Management plans for MPAs and other marine ecosystem-based protection mechanisms that include effective measures to protect marine species are developed in Pacific island countries and territories. v. Marine Species actions are incorporated into National Implementation Plans, Action Plans, Strategies or other National Programmes or projects. vi. Traditional knowledge, customary marine tenure and practices are present in new and reviewed policy, legislation and management plans. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. 2026 ii. 2023 iii. 2026 iv. 2025 v. 2026 vi. 2026

THEME 7: ECOTOURISM AND LIVELIHOODS		
Objective 1: Ensure the development of marine species tourism is sustainable and conducted responsibly, with impact to the environment and species and maximum education and economic returns.		
Number	Action	Responsibility

7.1.1	From the outcomes of 4.5.3, encourage the development of alternative livelihoods as ways to support and protect marine species.	Members, Partners
7.1.2	Collaborate with Pacific Tourism Organisation to develop Regional Marine Tourism Guidelines building on international work, e.g. UNEP species-specific guidelines for boat-based wildlife watching.	SPREP, Pacific Tourism Organisation
7.1.3	Organise a regional workshop for range states on responsible marine species tourism.	SPREP
7.1.4	Encourage where appropriate the inclusion of the cultural dimension, including traditional stories, in the development of tourism operations.	Partners, Members
INDICATORS: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Regional Marine Tourism Guidelines exist for marine species tourism in the Pacific region and are available on the SPREP website. ii. A virtual workshop has been held to promote responsible marine tourism for the different marine species with updates from members and partners on local management of marine wildlife tourism. 		TIMEFRAME: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. 2024 ii. 2025

THEME 8: CAPACITY BUILDING AND COLLABORATION		
Objective 1: Increase capacity at national and community level for monitoring and management of marine species populations.		
Number	Action	Responsibility
8.1.1	Investigate opportunities for Pacific island nationals to obtain further training and education (postgraduate degrees) in marine conservation management, including human environment relationships.	Partners, Members, SPREP
8.1.2	Ensure that post-graduate research is linked to national priorities for research and governments provide career pathways for graduates.	Members, Sponsor partners
8.1.3	Provide training for national coordinators to effectively use and communicate information, including support for language translation.	SPREP
INDICATORS: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Training and education opportunities are identified and communicated via Listservs. ii. Students who conduct post-graduate studies can continue their careers in-country. iii. Virtual communications training has been offered to members and conducted. 		TIMEFRAME: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Ongoing ii. Ongoing iii. Ongoing
Objective 2: Increase national, regional and international collaboration and partnership.		
8.2.1	Continue to identify and strengthen communication and share data between relevant laboratories and universities and members to enable genetic analyses for marine species biopsy samples.	SPREP, Partners
8.2.2	Encourage CMS Members and Non-Party Members to become signatories to the CMS Migratory Sharks MOU, the Pacific Cetacean MOU and Dugong MOU.	SPREP, Members

8.2.3	Encourage Non-Party Members to accede to CITES and/or adhere to CITES requirements to increase protection for traded marine species.	SPREP, Members
8.2.4	Through training workshops and other capacity building opportunities, enable members to comply with CITES regulations concerning marine species trade, export/import, including training on identifying parts.	SPREP, Members
8.2.5	Where scientific sampling for DNA analysis is required, assist in establishing permit requirements under CITES.	SPREP
8.2.6	Initiate dialogue and collaboration with the fisheries, tourism and transport sectors at the regional and national levels in relation to information, awareness raising and management actions to address impacts.	SPREP, Partners, Members
8.2.7	Foster CSO, NGO partnerships at the national, regional and international levels.	SPREP, Partners, Members
8.2.8	Foster interagency collaboration at the national level and engagement with the private sector.	Members
8.2.9	Continue to foster collaboration with the CMS and CITES Secretariats as well as other relevant species conventions and Multilateral Environmental Agreements and relevant UN Decades.	SPREP
INDICATORS:		TIMEFRAME:
i.	Laboratories and universities are identified for genetic analysis of each marine species group.	i. 2022
ii.	Membership to marine species MOUs has increased.	ii. 2023
iii.	At least one additional Member becomes a Party to CITES	iii. 2026
iv.	At least one additional member becomes a party to CMS.	iv. 2026
v.	Import and export for DNA analysis is unimpeded by CITES.	v. 2026
		vi. 2024

THEME 9: EDUCATION, AWARENESS, AND COMMUNICATION		
Objective 1: Improve awareness and understanding about marine species conservation issues, and importance of marine species in ecosystems, recognising the importance of culture.		
Number	Action	Responsibility
9.1.1	Promote Pacific island achievements and perspectives in international fora and engage with international media.	All
9.1.2	Develop regionally and nationally tailored education and awareness tools and resources (e.g. brochures, posters, documentaries) incorporating scientific and traditional knowledge (known threats; species diversity, distribution and status; key conservation projects; traditional knowledge and customs; role in climate change) for all marine species groups. Translate into French and local languages where relevant.	SPREP, Partners, Members
9.1.3	Disseminate education and awareness tools for use by government, schools, community groups, media agencies, private industry and NGOs.	SPREP, Members, Partners
9.1.4	Develop, or update, an educational toolkit to assist range states to deliver curriculum on key marine species groups, e.g. 2006 SPREP turtle education kit.	SPREP, Partners, Members

