ECS WORKSHOP SETTING UP AN INTERNATIONAL NETWORK TO REINFORCE THE COLLABORATION WITH MARINE MAMMAL TOURISM COMPANIES AND ENHANCE THEIR SUSTAINABILITY

Delegates are kindly invited to bring their own documents to the Meeting.
This document will be available only in electronic format during the Meeting.

Report of the ECS workshop
"Setting up an international network to reinforce the collaboration with Marine Mammal Tourism companies and enhance their sustainability"

Organised by Pauline Gauffier (Madeira Whale Museum), Laurène Trudelle (MIRACETI) and Aurélie Moulins (CIMA Foundation)

Held on Monday 17th April 2023, during the 34th Conference of the European Cetacean Society, O Grove, Galicia, Spain

Summary

The workshop "*Setting up an international network to reinforce the collaboration with Marine Mammal Tourism companies and enhance their sustainability*" was held during the 34th Conference of the European Cetacean Society, which was held in O Grove, Galicia, Spain in April 2023. The workshop aimed to include in the discussion as many as possible representatives of different types of stakeholders such as scientists, intergovernmental bodies, NGOs and companies.

The first part of the workshop consisted in a series of talks on:
1) the governance aspects for the International Whaling Commission and ACCOBAMS to implement responsible whale-watching;
2) the example of certification implementation such as the High Quality Whale-watching® and the «World Cetacean Alliance responsible operator»;
3) the challenges of data collection in several areas.

The second part of the workshop started with the results from an online questionnaire specifically prepared in 5 languages by the workshop's organisers. A total of 112 answers received from 7 countries and 14 whale-watching areas. Two companies were successively invited to share their points of view about 3 aspects: 1) data collection; 2) involvement in decision making; 3) feedback from certification bodies or national/regional authorities about their own contribution.

The final discussion between the 22 participants reached 3 main conclusions:

1) The need of a public involvement in label management, data sharing, access, use, and reuse;
2) The need to build a collaborative network willing to work together on a joint action plan including the definition of a limited but efficient WW data collection;
3) The need to highlight to policy makers that WW data is complementary data but cannot replace data collected by dedicated research surveys.

During the workshop, all participants actively participated in the discussions and committed to work together to develop a joint action plan within a transnational network.

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Introduction

Whale-watching (WW) activities are widely spread over the world in many locations where each single sighting is precious both from a scientific and management point of view. However, WW companies do not always report their activities or sightings. The workshop gave the opportunity to experts to discuss and assess joint actions in order to enhance the framework between companies, scientists and decision-makers. Initially the workshop illustrated some recent key actions in different countries for reporting activities and improving collaborative WW data collection. Then, the workshop engaged discussions between experts, in breakout groups, each focusing on a specific topic about the challenges of efficient collaborations. The workshop was an opportunity to exchange experience and lessons learnt between different regions and to support the establishment of an international network made to enhance collaborative activities with marine mammal tourism.

Part 1 - The importance of data collection for responsible marine ecotourism

Short summary of oral presentations

The International Whaling Commission WW Handbook *- E. Neave-Webb, IWC Secretariat*

- IWC organisation and purpose
- WW HandBook : an online tool for regulators, industry and the general public to help the industry to develop sustainably. It includes Maps, Country profiles/case studies – species, times, legislation, and a list of legislations and rules. Available in English, French and Spanish.
- The General principles of WW were created in 1996 and updated in 2022. This succinct, 4-page summary document forms part of a wider package of IWC work to understand and minimise the impacts of whale watching on individual animals, populations and their habitat. The IWC GUIDELINES are still under review.

- WW working group

ACCOBAMS and the High Quality Whale-Watching® Certificate *- C. Le Ravallec, ACCOBAMS Secretariat*

- ACCOBAMS provisions related to cetacean-watching activities;
- Guidelines on commercial whale watching
- Process to develop the High Quality Whale Watching Certificate

Implementation of the ACCOBAMS High Quality Whale-Watching® label in France - challenges and solution *- L. Trudelle, MIRACETI*

- No legal status for WW operators in France
- Presentation of the management tool the High Quality Whale-Watching® in France;
- Challenges (e.g. training, control of compliance of commitments, sighting data collection improvement, communication) and suggested solutions
- Perspectives

Implementation of the ACCOBAMS High Quality Whale-Watching® label in Italy - challenges and solutions *- A. Moulins, CIMA Foundation*

