

REGIONAL INITIATIVE TEMPLATE

Please complete each section below.

1. Contact Details

Please provide the following contact details:

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2. Name of Initiative

Development of marine species-based ecotourism in the Pacific Islands

3. Background and Rationale

You may consider: What is the issue being addressed by this initiative? What are the causes of this issue? Are there relevant studies that have been carried out to support the issue? Are there links to national, regional or international goals/policies?

Please limit your response to no more than 750 words.

Development of marine species-based ecotourism in the Pacific Islands region

VISION

'By 2020, the Pacific is recognized as a leading destination for marine ecotourism - a conservation tool for the marine environment, local cultures and sustainable socioeconomic development'

Definition

Coastal and marine ecotourism is a sustainable form of natural resource-based tourism, and includes those recreational activities involving travel away from one's place of residence, and which have as their host or

focus the marine environment and/or the coastal zone. It focuses primarily on experiencing and learning about nature, is ethically managed to be low-impact, non-consumptive, and locally oriented (control, benefits, and scale). It typically occurs in natural areas, and should contribute to the conservation or preservation of such areas.

Many Pacific Islands depend on tourism to generate jobs and revenues. Our region also hosts some of the world's most endangered and threatened species. Studies have indicated the potential value of marine-based ecotourism (e.g. shark-diving in Fiji has been estimated to generate US\$42 million p.a.; a humpback whale returning each winter to Tonga may generate more than US\$1 million during its lifetime).

A recent conference (the Blue Days) in Papeete, 1-5 June, brought together experts and delegates from 13 Pacific Island countries and territories, to learn from each others' experiences, and develop a road map for the sustainable development of marine ecotourism, that will benefit both communities and threatened species.

By mandating SPTO and SPREP to lead the engagement of CROP agencies, (see final clause of attached Communique, Annex 1), and by involving communities and other stakeholders in this initiative, it is envisaged that there will be a significant growth in tourist numbers to the region specifically to view wildlife such as whales, sharks and turtles.

4. Description

Please provide a brief overview of this initiative. Try to address the following: Does this initiative contribute to a positive change to the region? What makes this initiative of importance to the Pacific region as a whole? Who would implement this initiative? Who are the main beneficiaries? Are regulatory or legislative changes required at the national level to implement this initiative? How would the initiative be funded? Has this initiative been carried out previously? What are the key risks in implementing this initiative? Are there any complementary projects and programmes currently active? What is the proposed timeframe for this initiative? How would the initiative be sustained over the proposed timeframe?

Please limit your response to no more than 750 words.

The proposal for the development of marine species-based ecotourism in the Pacific Islands would enhance an already established niche that exists in the region. By introducing best international practice and facilitating the establishment of stakeholder networks, there would be conservation benefits for threatened species and economic benefits for communities. There are few Pacific Island countries without some form of tourism infrastructure, and there are many countries with the potential to both improve the degree and quality of protection for threatened species and at the same time promote tourism opportunities. Many of the fundamental principles of successful and sustainable ecotourism are easily transferable across the region. SPTO and SPREP would be the lead CROP agencies, and PIFS could coordinate capability building and regional integration. Any

regulatory or legislative changes that may be required to existing national frameworks would be simple and straightforward. There are several possibilities for funding, but there will be opportunities for public/private partnerships and South-South cooperation. There are no obvious risks to implementing the initiative, provided that adequate funding is available and there is compliance by operators with best practice principles. The programme would build on existing successful examples of marine ecotourism in the region and lessons learned from community-based enterprises in Solomon Islands, French Polynesia, Fiji, Tonga, Cook Islands, Kiribati, Guam and New Caledonia. The proposed timeframe is 5 years, and the initiative would be sustained through a variety of funding mechanisms, as outlined in the draft work programme attached as Annex 2.

5. Alignment to Regional Vision, Values and Objectives

Briefly describe how your initiative supports the vision, values and objectives set out in the Framework for Pacific Regionalism. These can be found in the Framework for Pacific Regionalism document or in the submissions guideline document.

