



# Whale Heritage Site Criteria Guidelines

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## Key

IRP – Independent Review Panel

WCA – World Cetacean Alliance

WHS – Whale Heritage Site

## Purpose

These Guidelines provide additional information and useful examples when considering how to qualify as a Whale Heritage Site under each of the Whale Heritage Site (WHS) criteria. The Guidelines are intended to assist WHS Candidate Sites and the WHS Independent Review Panel (IRP). Original criteria language is included below and additional guidance is included in italics. The 'Suggested evidence' boxes provide advice on the kind of documentation the IRP will be looking for to support claims that the criteria have been met. Examples throughout this document are not meant to be exhaustive or appropriate to all contexts, but illustrative.

## Delineation of Site

In terms of scale and boundary, the responsible communities and/or governmental authorities will delineate the geographical boundaries of the WHS, including land and marine or fresh water. It is expected that sites will come in all sorts of sizes and shapes. The geographical and political boundaries will be reviewed by the Independent Review Panel (IRP) to verify that the area: is able to be administered economically, politically and geographically by the proposing entity/ies; is not designed to avoid large polluters, captive cetacean facilities or other negative influences; and is able to be objectively regarded as a destination.

The IRP will also consider the tourist's perspective, including whether the site is perceived as one destination or if the site boundaries are confusing, which, in some cases, could attribute activities or benefits to another location that does not meet the criteria.

Critical to the definition of WHS is a good understanding of submarine areas; and the reality that WHS exist in three dimensions, including, for example, underwater sea mounts, canyons, banks, coral reefs, and benthic zones. Finding innovative ways of demonstrating the importance of marine habitats to people will be critical.

## Contemporary practices

A location that engages in commercial whaling as a contemporary practice would not be considered for WHS status. In addition, a location that condones the use of lethal scientific research will not be considered. Although the WCA recognises that there are sites where indigenous populations engage in subsistence whaling as a food source, since these interactions are not in line with the essence of WHS, such sites would not be eligible for WHS status.

Finally, a location incorporating a dolphinarium will not be considered. The World Cetacean Alliance advocates the protection of cetaceans in their natural habitats in the wild and opposes the keeping of cetaceans in captivity for any purpose other than genuine rescue, rehabilitation and release or sanctuary.

## Historical practices

Some Candidate Sites will have had a history of whaling or captivity practices and also retain legacy infrastructure that supported those industries, including redundant captive facilities, capture sites, whaling museums, whaling stations, and whaling boats. It is important to retain this infrastructure, setting these practices in their historical context and acknowledging that they helped us to gain a greater understanding of cetaceans. Most importantly, any educational visitor centre, museum, or other informative facility focusing on these historical practices must include clear display information on contemporary practices that encourage responsible and respectful coexistence with cetaceans in the wild.

## Cetacean culture

Where possible, a Candidate WHS should acknowledge and recognise the existence of cetacean culture, namely the social interactions, communication, and behaviour of cetaceans that are transferred between generations, and reveal the distinct features associated with local populations that are important to preserve. WHS Candidate Sites will be encouraged to understand whether a distinct cetacean culture exists in their location and if so, to inform and celebrate it. Close collaboration with cetacean experts will be essential in developing this understanding. Examples might include the ‘intentional stranding’ hunting techniques of orca to catch seals in Peninsula Valdez, Argentina, or the uniquely evolving songs of humpback whales in many regions.

## Marine Protected Areas

To ensure the long term survival of cetaceans, and the sustainability of those livelihoods associated with them, the WHS authority should work in the long-term to establish protected areas that frame the conservation and livelihood benefits for WHS. Future priorities might include:

- Critical areas for cetaceans protected under national or international law.
- Protected exclusion zones where human-cetacean interactions do not take place.
- Adequate staff and equipment available to patrol at-sea or freshwater areas and monitor activities.
- Establishing ‘no take’ zones where fishing is prohibited in order to allow fish stocks to recover in the long term.