9.1.5	Assist government agencies, community trainers, and educators to deliver outreach programmes.	SPREP/Members
9.1.6	Support and strengthen the Lui Bell scholarship, Sue Taei Ocean Fellowship and other scholarships in marine science for tertiary students in the region.	All
9.1.7	Undertake outreach using informal/traditional methods of education (e.g. <i>talanoa</i> (chat) sessions, turtle calling) involving elders within communities where appropriate.	SPREP, Partners, Members
INDICATORS: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. The SPREP website contains a section for marine species education and awareness tools and resources and is promoted widely. ii. Education tools and resources are available in English, French, and local languages as appropriate. iii. Printed resources are maintained and distributed by SPREP. iv. Educational toolkits to support school curriculum are available for two species groups. v. Scholarships are issued to Pacific island tertiary students working on marine species projects. 		TIMEFRAME: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. 2022 ii. 2024 iii. Ongoing iv. 2026 v. Ongoing

WHALE AND DOLPHIN ACTION PLAN

Goal: To protect whales and dolphins and their habitats to facilitate the recovery of Pacific island populations, while acknowledging their strong cultural importance to the people of the Pacific island regions.

INTRODUCTION

The Pacific islands region is home to half of the world's species of whales and dolphins. Baleen whales are highly migratory, travelling thousands of kilometres each year between winter tropical breeding grounds and summer feeding grounds. Some whales and dolphins have relatively small home ranges, whilst others travel between several Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs). All large whales except for minke whales were brought to the brink of extinction last century with some populations reduced to less than 2% of their initial abundance, but with over 36 million km² of SPREP Member EEZs now declared as whale sanctuaries (**Error! Reference source not found.**), humpback and other species are now recovering, although their numbers remain low relative to their abundance in 1900. Whale-watching is now an important tourist attraction for many countries and territories, including French Polynesia, New Caledonia, Niue and Tonga.

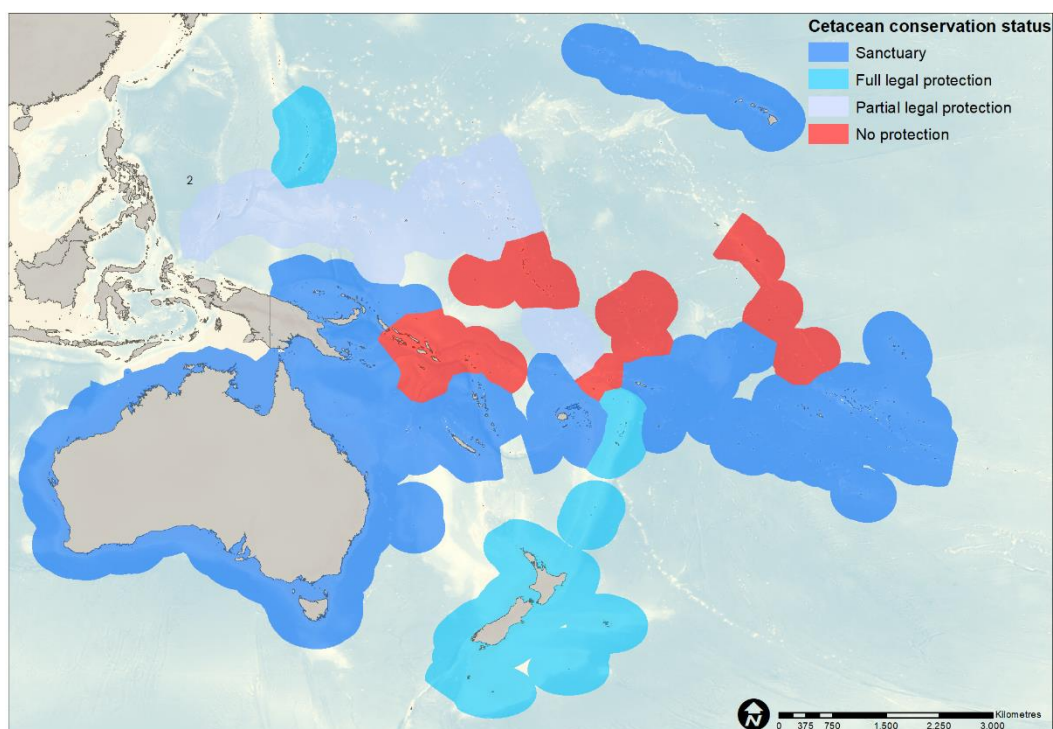


Figure 2. Map of whale and dolphin protected areas and sanctuaries. **Note: this is to be updated based on new information before finalisation of document.**

SPREP members designated 2017 and 2018 as Years of the Whale, which featured the [Whales in a Changing Ocean conference](#), the region's first inter-governmental conference focused on whales. Held in Nuku'alofa, Tonga in April 2017, the conference was attended by representatives from 16 governments, and forms the basis of many recommendations in this Action Plan.