- The WW in Italy before the High Quality Whale-Watching®;
- The implementation of the High Quality Whale-Watching® since 2019 in Italy;
- The smartphone App *ILogWhales* compliant to ACCOBAMS protocol for data collection by WW companies

WCA responsible WW certification *- H. Eckman, World Cetacean Alliance*

- Introduction to the World Cetacean Alliance (WCA) and
- Global best practice guidance for whale and dolphin watching (database, guide online training)
- Supported projects (e.g. Whale Heritage Site program, Sussex dolphin project)

Part 2 - Collaboration between research groups and marine ecotourism companies in Macaronesia - challenges and solutions

Short summary of oral presentations

The MONICET programme in the Azores *- L. García, Universidade dos Açores*

- What is MONICET ? a platform bringing together observations made by WW companies in the Azores.
    - 2009-2022
    - 12 companies from 4 islands with annual differences in involvement
    - 9421 trips, >70000 sighting records
    - >5700 photos, 2600 IDs
- How does it work? WW companies collect data and photos during their daily activities and report to MONICET.
    - Paper sheets before 2022

    - Smartphone App since 2022
    - Data validation process by researchers
- Where is the data? Uploaded to open access databases (EModnet, OBIS, GBIF)
- Lessons learnt from 14 years of running the programme
    - Simplifying data collection is the only solution to reach the goal to systematically collect information.
    - Developing a smartphone app improved data collection quality and company participation

Overview of data collection from WW boats in Madeira *- P. Gauffier, Madeira Whale Museum*

- Characterization of WW in Madeira
- Challenges of the current data collection scheme
    - Paper sheets impractical for RHIBs
    - Every company submits data in a different format
    - Missing or incorrect data
- Possible solutions for improvement:
    - Simplify required data
    - Resume and improve crew training
    - Implement smartphone app (*ILogWhales*) - ongoing process
    - Check data regularly and give feedback

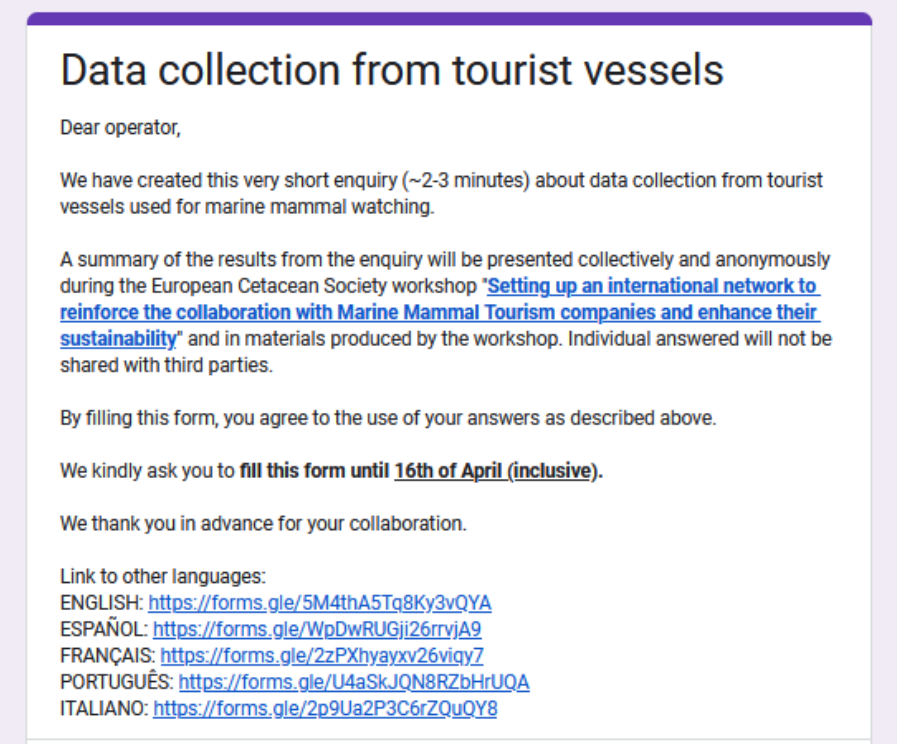
Studying cryptic cetacean species using opportunistic data. The Blainville's beaked whale community off Tenerife *- J. Marrero, Asociación Tonina*

- A photo-identification catalogue of Blainville's beaked whales was built from opportunistic data sent by WW companies and sailors
- Interesting results could be extracted from these data:
    - Characterization of habitat use
    - Distribution of the species
    - Individuals associations
- Important to make the process transparent and open access, give regular feedback to contributors and acknowledge their participation

Part 3 - Discussion groups

A) Results from a questionnaire about data collection from whale-watching boats (worldwide)

A Google form was sent to WW operators in 5 languages (English, French, Spanish, Italian, Portuguese).