## Criteria

Criteria for WHS focuses on how people celebrate, benefit from, and seek to conserve the cetaceans with which they coexist. Each WHS may find its own unique means, appropriate to its local context,

including geography, culture, economics, and politics, to satisfy the criteria with the required rigour. In meeting WHS criteria, a Candidate Site must take into account information relating to the relevant local cetacean populations, including their status, numbers, biology, habitat, behaviour, and welfare. Overarching the criteria is the premise that WHS sites will promote respectful coexistence with cetaceans.

## **1. 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.

*WCA's analysis of best practice frameworks around the world (Figure 1, page 8) demonstrates that the participation of whale watching tour operators in both the development and implementation of guidelines and/or regulations is critical to their success. Accordingly, and as a general guideline, a WHS should expect to have active participation of at least 60% of whale or dolphin watching tour operators in year one. These tour operators should be actively involved in the processes that support the WHS (e.g. through a whale watching association, annual review or other meetings, training sessions, workshops etc.), with that figure expected to rise following accreditation.*

*The following list provides some ideas for developing guidelines / regulations collaboratively, reviewing them regularly, and clearly communicating them to relevant audiences:*

1. *Organise regular communication between all stakeholders.*
2. *Collaboration on guidelines/regulations should be cyclical.*
3. *Regular skipper training or sharing of best practice between skippers with variable experience.*
4. *Regular scientific input and output, with scientific knowledge contributing to the evolution of guidelines / regulations.*
5. *Involve recreational boaters in educational programmes.*
6. *Anonymous reporting of bad practice with a feedback mechanism to discuss at meetings.*
7. *Provide incentives for compliance.*

8. *Encourage input from citizen science projects run collaboratively between whale watching tour operators.*
9. *Encourage partnerships with local NGO's or Universities able to provide independent advice and expertise.*

#### **Suggested evidence**

*Evidence that supports the WHS application could include:*

- *A copy of the guidelines with the logos, signatories or stamps of all compliant whale watching tour operators. This should ideally include agreed procedures for dealing with non-compliance. Evidence should ideally show that the proportion of operators supporting the guidelines is 60% or more.*
- *Minutes/agendas from meetings to demonstrate that the process is collaborative and that this collaboration is regular and ongoing.*
- *Copies of emails, leaflets, posters etc. used to communicate with stakeholders.*
- *Supporting statements from NGO's/academic institutions/monitoring authorities.*
- *Science project summaries likely to influence the evolution of regulations.*

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.

*The authority responsible for monitoring and enforcing guidelines / regulations for whale and dolphin watching varies by location. In many places, the relevant local government authority performs this task through, for example, the Department for the Environment, National Park or Marine Park Authority, the Navy, or Coastguard. The role of government in monitoring is important in many areas because it is also the authority able to enforce infringements of the guidelines / regulations. Some government authorities have also found that incentive schemes rewarding best practice acts as an effective method for improving standards among whale and dolphin watching tour operators.*

*However, other stakeholders can also play a very important role. For example, in some places Universities and NGOs have strategies for reporting bad practice and a mechanism for feeding this information back to government, whale watching companies or both, to encourage change. In other examples, tourists have been encouraged to report bad practice, and NGOs have run independent observer schemes (sometimes using the 'secret shopper' technique) to monitor whale and dolphin watching tours.*

*Perhaps one of the most important, cost-effective, and overlooked ways to ensure guidelines / legislation is adhered to is through self-regulation. This requires whale and dolphin watching tour operators to work collaboratively to ensure that the rules are adhered to at all times. This is only possible if there is good communication between operators, mutual respect, and an acknowledgement that all operators depend upon a shared resource. Self-management is most effective in locations*

where whale and dolphin watching tour operators have formed a whale watch association, and/or have regular meetings to discuss any issues arising and involve other relevant stakeholders in those discussions, including academic institutions, government, NGOs, and the public.

**Suggested evidence**

Evidence that supports the WHS application could include:

- Evidence of the number of licences/permits granted to whale watching tour operators in the destination.
- A copy of the licence / permit agreement.
- Evidence that fines have been issued for poor whale watching practice.
- Press stories confirming that fines have taken place.
- Written statement from enforcement officers.
- Minutes of meetings in which discussions on non-compliance took place and resolutions were found.