SPECIES DISTRIBUTION

Our understanding of whale and dolphin diversity and distribution in the Pacific islands region is incomplete as there are many locations that have not yet been surveyed or there is little local environmental knowledge. Based on largely opportunistic records, at least 30 different whale and

dolphin species occur, either as year-round residents or seasonally, as migrants, within the EEZs of the 22 Pacific island countries and territories (Table 1). This number is likely higher if rare and vagrant species are considered.

Given the current state of knowledge, the most reported species across the region include the sperm whale, short-finned pilot whale, spinner dolphin and the humpback whale, noting that these species are easily identifiable, even at a distance. The distribution and abundance of many species, particularly the beaked whale species, which occur in the deep, seamount ecosystems of many Pacific island countries and territories, are hard to identify at sea and are largely known from stranding data. This underlines the importance of collecting stranding data throughout the region which can reveal important information that cannot be achieved from systematic surveys for live sightings, particularly for offshore, deep-diving species. Limited research efforts in the region, coupled with the very large expanse of marine area, make it highly likely that there are species as yet unreported from these waters.

The Science Research Working Group at the Whales in a Changing Ocean conference in 2017 recommended the establishment of a validated inventory of whale and dolphin species, genetic distinctiveness and habitat use across each Pacific island country and territory of the SPREP region in order to improve understanding of ecological roles, economic and cultural values to better inform management.

Important Marine Mammal Areas

In March 2017 a Regional Workshop was held in Samoa to identify Important Marine Mammal Areas (IMMAs) for the Pacific region. IMMAs denote habitat areas for cetacean species which need to be considered to effectively manage conservation threats. The report of the IMMA Regional Workshop for the Pacific islands can be [downloaded here](#). Each site was reviewed by an expert panel and 18 IMMAs were accepted. A further five candidate sites and 19 Areas of Interest were also designated and require further information to be upgraded to full status IMMA. Notably, it was recognised that there are substantial data gaps for marine mammals across the region, which renders the designation process for globally important sites incomplete. An interactive [e-atlas](#) provides species lists and other information for each IMMA in the Pacific.

SPECIES STATUS

Cetacean species in the region vary in conservation status according to the IUCN system of species classification. Endangered species include the sei whale (*Balaenoptera borealis*), blue whale (*Balaenoptera musculus*), and the Oceania subpopulation of the humpback whale (*Megaptera novaeangliae*). Vulnerable species include the fin whale (*Balaenoptera physalus*), snubfin dolphin (*Orcaella heinsohni*), Australian humpback dolphin (*Sousa sahulensis*) and sperm whale (*Physeter macrocephalus*). Near Threatened species include the Antarctic minke whale (*Balaenoptera bonaerensis*), false killer whale (*Pseudorca crassidens*), and the Indo-Pacific bottlenose dolphin (*Tursiops aduncus*). Of the remaining species, 17 are of Least Concern and two are Data Deficient. Twelve species have changed in conservation status since the publication of the previous Whale and Dolphin Action Plan, many of which were a reclassification of Data Deficient to Least Concern (not due to substantial new information becoming available but due to a revised interpretation of the categories) as well as three species moving from Data Deficient to Near Threatened. Notably, fin whales moved from Endangered to Vulnerable and snubfin dolphin moved from Near Threatened to Vulnerable.

Table 1. Cetacean diversity in Pacific island countries and territories. Records are classified as level 1, 2 or Unconfirmed. Note: based on Miller 2021 (in prep), some of the lists are awaiting confirmation and updates from relevant parties.