Data collection from tourist vessels

Dear operator,

We have created this very short enquiry (~2-3 minutes) about data collection from tourist vessels used for marine mammal watching.

A summary of the results from the enquiry will be presented collectively and anonymously during the European Cetacean Society workshop "**Setting up an international network to reinforce the collaboration with Marine Mammal Tourism companies and enhance their sustainability**" and in materials produced by the workshop. Individual answered will not be shared with third parties.

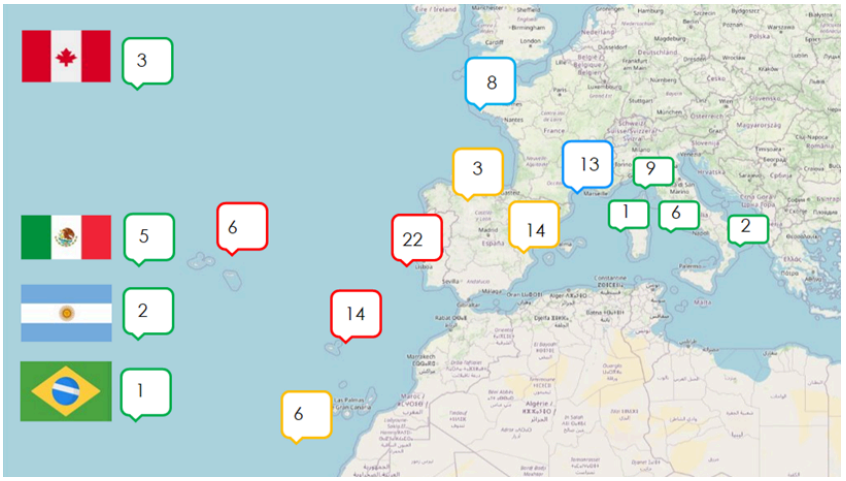
By filling this form, you agree to the use of your answers as described above.

We kindly ask you to **fill this form until 16th of April (inclusive).**

We thank you in advance for your collaboration.

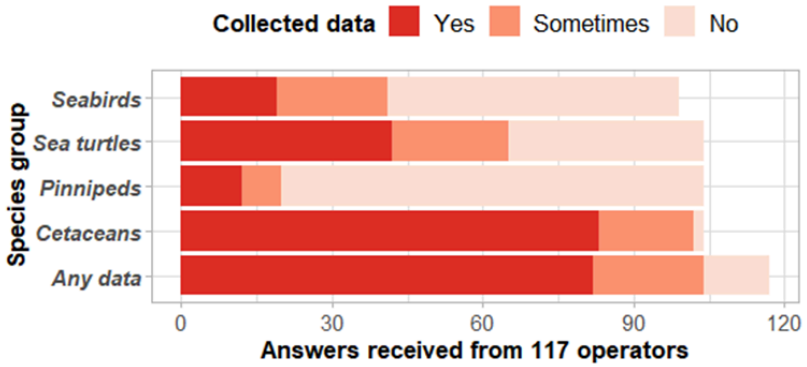
Link to other languages:
ENGLISH: https://forms.gle/5M4thA5Tq8Ky3vQYA
ESPAÑOL: https://forms.gle/WpDwRUGji26rrvjA9
FRANÇAIS: https://forms.gle/2zPXhyayxv26viqy7
PORTUGUÊS: https://forms.gle/U4aSkJQN8RZbHrUQA
ITALIANO: https://forms.gle/2p9Ua2P3C6rZQuQY8

We received 117 answers from 7 countries (France, Spain, Portugal, Italy, Canada, Mexico, Argentina and Brazil) and 14 areas.