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.

Training could be through an official training course involving classroom activities and / or practical training on the water. Alternatively the sharing of best practice concepts between skippers, crew, guides, onshore staff, and other stakeholders with local expertise is also considered valid under this criterion.

Training courses are offered by NGOs, academic institutions, government, industry etc. and can be a great way to raise funds for local conservation initiatives. Examples include:

WiSe Scheme: <http://www.wisescheme.org/>

Comet Whale Watching Guided Course: <http://comet.training/categories/hospitality-and-tourism/02-whale-watching-guided-course.html>

Marine Naturalist Training Course: <http://whalemuseum.org/pages/marine-naturalist-training>

**Suggested evidence**

Evidence that supports the WHS application could include:

- Training course manuals.
- Links to advertisements promoting training courses.
- Copies of certificates issued following courses.

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.

*For many places, ensuring that commercial whale and dolphin watching can only be undertaken by a limited number of permitted (licensed) operators is the essential first step to sustainable management. Ideally, the number of licenses available should be based on a scientific assessment of the carrying capacity for that location.*

*There are different methods for limiting the number of permits available. In South Africa, permits are generally limited to one permit per location. In Kaikoura, New Zealand, permits are limited by tourist activity, so the company running dolphin swim programmes cannot also run whale watching trips. Until recently, Hervey Bay, Australia, implemented a zoning system, separating boats by restricting permit holders to specific zones.*

*One of the most advanced systems for permit use for whale and dolphin watching tour operators is in South Africa. The system is founded on the principles of 'continuous criteria' and 'permit re-application', whereby operators are required to provide evidence of their high standard of responsible whale and dolphin watching in order to successfully retain a permit on reapplication every 5 years. Examples of the evidence provided include cooperation with researchers, equality within the workforce, and involvement in educational programmes.*

#### **Suggested evidence**

*Evidence that supports the WHS application could include:*

- *Permit / licence requirements.*
- *Permit / licence application forms.*
- *List of restrictions/requirements for obtaining permits / licences.*
- *Local Authority permitting / licensing strategy.*
- *List of permitted / licenced operators.*

1.5 Mechanisms are in place to encourage ongoing reduction of environmental impacts in order to enhance the social and educational benefits from watching cetaceans.

*Examples of commitments from whale and dolphin watching operators might include:*