SPECIES	PACIFIC ISLAND COUNTRY OR TERRITORY																				
	AS	CI	FSM	FI	FP	GU	KI	MI	NA	NC	NI	NMI	PA	PNG	SA	SI	TOK	TO	TU	VA	WF
Australian humpback dolphin														2							
Blainville's beaked whale		1		2	1	1	1			1		1		U		U					
Blue whale		2		U			U	2								2		1			
Blue whale, Pygmy										1											
Bottlenose dolphin	1	U	2	2	1	1	1	2		1		1	U	1	1	1		1	2	2	
Bryde's whale				1	U	1									2						
Bryde's-like whale		U	1	2		U		U	2	1		1	2	U		U				U	
Common dolphin		2		U				2		2		U				U		1			
Cuvier's beaked whale	2	1	U		1	1	1		U	1		1	U	1	1	U					
Diminutive sperm whale					1	1						2		1					2		
Dwarf sperm whale	U									1					1						
False killer whale	1	U		1	1	1	U			1	1	1	U	1	1	2		1	U		
Fin whale				2	U			2													
Fraser's dolphin		1	1	U	1		1		2				1	1	2	2					
Gingko-toothed beaked whale			1				U														
Humpback whale	1	1		1	1	2		2		1	1	1		U	1	U		1		1	1
Indo-Pacific bottlenose dolphin										1											
Longman's beaked whale												1									
Melon-headed whale		1	1		1	1	U	2	2	1		1	U	1	2	2		1		1	
Minke whale, Antarctic										2								2			
Minke whale, Dwarf																		1			
Minke-like whale	1	2		1	U			2		1	1	2	U		2				2		
Orca	2	1	U	U	1	U	2	2	U	1	1	U	2	1	1	2	U	1	2	2	
Pantropical spotted dolphin	2	1	U	1	1	1	2	2		1		1	U	1		1		1	2	1	
Pygmy killer whale					1	1				1		1	U	U				1			
Pygmy sperm whale				U			1			1											
Risso's dolphin		U			1	2				1		1	U	1	2	1		1			
Rough-toothed dolphin	2			U	1	1	2	U		1		1		U	1	1		U			
Sei whale		U				U				2		2		1				2			
Short-finned pilot whale	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	2		1	2	1	U	1	1	1		1		2	
Snubfin dolphin														2		2					
Southern bottlenose whale							2														
Southern right whale							U														
Southern right whale dolphin														U							
Sperm whale	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	U	2	1	2	1	U	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	U
Spinner dolphin	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	2		1	1	1	U	1	1	1		1	1	1	
Striped dolphin		U	1			1	U	2				1	2		2	2				U	
Unknown beaked whale							1								U				U		

Pacific island cetacean species listed on CMS Appendix I are sei, blue, fin, humpback and sperm whales. Several Pacific island cetacean species, such as the Antarctic minke whale, Bryde's whale, snubfin dolphin, orca and Indo-Pacific humpback dolphin, are also listed on CMS Appendix II, which denotes species with an unfavourable conservation status or a status which would significantly benefit from international co-operation. The SPREP Whale and Dolphin Action Plan has been appended to the CMS Memorandum of Understanding for the Conservation of Cetaceans and their Habitats in the Pacific islands region (Pacific Islands Cetaceans MOU). This forms the basis for the MOU Signatories' and Collaborating Organisations' on-the-ground conservation efforts throughout the region.

TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE AND CUSTOMS

Whales and dolphins are important to the cultures, legends, traditions and heritage of many Pacific island peoples, and are often associated with identity, livelihoods and wellbeing. The history of some cultures includes the role of whales in traditional navigation. Migrations of whales are used as an environmental cue on some islands, and ceremonies and ritual surround cetaceans across the region. Whales are viewed by certain traditions as incarnations of humans, and their regular appearance to breed and give birth is still regarded as a significant event in many communities. The cultural importance of cetacean species is further illustrated by myths, stories and legends that are passed down from generation to generation via song, dance and oral traditions.

Cultural harvesting has existed in most Pacific islands at some point in time, albeit to varying degrees. This practice has ranged from using beach cast animals to direct and opportunistic hunting. Cetacean meat is sometimes harvested as a source of sustenance for the local village, but their bones and teeth are also particularly sought after (for example in dowry), with the latter likely playing an important role in historical trade. Some traditional and subsistence harvesting still exists in some communities.

INCOME GENERATING OPPORTUNITIES

A regional review of the status of marine mammal tourism activities showed that whale watching has become an important component of tourism development in the region. In 2005, the industry had a total estimated direct economic value of USD 7.5 million and USD 21 million in total value.

Whale watching has become of high economic importance to many Pacific island countries and territories. Correspondingly, the growth potential and economic benefits of cetacean-based tourism has proved an effective argument against the killing of whales throughout the Pacific. The rapid growth of whale-watching in the region during 1988-2005 raised questions about the sustainability of the activity. However, there has been little activity since 2020, because of the impacts of Covid-19 on the region's tourism industry. Issues related to any future resumption of whale-watching will include the potential impacts on marine mammal populations and the need for management measures. The hiatus in tourism may be an opportune time to ensure whale watching best practice is implemented. A recent publication (Fiori 2019) highlighted that swim-with operations in Tonga are having biological impacts on the animals. This highlights the need for long term monitoring of whale watching activities, monitoring, control, surveillance of regulations and capping of the numbers of vessels to ensure the safety of animals and people. The [Pacific Regional Guidelines for Whale and Dolphin Watching](#) (SPREP, 2008) provides a template for the development of regulations and recommended management measures for sustainable whale watching tourism. There is also the [IWC Whale Watching Handbook](#). The [Whales Alive Whale Watching Operator and Guide Training Programme](#) was designed to meet the skill needs of Pacific whale watching operators. There are also

resources available from the World Cetacean Alliance (WCA) such as the [Global Best Practice Guidance for Whale Watching](#) and the [Responsible Whale Watching Guides course](#).