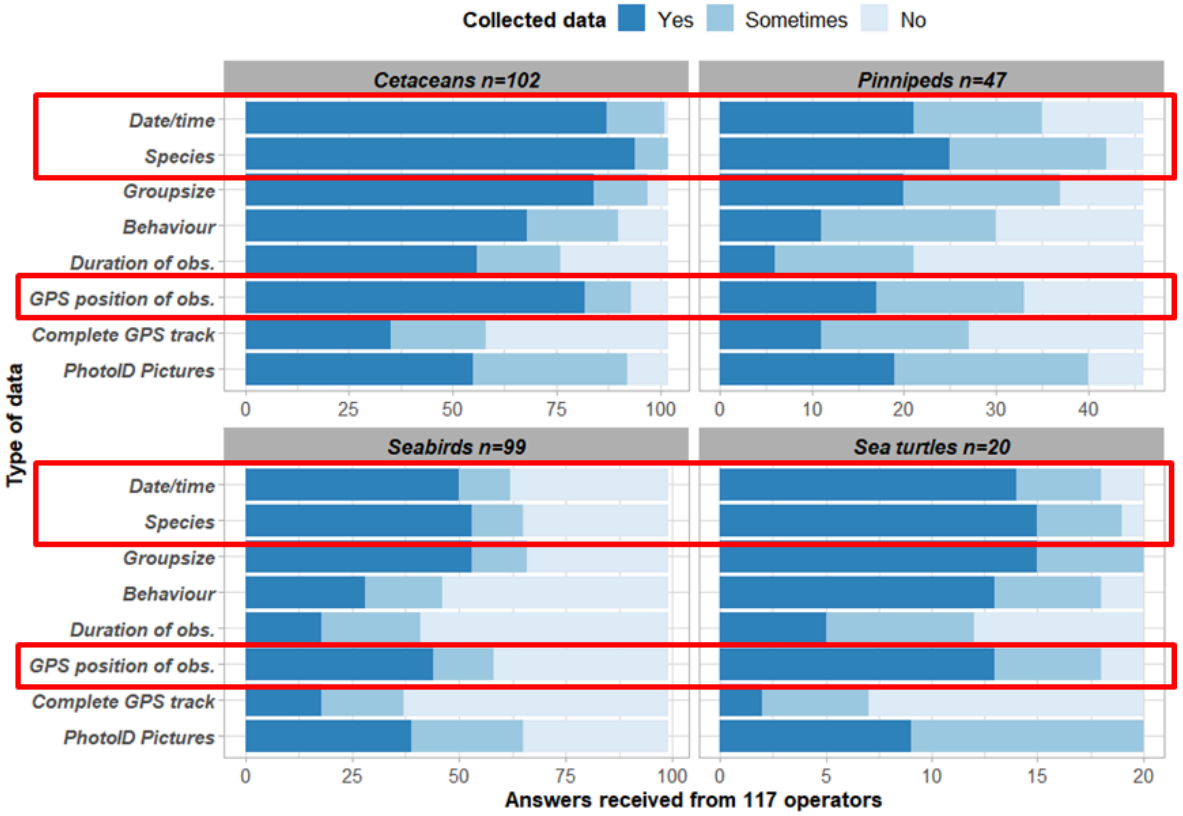


Most companies (~60) were mainly dedicated to cetacean watching, while some were doing marine life watching (~35) or were organising excursions at sea with occasional sightings of marine life (~20). A majority of operators (64) were not members of a voluntary certification programme, while 22 had the ACCOBAMS HQWW certificate and 15 the WCA responsible operator certificate.

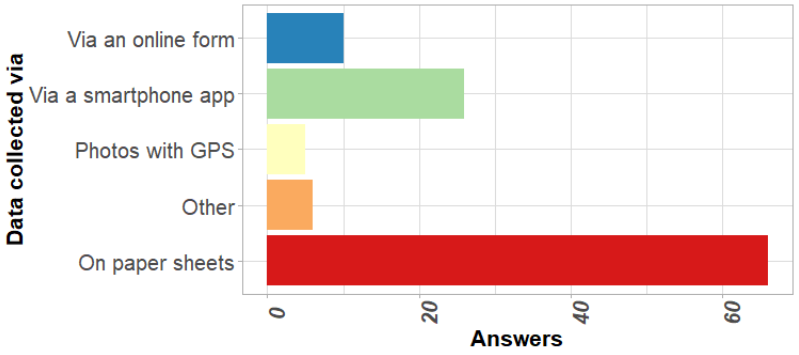
- When asked about data collection about observations, most companies (n=104, 89%) indicated that they collected at least some data about some species.