Please limit your response to no more than 500 words

The oceans divide and unite Pacific islanders. The iconic species of the region are those like the turtles, whales and sharks, that undertake the same long journeys. Many of these species are threatened or endangered, and the Pacific Islands leads the world in establishing protected areas and sanctuaries for our emblematic animals. Improving the protection available to these animals, and supporting communities to derive an economic benefit from increased tourism is a win-win situation. The Pacific Islands are uniquely placed to make this initiative a success.

6. Additional Information

Please provide or attach additional information in support of this initiative.

Please limit your response to no more than 5 pages.

Please see Annexes 1 and 2

ANNEX 1

Communiqué

Journées Bleues (Blue Days) Regional Conference

on Iconic Marine Species Ecotourism

Hosted by the Government of French Polynesia, Tahiti

4 June 2015

THE PARTICIPANTS

1. *Attending the Journées Bleues regional conference hosted by the government of French Polynesia and SPREP, with various cofunders, held in Tahiti in June 2015, dealing with iconic marine species ecotourism;*
2. *Aware of the importance of the growing economic value of ecotourism in the Pacific Islands Countries and Territories and of its potential to bring economic benefits to communities;*
3. *Aware of the importance of preserving iconic species to ensure the development of the marine ecotourism sector and the need to encourage sustainable tourism activities;*
4. *Aware of the commitment by our countries to reaching the Aichi Targets and to preserve the species and habitats which support ecotourism;*
5. *Aware that many of the marine species included in tourism activities are listed as vulnerable, endangered or critically endangered on the IUCN Red List or other nationally relevant criteria;*
6. *Noting that humpback whales and other marine mammals, including dugongs, marine turtles, sea birds, and many species of sharks and rays are given priority for the implementation of management measures by their inclusion in the texts or annexes of the Convention of Migratory Species (CMS), and of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES);*
7. *Recognise the value and principles of MPAs to safeguard marine species targeted by ecotourism activities;*
8. *Recognizing that marine tourism may have irreversible effects on iconic vulnerable marine species and their habitat, as well as indigenous cultures, if the sector is not sustainably managed;*
9. *Recognizing that the long-term conservation of iconic marine species and their habitats and sustainable tourism development that involve watching, diving, swimming with these species requires a consistent and regulated framework that guides such activities at national levels throughout the Pacific Islands region;*
10. *Recognizing that well-managed ecotourism can benefit both species conservation and sustainable livelihood development at all levels;*
11. *Considering the need for the SPREP's member countries to collaborate in the field of tourism, to encourage regional cooperation and South-South economic development;*
12. *Recognizing the importance of the participation of all PICTs, indigenous communities, as well as Regional Organizations, NGOs and the private sector in collaborative action related to the conservation of marine species and management of their habitats.*