THREATS

Although whales are no longer hunted commercially in the Southern Hemisphere, they are exposed to a wide range of other threats. Though the geographic coverage and regularity of the threats, as well as the species that are impacted by them, can vary across the region, the main threats to cetaceans in the Pacific islands region include:

- fisheries interactions including by-catch and entrapment in both active and Abandoned, Lost and Discarded Fishing Gear (ALDFG), including Fish Aggregating Devices (FADs) and gillnets.
- whale watch vessels and swimmers ship strike
- pollution (e.g. plastic, abandoned fishing gear, heavy metals)
- habitat degradation
- anthropogenic noise including from ships, industrial activity and naval operations
- climate change
- direct take, for both sustenance (hunts) and commercial trade (live)
- Incomplete understanding of genetic distinctiveness of pan-tropical species and implications for understanding by-catch risk

In addition, there is a lack of scientific information to inform decisions on how to manage anthropogenic threats.

Fisheries

Interactions with fishing gear have been reported for more than 30 species of cetaceans in tuna and other small- and large-scale fisheries in the Western Central Pacific Ocean. False killer whales are reported to interact most frequently in both longline and purse seine fisheries. Interactions with baleen whales, including threatened species such as blue, fin and humpback whales, and sperm whales are also recorded for both purse seine and longline fisheries. Risso's (*Grampus griseus*), rough-toothed (*Steno bredanensis*), Indo-Pacific bottlenose and pan-tropical spotted dolphin (*Stenella attenuata*) are also frequently reported as by-catch in gillnets, longlines and purse seiners. Australian snubfin (*Orcaella heinsohni*) and Australian humpback (*Sousa sahalensis*) dolphins found in the Kikori Delta of Papua New Guinea are also threatened as by-catch in coastal fisheries activities. Survival from interactions with fishing gear is poorly understood, particularly where gear remains attached to animals. Interactions with ALDFG are of increasing concern. High levels of observer coverage in tuna purse seine fisheries provide a good understanding of the level of interactions in this fishery but this is not so with tuna longline fisheries, which generally have very low levels of observer coverage (2-5%), according to the Western Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC). Estimates of by-catch in non-tuna small- and large-scale fisheries are lacking. In addition, our incomplete knowledge with regards to population size, distribution, and genetic distinctiveness of many marine mammal species in the Pacific means it is very difficult to understand the degree to which these interactions may threaten cetacean populations. Filling data gaps will take many years and we cannot wait for definitive results. A precautionary approach is required and increased effort to reduce interactions and mitigate harm is essential if we are to guarantee the long-term benefits of whales and dolphins to our ocean health and as important cultural icons.

THEMES AND OBJECTIVES

THEMES	OBJECTIVES
1. Research and Monitoring	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Data are collected, centralised, accessible and maintained. 2. Improve knowledge of abundance and distribution of cetaceans. 3. Understand critical habitat and migratory pathways. 4. Understand impact of threats to populations of whales and dolphins.
2. Climate Change	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Identify vulnerability of whales and dolphins to climate change.
3. Ecosystems and Habitat Protection	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Critical habitat and migratory pathways for whales and dolphins are protected.
4. Threat Reduction	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Reduce direct and indirect threats to whale and dolphin populations.
5. Cultural Significance and Value	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Recognise the value of traditional knowledge, customs and marine tenure and ensure it is incorporated into management.
6. Legislation, Policy and Management	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Review legal, policy and institutional frameworks relating to the protection of whales and dolphins.
7. Ecotourism and Livelihoods	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ensure the development of whale and dolphin tourism is sustainable and conducted responsibly, with minimum impact and maximum education and economic returns.
8. Capacity Building and Collaboration	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Increase in-country expertise and capacity for the conservation and sustainable management of cetaceans. 2. Increase national, regional and international collaboration and partnership for whale and dolphin conservation and management.
9. Education, Awareness, and Communication	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Improve awareness and understanding about the importance of whales and dolphins and relevant conservation issues.