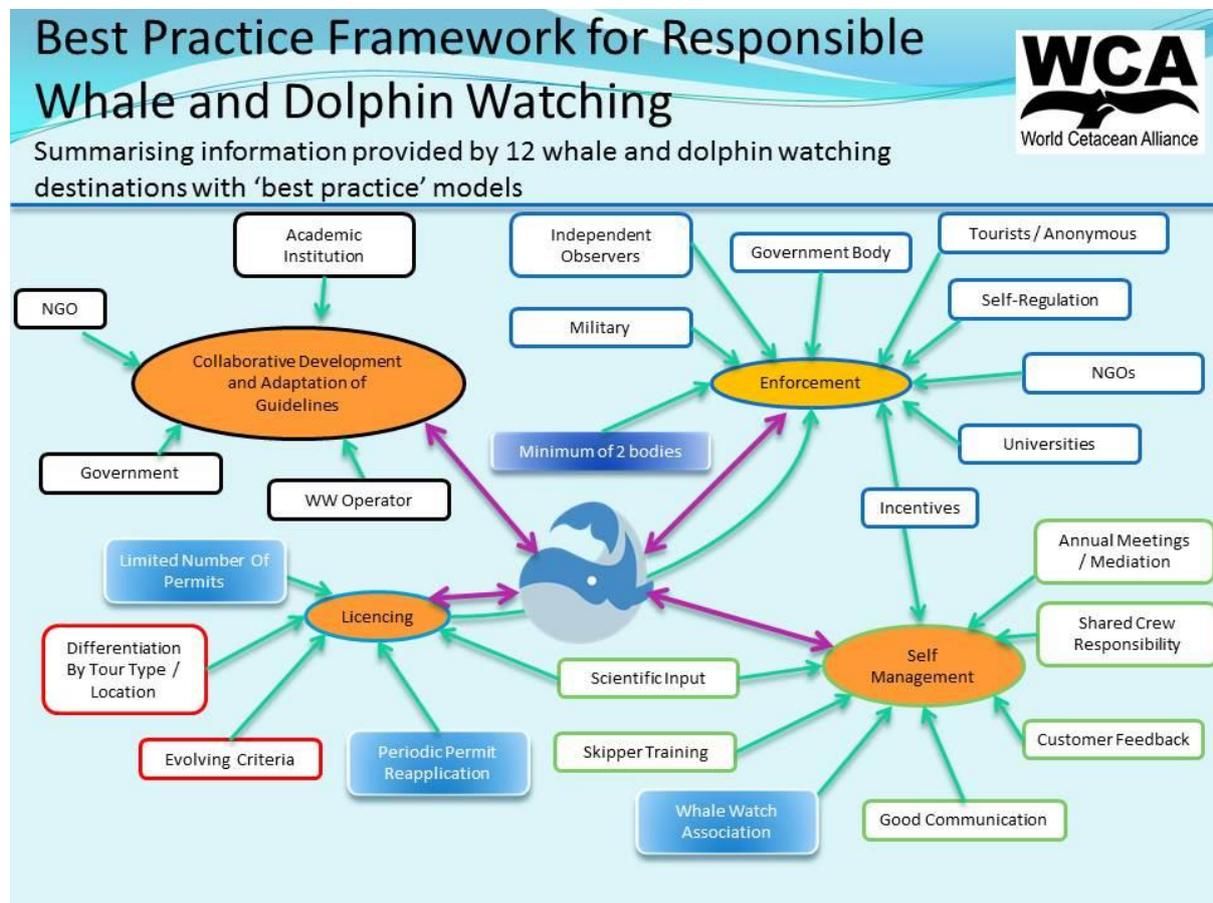
- *Use of low environmental impact motors / sailing / paddling.*
- *Research to understand environmental impacts as part of efforts to reduce them.*
- *Efforts to reduce acoustic impacts.*
- *Use of eco-friendly products and clearly labelled recycling.*
- *Registration with an acknowledged eco-label such as the Blue Flag Sustainable Boating Tour Operators scheme: <http://www.blueflag.global/sustainableboating/>*
- *Adoption of ethical advertising practices that do not set unrealistic whale/dolphin viewing expectations.*

The innovation and success of individual operators in this area should be acknowledged and encouraged by the destination authorities.

**Suggested evidence**

Evidence that supports the WHS application could include:

- Photographs.
- Promotional material that highlights environmental commitments.
- Promotional material that manages customer expectations appropriately.
- Published scientific papers.
- Proof of Blue Flag (or other eco label) membership.



**Figure 1.** Site-based ‘best practise’ Responsible Whale Watching Framework. This diagram provides different options (dependent on available stakeholders and resources at a site) to achieve best practice in four key areas: 1) Collaborative development and adaptation of guidelines, 2) Licensing, 3) Enforcement, and 4) Self-management.

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.

### **Suggested evidence**

*Evidence that supports the WHS application could include:*

- *Published literature.*
- *List of research papers.*
- *Photographs of works of art.*
- *Videos of theatrical or musical performances.*
- *Newspaper articles.*

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

*Original and innovative ideas are very much encouraged as part of this process. The following examples are therefore not meant to be exhaustive or appropriate to all contexts, but illustrative of practices that are successful and appropriate to WHS:*

Hervey Bay Whale Festival: <http://www.visitfrasercoast.com/whales/whalefestival>

WhaleFest UK: <http://www.whale-fest.com/>

Sitka WhaleFest: <http://sitkawhalefest.org/>

Maui Whale Festival: <http://mauiwhalefestival.org/>

The Whale Crier of Hermanus: <http://www.hermanus.co.za/whale-crier>

March of the Mermaids: <http://www.marchofthemermaids.com/>

The Whale Mobile: <http://www.thewhalemobile.com/>

### **Suggested evidence**

*Evidence that supports the WHS application could include:*

- *Photographs.*
- *Advertisements.*
- *Videos.*
- *Leaflets and programmes.*

- *Published reviews.*
- *Other promotional material.*

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.

