



Whale Heritage Sites Criteria



Encouraging Respectful Human-Cetacean Coexistence

The WHS has developed, and seeks to continually improve, a responsible framework managing the coexistence of people and cetaceans.

1.1 Guidelines and/or regulations related to the interactions between humans and cetaceans support international best practice and are appropriate to local context. Guidelines and/or regulations must be developed collaboratively by all of the key stakeholders, reviewed regularly, and clearly communicated to relevant audiences.

1.2 Guidelines and/or regulations are monitored by a minimum of two authorities, one of which can be advisory, but the other should be a responsible government body authorised to take effective action. There should be a clear process for any breaches including consequences for offenders.

1.3 Regular training takes place for skippers, crew, guides, onshore staff, and other stakeholders to ensure ownership and maintenance of responsible standards for interactions.

1.4 A permit system exists that manages and limits licences for cetacean interactions according to the best available local research and includes regular assessment and reapplication.

1.5 Mechanisms are in place to encourage ongoing reduction of any environmental impacts associated with watching cetaceans.

Four of the five sub-criteria must be met.

2

Celebrating Cetaceans

The WHS celebrates the close cultural association between cetaceans and people.

2.1 Wild cetaceans are reflected in culture through historical or contemporary practices that harness a greater appreciation for living cetaceans in their natural habitats.

2.2 Cetacean-related festivals, ceremonies, meetings or other events that encourage a sense of pride, heritage, history, sustainability, and legacy are held annually.

2.3 Cetacean-related works of art are created, including in music, dance, and theatre; the visual arts, and in literature, from both written and spoken traditions.

Two of the three sub-criteria must be met.

3

Environmental, Social and Economic Sustainability

The WHS seeks to achieve an environmentally, socially and economically sustainable balance between the natural environment, the expectations of visitors, the needs of the local community and the businesses that operate there. This balance is best achieved through engaging stakeholder representatives from government, the private sector, the local community and other relevant organisations, to collaborate on embedding effective policies and practices into the sustainable management of the Whale Heritage Site and the wider tourism industry in the destination.

3.1 Economic sustainability – sustainable livelihoods are created, generating employment and financial benefits, to provide a clear demonstration of the economic value of protecting cetaceans. This can be achieved directly (through whale-watching, tour guiding, research and conservation, etc.) and indirectly (through employment in cetacean tourism related services, such as arts festivals, exhibitions and other cultural events) but should include a balance of jobs (i.e., should ideally not be overly dominated by low paid, informal work).

3.2 Social Sustainability – local communities are recognised as key WHS stakeholders by:

3.2.1 Being given the opportunity to participate in decision-making at key stages.

3.2.2 Informed via press, social media or other means, about the Whale Heritage Site Candidacy and the rationale behind it.

3.2.3 Involved in preparing and maintaining the site for WHS status.

3.2.4 Engaged in educational and community outreach events that promote the WHS and the reasons for its existence.

3.3 Environmental sustainability – the marine and terrestrial ecosystems within the WHS must be maintained and preferably enhanced to support a thriving population of wild cetaceans.

3.3.1 Threats relevant to the primary cetacean habitat should be identified and an action plan developed to address those impacts within the control of local stakeholders.

3.3.2 A range of measures to enhance general environmental sustainability should be undertaken.

3.4 Sustainable Destination Management – to support achievement of all the above criteria, ensure continuous improvement and maintain the long term sustainability of the WHS, those responsible for the management of tourism in the location should ensure that there is an active and ongoing process to improve sustainability using recognised tools such as:

- The European Sustainable Tourism Indicator System (ETIS) developed by the European Commission.
- The Global Sustainable Tourism Council's Criteria for Destinations (GSTC C-D)
- Or another Global Sustainable Tourism Council recognised destination management or accreditation scheme

Sub-criteria 3.1, 3.2, and 3.3 must be met.

4

Research, Education and Awareness

The WHS recipient has developed, and seeks to continually improve, its commitment towards research, education and awareness.

4.1 Companies and organisations involved with cetacean interactions incorporate conservation-directed science and research programmes.

4.2 Conservation-based cetacean research and policy is showcased within the site.

4.3 Educational programmes that focus on cetaceans are delivered to local communities.

4.4 Local sustainability initiatives benefitting the marine environment are showcased.

Three of the four sub-criteria must be met.