THEME 1: RESEARCH AND MONITORING		
Objective 1: Data is collected, centralised, and accessible.		
Number	Action	Responsibility
1.1.1	Facilitate the widespread use of innovative electronic reporting and monitoring tools such as Happywhale.com , iNaturalist and other suitable applications to promote citizen science and collect observational data.	SPREP, Partners, Members
1.1.2	Maintain and administer the ' Strandings of Oceania ' database on Flukebook.org .	SPREP
1.1.3	Encourage public to report all whale and dolphin strandings and mortalities to appropriate management authority.	Members
1.1.4	Develop national stranding networks that are inclusive of stakeholders. Implement stranding response and data collection protocols, collect information on the potential	Members, SPREP, SPC

	impact of human interactions including plastics and fishing gear on whales and dolphins, with the best-practice goal of full necropsies where possible.	
1.1.5	Submit stranding data and analysis results to the ' Strandings of Oceania database ' (www.flukebook.org), including any DNA results or necropsy notes and reports, evidence of human interaction including entanglement or plastic ingestion.	Members
1.1.6	Encourage reporting of ship-strikes to local and regional authorities and the IWC's global ship-strike database . Record in Strandings of Oceania database .	Members
1.1.7	Encourage monitoring and assessment of the number of animals, species, location and date of any direct take.	Members, SPREP
INDICATORS		TIMEFRAME
i.	A range of complementary applications are in use in the region to record and disseminate sightings.	i. 2024
ii.	An electronic humpback whale fluke identification database (happywhale.com) contains data from member countries and territories.	ii. 2025
iii.	The Strandings of Oceania database (www.flukebook.org) contains stranding records from members.	iii. 2025
iv.	Data is available on direct take.	iv. Ongoing
Objective 2: Improve knowledge of abundance/distribution of cetaceans.		
Number	Action	Responsibility
1.2.1	Support and promote well-designed and funded surveys to establish abundance estimates, distribution, range and habitat information for Pacific island region cetacean species and provide information to SPREP members.	SPWRC, Partners, SPREP
1.2.2	Consider the use of remote sensing (e.g. hydrophones, gliders, satellites) to detect whales and dolphins in the region. Promote the use of cetacean remote sensing systems.	SPREP, Partners
1.2.3	Conduct and support surveys to contribute to inventory of whale and dolphin species and research into genetic distinctiveness and habitat use for each Pacific island country and territory.	SPREP, Partners, Members
1.2.4	Encourage research on subpopulations of false killer whales and other vulnerable species in the Pacific including assessing genetic distinctiveness to inform level of risk from industrial fisheries.	SPREP, SPC, Partners, Members
1.2.5	Assessment of genetic distinctiveness and isolation of cetacean species and where appropriate, taxonomic status, and implications for threat management and survival.	SPREP, Partners
INDICATORS:		TIMEFRAME:
i.	A validated inventory of Pacific island region cetacean species has been published and contains information on genetic distinctiveness, range and habitat use for cetaceans in Pacific island countries and territories.	i. 2023
ii.	A pilot study on remote sensing of cetaceans is conducted.	ii. 2026
iii.	An abundance survey for cetaceans has been undertaken.	
Objective 3: Understand critical habitat and migratory pathways.		
Number	Action	Responsibility

1.3.1	Work to upgrade candidate IMMAs and Areas of Interest already identified to full IMMA status, in partnership with the IUCN Pacific Islands Regional Committee on IMMAs, and others.	SPREP, Partners, Members
INDICATORS: i. At least one Pacific IMMA Candidate Site has been confirmed.		TIMEFRAME: i. 2025
Objective 4: Understand impact of direct threats on whale and dolphin species.		
1.4.1	Assessment of the scale and impact of by-catch on cetaceans in all fisheries.	SPREP, Partners, Members
1.4.2	Assessment of the impact of ongoing drive hunts or other direct take in the region on populations of small cetaceans.	SPREP, Partners, Members
INDICATORS: i. Assessment of the impact of by-catch in fisheries on cetaceans in Pacific island countries and territories has been completed. ii. Assessment of direct take on populations of cetaceans has taken place.		TIMEFRAME: i. 2024 ii. 2025

THEME 2: CLIMATE CHANGE		
Objective 1: Identify vulnerability of whales and dolphins to climate change.		
Number	Action	Responsibility
2.1.1	Promote consideration by international fora, of climate change issues impacting Pacific cetaceans, in particular the impact on the food supply of migratory whales in their foraging grounds in high latitudes of the Southern Ocean and Antarctica, and on suitable breeding habitat in the Pacific.	SPREP, Partners, Members
2.1.2	Promote surveys to estimate the abundance of whales on Pacific island breeding grounds and integrate carbon sequestration services provided by whales into national considerations for climate change mitigation and adaptation. Secure climate funding for projects aimed at protecting whale populations in recognition of their climate mitigation services.	Members, Partners
2.1.3	Assess the potential impacts of climate change on whale and dolphin species, including their migratory pathways and timing of migrations, in the Pacific and identify the most at-risk species and populations.	SPREP, Partners
2.1.4	Undertake detailed risk assessments for whale and dolphin species or populations that are identified as being at high risk from the impacts of climate change and the potential impact on communities, including whale watching economies.	SPREP, Partners
INDICATORS: i. Whale and dolphin populations that are vulnerable to climate change impacts are identified and habitats are prioritised for protection. ii. Possible changes to distribution or migration pathways are identified and implications for management noted. iii. Publish and disseminate report on whales and carbon sequestration for inclusion in national climate policies. iv. Risk assessment published and disseminated.		TIMEFRAME: i. 2025 ii. 2025 iii. 2026 iv. 2026