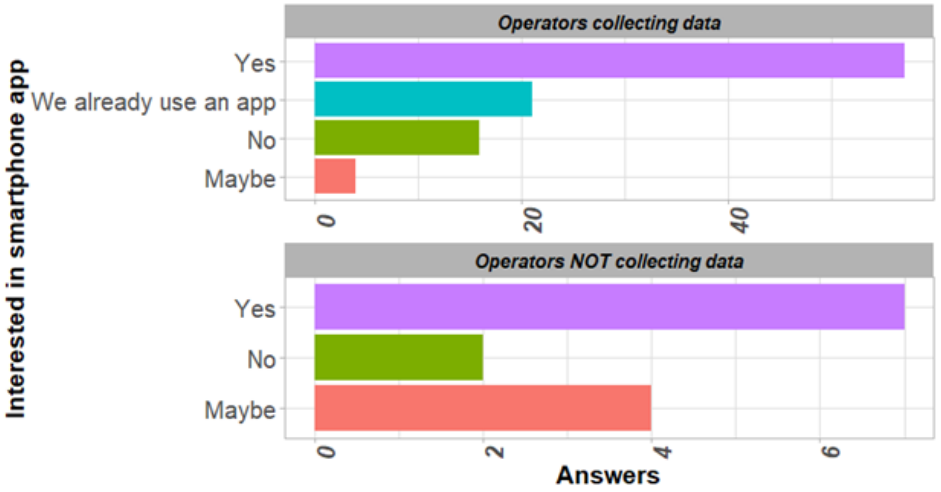
- They were then asked about the type of data that was collected from 4 main species groups, cetaceans, sea turtles, pinniped and seabirds.



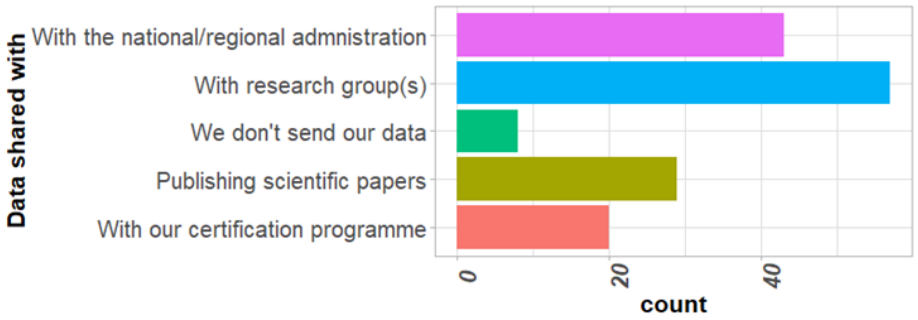
- Most operators (63) indicated that currently they were using paper sheets to collect data, 24 were using a smartphone app, 10 an online platform and 3 photographs with GPS.



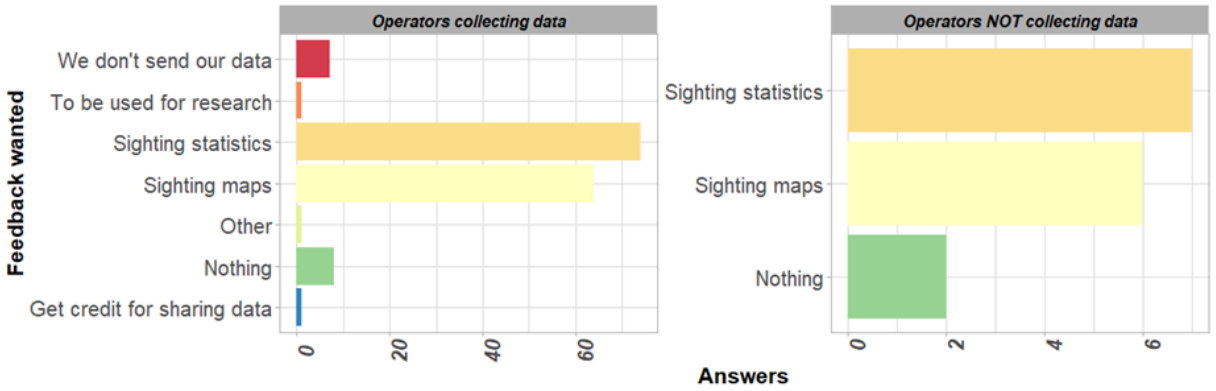
- Most of the operators (82) already collecting data answered that a smartphone App already helps or would help to collect data.