THE PARTICIPANTS THEREFORE

1. *Note* that the Pacific can become an even more globally recognised destination in terms of marine ecotourism due to its biodiversity, commitment to sustainable practices and traditional knowledge;
2. *Recognise* that ecotourism is a major opportunity for the development of the economic sector in the region, for the benefit of the local communities and conservation goals;
3. *Recognize* the importance of local, cultural and scientific knowledge and practices for the sustainable economic development of this niche market;
4. *Recommend* that actions at the national level be implemented in an integrated multi-sectorial approach;
5. *Recommend* that actions at a national level be implemented with the support of key stakeholders at a regional level;
6. *Endorse* the development of a multiyear programme based on the framework agreed to during this conference, to provide the opportunity for Pacific countries and territories to coordinate efforts and to meet their shared expectations;
7. *Recommend* institutional reforms be undertaken in our respective countries, if required, to support community-based well-managed ecotourism initiatives and directly and indirectly benefiting local communities;
8. *Propose* that institutional reforms be undertaken in our respective countries and territories, if required, to support the conservation of marine species and their habitats with resources generated by tourism sector;
9. *Agree* that the endorsement of the regional strategy proposed by SPTO would be beneficial for the development of marine ecotourism in each country or territory according to local context;
10. *Propose* that each country and territory represented at this conference should consider making a firm commitment to supporting existing, or establishing pilot, marine ecotourism projects combining economic development with marine species conservation and sustainable management of natural resources, according to the framework agreed by participants;
11. *Recommend* that countries and territories represented at this conference put in place a mechanism for all the stakeholders involved in marine ecotourism to regularly exchange information and experiences;
12. *Endorse* the development of an eco-certification label for tourism infrastructures, private operators and travel agencies, along with relevant training programmes, to improve and harmonise the quality and sustainability of ecotourism services and the protection of iconic species;
13. *Recommend* that countries and territories consider the establishment of a regional label linked with the destination Pacific islands, without affecting existing efforts in the region;
14. *Recommend* that countries and territories review and consider the adoption of regional guidelines related to responsible and sustainable marine species-based tourism and ensure its promotion at national and regional levels;
15. *Recommend* that countries integrate community-based ecotourism principles into national development policies and legal frameworks, including raising awareness and capacity building for the local community and tourism industry on preserving marine life, developing this niche for sustainable economic and livelihood development;
16. *Request* the SPREP Secretariat to forward this Communiqué and other relevant outputs of this Conference to the 2015 SPREP Meeting, to Tourism and Environment Ministers in member governments, and to all CROP agencies involved in tourism development and marine resources management in the Pacific islands, and to the relevant multilateral environmental agreements (such as CBD and CMS); and furthermore *invite* countries taking part in this Conference who are members of such treaties and agencies to also bring to their attention the relevant outputs of this Conference;
17. *Endorse* SPTO and SPREP as the organisations to lead development of the regional guidelines framework, to collaborate in seeking funding and implementing the multiyear programme.



ANNEX 2

Framework for a Multiyear Programme following Blue days conference held in Tahiti in June 2015

Development of marine species-based ecotourism in the Pacific Islands region

VISION

'By 2020, the Pacific is recognized as a leading destination for marine ecotourism - a conservation tool for the marine environment, local cultures and sustainable socioeconomic development'

Definition

Coastal and marine ecotourism is a sustainable form of natural resource-based tourism, and includes those recreational activities involving travel away from one's place of residence, and which have as their host or focus the marine environment and/or the coastal zone. It focuses primarily on experiencing and learning about nature, is ethically managed to be low-impact, non-consumptive, and locally oriented (control, benefits, and scale). It typically occurs in natural areas, and should contribute to the conservation or preservation of such areas.

10 themes

- Theme 1:** Demand, supply and needs assessment in the Pacific Islands region
- Theme 2:** Planning and structure of marine ecotourism
- Theme 3:** Design of 'high-quality' products
- Theme 4:** Research, monitoring and evaluation
- Theme 5:** Marine ecotourism as a conservation tool
- Theme 6:** Sustainable economic development and commitment of local communities
- Theme 7:** Traditional knowledge and local cultures
- Theme 8:** Awareness, environmental and cultural education
- Theme 9:** Capability-building
- Theme 10:** Promotion of sustainable marine ecotourism in the Pacific Islands region

Theme 1: Demand, supply and needs assessment in the Pacific Islands region

Objective 1: Understand current and likely future trends and demands for marine ecotourism in the Pacific Islands Region

Action a. Undertake a market and competitor analysis to assess the current and likely future demands for marine ecotourism

Objective 2: Understand current and likely future needs of communities and their objectives for marine ecotourism in the Pacific Islands Region

Action a. Undertake a community socio-economic assessment to understand community aspirations and expectations for marine ecotourism

Objective 3: Understand current and likely future vulnerability, resilience and capacity of ecosystem and species to support marine ecotourism in the Pacific Islands Region

Action a. Develop and strengthen management programmes, including best practice guidelines, for marine ecotourism activities and apply tools for measuring and promoting ecosystem resilience at all levels (local, national and regional); e.g. Reef Health Index or similar report card system

Objective 4: Develop an inventory of current and future potential of marine ecotourism product supply and gaps in the Pacific Islands Region

Action a. Develop an inventory of tourism products available in the Pacific Islands Region

Action b. Identify gaps and predictions for future

Action c. Identify iconic and unique products for marine ecotourism

Theme 2: Planning and structure of marine ecotourism

Objective 1: Develop a common programme for ecotourism in the region, led by SPTO and SPREP, with regional organization membership