THEME 3: ECOSYSTEMS AND HABITAT PROTECTION		
Objective 1: Critical habitat and migratory pathways for whales and dolphins are protected.		
Number	Action	Responsibility
3.1.1	Support establishment of further well-managed MPAs including national EEZ-wide whale and dolphin sanctuaries, paying special attention to IMMAs, through management plans and legislation which prioritise protection of cetaceans and their habitats, including migratory pathways and associated biodiversity.	SPREP, Members, Partners
INDICATORS:		TIMEFRAME:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Formally designated and established national EEZ-wide sanctuaries and MPAs, each over at least 50 sq.km, and enhanced protection are established for at least two IMMAs that protect cetaceans. ii. There is a management plan for each established sanctuary and MPA. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. 2024 ii. 2026

THEME 4: THREAT REDUCTION		
Objective 1: Reduce direct and indirect threats to whale and dolphin populations.		
Number	Action	Responsibility
4.1.1	Encourage collaboration between WCPFC, national governments, regional agencies and researchers to enable improved collection of data on cetacean species interacting with small- and large-scale fisheries, including collecting genetic samples and analysing photos to improve species identification.	SPREP, SPC, FFA, FAO, Members, Partners
4.1.2	Foster partnerships to trial and deploy suitable mitigation methods relating to cetacean interactions with fishing gear.	SPREP, SPC, FFA, Members, Partners
4.1.3	Work with local communities to develop management options and alternative livelihood options for addressing small cetacean by-catch and direct take.	Members
4.1.4	Collaborate with international organisations such as the FAO, IWC, CMS, MSC and ISSF to provide technical advice and support for reducing by-catch of cetaceans.	SPREP
INDICATORS:		TIMEFRAME:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Information is available on species involved and level of interaction with fishing gear to inform management options. ii. Suitable mitigation methods for cetaceans are identified and implemented across fishing fleets. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. 2026 and ongoing ii. 2026

THEME 5: CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE AND VALUE		
Objective 1: Recognise the value of traditional knowledge, customs and marine tenure and ensure it is incorporated into management.		
Number	Action	Responsibility
5.1.1	Support culturally safe documentation of traditional knowledge, practice, heritage and values related to whales and dolphins and incorporate into management practices.	Members, Partners

5.1.2	Encourage socio-cultural research into traditional knowledge and cultural practice relating to dolphin drive hunts to underpin future research and management approaches.	SPREP, Members, Partners
5.1.3	Collaborate with regional voyaging societies and other cultural groups to promote traditional knowledge related to the conservation and management of whales and dolphins and enhance data collection from traditional sailing vessels.	Members, Voyaging societies of the Cook Islands, Fiji, French Polynesia, New Zealand, Okeanos Foundation, Samoa, Tonga.
INDICATORS:		TIMEFRAME:
i. Socio-cultural research into cultural practice relating to dolphin drive hunts in one country or territory has taken place.		i. 2024
ii. At least one project or initiative has been undertaken in collaboration with regional voyaging societies and other cultural groups across at least one SPREP member country or territory.		ii. 2024

THEME 6: LEGISLATION, POLICY AND MANAGEMENT		
Objective 1: Review legal, policy and institutional frameworks relating to the protection of whales and dolphins.		
Number	Action	Responsibility
6.1.1	Ensure that the needs of whales and dolphins are considered when developing new legislation or policy and when reviewing existing legislation to ensure the effective conservation and management of whales and dolphins, and to identify and address gaps and inconsistencies related to these species, e.g. between fishery and environmental legislation, policy and MCS gaps.	Members
6.1.2	Respond to country or territory legal and policy requirements or requests for support in developing such frameworks, management or action plans or legislative measures to implement the Whale and Dolphin Action Plan.	SPREP, Partners
6.1.3	Pacific island countries and territories develop national cetacean action plans, sanctuary management plans or marine mammal regulations.	Members, Partners
INDICATORS:		TIMEFRAME:
i. SPREP members have enacted new or updated legislative measures regarding conservation and management of whales and dolphins.		i. 2026
ii. SPREP has assisted, where requested, with the development of frameworks, management or action plans or legislative measures.		ii. Ongoing
iii. National action plans for whales and dolphins have been developed.		iii. 2026

THEME 7: ECOTOURISM AND LIVELIHOODS		
Objective 1: Ensure the development of whale and dolphin tourism is sustainable and conducted responsibly, with minimum impact and maximum scientific, education and economic returns.		
Number	Action	Responsibility