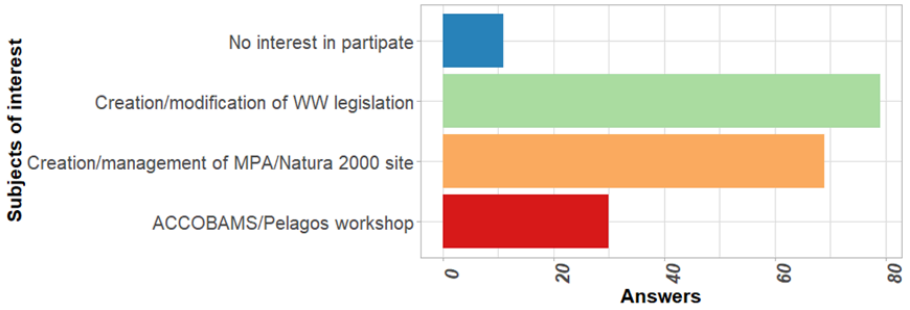
- 84 operators indicated that they shared data with national/regional administration and/or research groups.



- The main desired feedback that would encourage operators to continue to collect data or start to collect some are to get Sightings statistics and Sightings maps.



- 90% of operators who answered to the questionnaire would like to be involved in future decision making



Most companies that answered the survey already collected some kind of data on marine species and indicated that using a smartphone app could be a way to improve their data collection. A majority also answered that they would like to be involved in decision making about their activity and the management of marine protected areas.

B) Round table with speakers from WW companies

The round table was an opportunity to gather different organisations sharing the objective to implement a systematic data collection with WW companies to meet and exchange in view of future possible joint activities through a transnational network. The discussions highlighted the need to establish and maintain participative approach with WW operators, several examples on how to best engage with them were discussed.

1) **The need of a public involvement in label management, data sharing, access, use, and reuse;**

Several labels for WW have been developed by the private economic sector, research organisations or by governments. The positive aspect of providing different ecolabels is the diversity of ways to reach a common aim: encouraging activities based on environmentally friendly principles and sustainable practices. But generally, the negative aspects of having a multitude of ecolabels are:

- potential redundancy when they have the same characteristics;
- potential greenwashing when private;
- tourists disinterest due to their number and contradictory common messages.

Therefore, the supervision by Regional/National/International authorities of the label regulation is fundamental to ensure label quality control and message consistency about the way to undertake a sustainable WW.

The other aspect discussed here was about the deeper involvement of relevant administrations in data sharing, access, use, and reuse. WW operators voiced their concerns that authorities request data from them without a clear purpose and that these data are seldom used for anything. Sometimes it is not even clear whether their data are being checked by anyone or stored in an adequate manner to ensure future use. In countries/regions where data collection is mandatory within the licensing scheme (e.g. Spain, Portugal), there is generally no consequence for operators that do not provide data or do not provide them in a desirable format. For this reason, some WW operators do not see the point of making the effort to send good quality data when there is no positive nor negative feedback associated with it. Moreover, it is not always clear what is happening to these data, as for example in Spain, these data cannot be requested from the Government by researchers to be analysed due to data protection laws. There is a need to create a protocol for data sharing, including examining options to pre-process data to create aggregated (anonymised) data or

else so that data can be used for management purposes while properly acknowledging contributors and providing timely feedback.

2) **The need to build a collaborative network willing to work together on a joint action plan including the definition of a limited but efficient WW data collection ;**

In general, due to the disparity in data collection formats and human resources/funding limitations, relevant administrations do not have the capacity to analyse these data efficiently. There is a need for a standardised integrated data collection framework, similar to those developed for the fishing industry, including the type of data to be collected (less is best), the collection method (via an app or standardised forms) and training programmes to ensure that all data are collected in the same useful way. To build this framework, it would require a collaborative network of WW operators, administrations and researchers willing to work together on a joint action plan including the definition of a limited but efficient WW data collection, that is accessible for all types of operators and ensure that data can be used for management purposes. The framework should also examine how to best deal with data property, data access and acknowledging data contributors, especially for those WW operators who wish to be involved in data analysis or to publish their own research independently.