*Original and innovative ideas are very much encouraged as part of this process. The following examples are therefore not meant to be exhaustive or appropriate to all contexts, but illustrative of practices that are successful and appropriate to WHS:*

*The Moby Dick Marathon at the New Bedford Whaling Museum:*

<http://discovernewengland.org/annual-moby-dick-marathon>

*The Whale – a submersive theatre experience:* <http://www.talkingbirds.co.uk/thewhale/>

*Wyland Walls:* [http://www.wylandfoundation.org/community.php?subsection=wyland\\_walls](http://www.wylandfoundation.org/community.php?subsection=wyland_walls)

*Whale willow sculpture:* <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-bristol-33548708>

*Human-Whale Event:* <http://www.imaginecruises.com.au/the-human-whale-event/>

*Zamami Whale Music Festival:* <https://zamamitimes.wordpress.com/2016/02/03/2016-whale-music-festival/>

*Azorean Whale Boat Regatta:* <http://azoreanmaritime.org/2015-international-regatta/>

### ***Suggested evidence***

*Evidence that supports the WHS application could include:*

- *Photographs.*
- *Advertisements.*
- *Videos.*
- *Leaflets and programmes.*
- *Published reviews.*
- *Other promotional material.*

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).

#### ***Suggested evidence***

*Best available data on the approximate numbers of persons employed directly and indirectly as a result of the interaction with and celebration of cetaceans in the proposed WHS. Information should be provided on how these figures have been obtained and an indication given of the proportion of:*

- *Unskilled/lowest paid work.*
- *Skilled manual work.*
- *Skilled technical work.*
- *Managerial/senior level.*

*NB. Destinations applying for WHS renewal should record and report any growth in employment resulting from designation of WHS status.*

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.

*Through consultation procedures or through collaboration with community representatives.*

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.

*Being given the opportunity to get involved, through for example; environmental actions such as community beach cleans, celebrations of cetaceans through school art competitions, photography competitions or other participatory activities.*

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

*This can be undertaken, for example, through school programmes in which children learn about the marine environment and perhaps experience it during site visits. Local residents could be provided with discounted/subsidised access to whale watch tours or key events celebrating cetaceans. Other mechanisms, which help ensure the local population receive a positive social gain and a broader knowledge/appreciation of the marine environment are encouraged.*

**Suggested evidence**

*Evidence that supports the WHS application could include:*

- *Newspaper articles.*
- *Social media reports.*
- *Meeting minutes.*
- *Photographs.*
- *Testimonials.*

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.

*Key ecosystem threats relevant to the primary cetacean habitat within the WHS area should be identified and listed. This list is likely to include a number of threats that can be reduced through concerted local action (such as plastics, water pollution, ghost fishing gear, ship strikes etc.), while others may be global (such as climate change, overfishing, pollution etc.)*

**Suggested evidence**

*Evidence that supports the WHS application could include:*

- *List of priority threats.*
- *Action plan.*

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

*Original and innovative ideas are encouraged as part of this process. The following examples are not meant to be exhaustive or appropriate to all contexts, but illustrative of practices that can be successful and appropriate to WHS:*

- *Implementation of measures to encourage reduction in energy use and adoption of renewable technologies.*
- *Carbon footprint measurement and initiatives and incentives to reduce carbon emissions in the tourism sector.*
- *Initiatives to improve biodiversity, both marine and terrestrial.*
- *Implementation of measures to reduce water pollution.*
- *Implementation of measures to reduce plastics, discarded fishing gear and other solid waste entering waterways.*
- *Provision of sustainability training for local tourism businesses*

#### **Suggested evidence**

*Evidence that supports the WHS application could include:*

- *Certification.*
- *Policy documents.*
- *Documented or photographic evidence that actions have been implemented.*
- *Research reports or impact assessments.*
- *Press coverage.*