7.1.1	Document and share lessons learned from members with sustainably managed whale and dolphin watching industries through regional meetings and fora, in collaboration with the International Whaling Commission Whale Watch Sub-Committee, the South Pacific Tourism Organization and others.	SPREP, Partners, Members
7.1.2	Encourage whale watch operators and other platforms of opportunity to either carry researchers or undertake themselves recording of sightings and identification features (e.g. tail fluke photos) of cetaceans and share them with appropriate archives (e.g. HappyWhale.com).	SPREP, Partners, Members
7.1.3	Review Pacific Islands Regional Guidelines for Whale and Dolphin Watching to ensure relevance and promote sustainability.	Partners, SPREP
7.1.4	Encourage annual, pre-season national and local stakeholder meetings and training (government, industry, scientists, NGOs) to assess management of the whale watch industry.	Members, Partners
7.1.5	Encourage appropriate levels of licensing and permits, as a tool for management, including development of industry training and certification programmes.	Members, Partners
7.1.6	Support countries to develop national regulations in line with the SPREP-endorsed regional guidelines for whale and dolphin watching.	SPREP, Partners
7.1.8	Continue to assess the potential impacts and localised effects from cetacean-oriented tourism activities, including swim-with activities on whales and dolphins.	SPREP, Partners, Members
7.1.9	Encourage land-based whale watching and non-swimming marine tourism opportunities as a potentially lower-impact alternative.	SPREP, Members
INDICATORS: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. At least one Pacific case study on whale and dolphin watching industries has been presented at international fora. ii. The Pacific Islands Regional Guidelines for Whale and Dolphin Watching have been reviewed. iii. National and local stakeholder meetings and training have been conducted in advance of whale watching seasons. iv. National guidelines have been developed or reviewed as appropriate. v. SPREP member countries and territories have implemented licensing or permit programmes for whale-watching entities which includes an industry training and/or certification programme requirement. vi. Members have adopted or updated national whale watch regulations in line with the SPREP endorsed regional guidelines. vii. Whale watch operators have reported multiple humpback sightings to a citizen science platform such as HappyWhale. 		TIMEFRAME: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. 2024 ii. 2023 iii. 2024 iv. 2023 v. 2023 vi. 2023

THEME 8: CAPACITY BUILDING AND COLLABORATION

Objective 1: Increase in-country expertise and capacity for the conservation and sustainable management of cetaceans.

Number	Action	Responsibility
8.1.1	Compile an online database of potential partners with already-existing best-practice policies, guidelines and educational materials, overlapping goals and potential resources, including trainers, to assist members with capacity building efforts on common regional priorities (stranding response, necropsy, disentanglement, species identification, whale watching protocols, MCS).	SPREP
8.1.2	Identify, develop and distribute training packages, e.g. via brochures and videos, and convene training workshops on stranding response, necropsy, disentanglement, species identification.	SPREP, Partners
8.1.3	Undertake regional strandings and database training and distribute stranding kits with necessary resources for collection and storage of tissues and necropsies (using experts, including IWC, and online strandings training resources, such as the Global Marine Animal Stranding Training Toolkit).	SPREP, Partners, Members, IWC
8.1.4	In alignment with the online SPREP-endorsed Pacific Islands Regional Guidelines for Whale and Dolphin Watching and the online IWC's Best Practice Whale Watching Handbook, develop a regional training template (consisting of industry training and certification programmes) for whale watching operators and guides/stakeholders, e.g. the New Zealand SMART Operator Programme .	SPREP, Partners
8.1.5	Conduct MCS training workshops to increase national compliance of whale watch operators with whale watch guidelines and regulations.	SPREP, Members
8.1.6	Encourage Non-Party Members to join CMS and the CMS Memorandum of Understanding on the Conservation of Cetaceans and Their Habitats in the Pacific islands region (Cetacean MOU).	SPREP, Members
INDICATORS:		TIMEFRAME:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. An online up-to-date list of partners with potential resources to assist with prioritised capacity building efforts is live on SPREP website. ii. Training packages in stranding response, necropsy, disentanglement, species identification, whale watching protocols and MCS developed and distributed. iii. Undertake training sessions and workshops on species ID and stranding prevention and response for relevant stakeholders. iv. Regional stranding booklets and stranding kits with necessary resources for sampling and necropsies have been provided to SPREP members. v. A regional training template for whale watching operators, guides and stakeholders has been agreed by SPREP members. vi. Workshops have been conducted in the Pacific islands region for national MCS of whale watch guidelines and regulations. vii. A workshop on the value of becoming a member of the Pacific Cetacean MOU has been undertaken. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. 2022 ii. 2023 iii. 2024 iv. 2023 v. 2023 vi. 2024 vii. 2024 viii. 2023

THEME 9: EDUCATION, AWARENESS, AND COMMUNICATION		
Objective 1: Improve awareness and understanding about the importance of whales and dolphins and conservation issues.		
Number	Action	Responsibility
9.1.1	Celebrate World Whale Day on the third Sunday in February and/or hold annual welcoming the whale’s festival at the start of whale season (June).	All
INDICATORS: i. An annual whale celebration event that becomes a focal point for education and promoting conservation.		TIMEFRAME: i. 2024 then annually