3) **The need to highlight to policy makers that WW data is complementary data but cannot replace data collected by dedicated research surveys.**

There are several examples of how WW data can contribute to science, whether it is sighting data or photo-identification pictures. This is generally linked to the fact that WW operators perform very regular (generally daily or multi daily) trips in their area, sometimes all year round, which brings a great temporal resolution that research surveys can seldom reach. However, WW data, and especially basic mandatory data received by relevant administrations, should be verified and used in an adequate manner that takes into account the inherent limitations associated with commercial tourism. In some cases, the short duration of the trip can limit the area to be covered and the lack of searching effort could lead to wrong conclusions regarding spatial distribution, or the regulations (e.g. minimum distance or maximum time to be spent with a group) can limit the capacity to correctly count animals or take photo-identification pictures of all animals present. These limitations need to be taken into account in the analysis process otherwise they will reflect an incorrect picture of the situation and possibly lead to inadequate management measures. It is essential to understand that WW data collection can not substitute dedicated data collection from research surveys but can be very useful to complement them.
As indicated above, WW data collection is opportunistic because the trips are designed according to tourist needs and expectations so data collected with WW is biased and have limitations in space and methodology.

Final remarks

Participants stated that they would like to be involved in a longer workshop/conference about this subject organised by ACCOBAMS, Pelagos and/or IWC to continue these important discussions.

A summary of the workshop was presented on 20th April 2023 during the Annual Assembly of the European Cetacean Society Meeting by Laurène Trudelle.

Appendix 1 : Workshop agenda

Monday 17 April 2022, 9:00-13:00	
9:00 **Welcome and introduction to the workshop**	
9:10-10:20 Part 1 - The importance of data collection for responsible marine ecotourism	
The International Whaling Commission WW Handbook	E. Neave-Webb, IWC
ACCOBAMS and the High Quality WW label	C. Le Ravallec, ACCOBAMS
Implementation of the ACCOBAMS High Quality WW label in France - challenges and solution	L. Trudelle, MIRACETI
Implementation of the ACCOBAMS High Quality WW label in Italy - challenges and solutions	A. Moulins, CIMA Foundation
WCA responsible whale-watching certification	H. Eckman, World Cetacean Alliance
10:20-11:00 Part 2 - Collaboration between research groups and marine ecotourism companies in Macaronesia - challenges and solutions	
The MONICET programme in the Azores	L. García, Universidade dos Açores
Overview of data collection from whale-watching boats in Madeira	P. Gauffier, Madeira Whale Museum
Studying cryptic cetacean species using opportunistic data. The Blainville beaked whale community off Tenerife	J. Marrero, Asociación Tonina
11:00-11:20 Coffee Break	
11:20-12:45 Part 3 - Discussion groups	
Results from a questionnaire about data collection from whale-watching boats (worldwide)	P. Gauffier, A. Moulins, L. Trudelle
Round table with speakers from WW companies	C. Monaco, C. Fanizza and all participants
12:45-13:00 Conclusions	

Appendix 2 : List of participants

NAME	**ORGANISATION**	**ROLE**
Aurélie Moulins	CIMA Foundation	Organiser
Pauline Gauffier	Madeira Whale Museum	Organiser
Laurène Trudelle	MIRACETI	Organiser
Harry Eckman	World Cetacean Alliance	Speaker
Laura Gónzalez	Universidade dos Açores	Speaker
Célia Le Ravallec	ACCOBAMS Secretariat	Speaker
Jacobo Marrero	Asociación Tonina	Speaker
Clara Monaco	Mare Camp	Speaker
Emma Neave-Webb	International Whaling Commission	Speaker
Silvia Aveta	WWF IT - Vele di Panda	Participant
Isabel Cristina Avila Jiménez	(ITAW), University of Hannover	Participant
Stefano Bellomo	Jonian Dolphin Conservation	Participant
Thalia de Haas	DMAD-Marine Mammals Research Association	Participant
Lorenzo Fiori	Auckland University of Technology	Participant
Maurizio Ingrosso	Università degli Studi di Bari	Participant
José Manuel Viegas de Oliveira Neto Azevedo	Universidade dos Açores	Participant
Laura Pintore	WWF IT - Vele di Panda	Participant
Alicia Quirin	AIMM	Participant
Alessandra Raffa	Mare Camp	Participant
Lia Santacesaria	Jonian Dolphin Conservation	Participant
Alessia Scuderi	Universidad de Cádiz	Participant
Paola Tepsich	CIMA Foundation	Participant