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.  
[http://ec.europa.eu/growth/sectors/tourism/offer/sustainable/indicators/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/growth/sectors/tourism/offer/sustainable/indicators/index_en.htm)
- The Global Sustainable Tourism Council's Criteria for Destinations (GSTC C-D)  
<https://www.gstcouncil.org/en/gstc-criteria/criteria-for-destinations.html>
- Or another Global Sustainable Tourism Council recognised destination management or accreditation scheme <https://www.gstcouncil.org/en/gstc-partners-2/gstc-recognized-standards/recognized-standards-for-destinations.html>

*Other aspects relating to general sustainability, climate change mitigation, and carbon reduction will be important to note. Anecdotal evidence of sustainability management activities undertaken by tour operators and large hotels in the destination will also be of interest.*

***Suggested evidence***

*Evidence that supports the WHS application could include:*

- *Agenda/minutes from Tourism Indicator System stakeholders meetings.*
- *Letter of support from GSTC or evidence of actions taken to drive improvements in destination sustainability from GSTC (additional to basic GSTC membership).*

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.

*Examples might include, but are not limited to the following:*

- *Citizen science initiatives.*
- *Collaborative long-term data gathering projects run by whale watch tour operators in collaboration with each other and in association with academic institutions or NGOs.*
- *Opportunities for researchers aboard whale watch boats through internship programmes.*
- *Government management strategy including funding research focused on human impacts on cetaceans.*
- *Ongoing independent conservation-research delivered by a number of stakeholders, including NGOs, academic institutions, and government bodies.*

***Suggested evidence***

*Evidence that supports the WHS application could include:*

*Scientific papers.*

*Databases / data recording cards.*

*Published papers / research reports.*

*Letters of support from relevant academic institutions.*

*Government or local authority policy or strategy documents.*

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

*Examples might include, but are not limited to the following:*

- *Peer reviewed journal publications.*
- *Non-scientific articles, television or radio interviews.*
- *Dissemination of the latest research or policy changes to whale watching naturalist guides.*
- *Display information prominently placed in visitor centres, museums, and other visitor attractions.*
- *School visits.*
- *Scientific conferences and meetings.*

**Suggested evidence**

*Evidence that supports the WHS application could include:*

- *Posters / display boards.*
- *Scientific publications.*
- *Newspaper articles.*
- *Radio/tv interviews.*
- *Press releases.*
- *Policy documents.*
- *Conferences or workshop proceedings.*

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

*Examples might include, but are not limited to the following:*

- *Incorporation into the school curriculum or through school outreach programmes.*
- *Incentivised opportunities for local community groups or schools to meet cetacean experts and take whale or dolphin watching tours.*
- *Citizen science projects with a focus on raising awareness among participants.*
- *Opportunities for local students to study cetaceans and their habitats.*
- *Awards ceremonies for student projects linked to cetaceans and their habitats.*

**Suggested evidence**

*Evidence that supports the WHS application could include:*

- *Lesson plans.*
- *Photographic projects.*
- *Feedback from participants.*
- *School project documents.*
- *Research reports.*
- *Newspaper articles.*
- *Certificates / awards.*

4.4 Local sustainability initiatives benefitting the marine environment are showcased.

*Examples might include, but are not limited to the following:*

- *The establishment of appropriate fisheries management strategies and governance systems that improve the sustainability of fisheries and fishers' livelihoods e.g. <https://blueventures.org/conservation/rebuilding-fisheries/>*
- *Coral reef restoration projects.*
- *Implementation of renewable energy resources.*
- *Establishment of patrol boats and wardens to protect critical habitat.*
- *Art and craft projects utilizing local and sustainable materials.*

**Suggested evidence**

*Evidence that supports the WHS application could include:*

- *Photographic projects.*
- *Feedback from participants.*
- *Examples of arts or crafts.*
- *Research reports.*
- *Newspaper articles.*
- *Certificates / awards.*
- *Proof of accreditation.*

Three of the four sub-criteria must be met.