Action a. Hold a working group or other mechanism bringing together regional agencies to define the comparative advantage of each regional actor and develop a common platform and approach to ecotourism development in the region, including a shared strategy

Action b. Develop a five year programme and secure funds to support its implementation

Action c. Integrate ecotourism in regional policies and approaches

Objective 2: Identify mechanisms to encourage and support collaboration between regional, national and local stakeholders, including facilitation of cross government agency discussions

Action a: Identify all stakeholders at regional, national and local level and establish a collective impact approach

Action b: Identify local champions who can facilitate the collaborative process

Action c: Integrate ecotourism in national policies and approaches

Objective 3: Assess existing information, strategy, frameworks and planning tools related to ecotourism at global, regional, national and local levels, develop new tools where needed, and make all information and tools easily accessible to the region

Action a: Establish a portal/database as a site for all information, strategies, plans, tools, networks, products and opportunities, including information on trends and developments that could impact on ecotourism in the region

Action b: Commission a collection and assessment of existing ecotourism-related research, policies, plans, activities, products and destinations (including environmental and cultural), tools including planning frameworks, regulations, codes of conduct, guidelines, training programmes, certification programmes, marketing strategies, best practice, networks

Theme 3: Design of 'high-quality' products

Objective 1: Market high-quality marine ecotourism products in which people are enjoying and learning about biology, culture, and contributions to the local place

Action a. Develop standards, certifications and practices that reflect sustainable, cultural and environmental place/location-based resource use

Action b. Explore and scope best practices in order to develop local accreditation programmes which are developed in partnership with relevant communities and cultures and provide necessary facilities to achieve these – South-South cooperation would provide many opportunities for this.

Objective 2: Identify, promote and enable authentic community-owned culture and value-driven products on iconic species and cultural attractions

Action a. Enable interested communities to drive their own unique product development (not only from external demand), driven from internal values and that protect intellectual and cultural property rights

Action b. Assist communities to present and market products that are attractive and acceptable to international visitors

Action c. Allow local stakeholders to explore what is meant by ecotourism and the expectations (positive and negative) of visitors such that they are able to develop appropriate high quality products

Theme 4: Research, monitoring and evaluation

Objective 1: Collect, share and use baseline data on the current status of marine species and environments, cultural knowledge, ecotourism opportunities, markets and impacts

Action a. Collect baseline data

Action b. Share and use data

Objective 2: Strengthen existing participatory processes for stakeholders to support research, monitoring and evaluation

Action a. Establish local and regional networks with appropriate feedback loops

Action b. Explore opportunities for sustainable financing

Theme 5: Marine ecotourism as a conservation tool

Objective 5: Make culture and conservation drivers for marine ecotourism particularly for emblematic marine species

In the short-term

Action a. Bring the outcomes of this meeting to the attention of Tourism, Environment and Fisheries Ministers in the Pacific Islands region by:

- An agenda item at Tourism Ministers Meeting, Papeete October 2015 (organized by SPTO)
- Proposing a paragraph in Communiqué for the Pacific Island Leaders Forum Meeting 2015, in September in PNG
- Agenda item/side event for SPREP Meeting 21-25 September
- Reports to CBD and CMS

In the long-term, local scale

Action b. Using lessons learnt from community-based activities such as LMMAs, turtle monitoring schemes and small-scale MPAs:

- Promote the training of community monitors/representatives in basic monitoring techniques, including compliance with existing rules
- Provide training for monitors in tourism and hospitality
- Encourage government agencies and donors to support this through training programmes and scholarships

At the long-term, regional/international scale

Action c. Create the right conservation framework for emblematic species:

- Connect ecotourism, MPAs, regional initiatives
- Possible integrative tools include SPREP Marine Species Plan; PIFS: especially the Pacific Oceanscape Framework; Regional Tourism Strategy; Donors (World Bank, EU, Asia Development Bank/operators/supporters)
- Best Practice guidelines: CROP Agencies

Action d. Measure the success of appropriate ecotourism to promote emblematic species conservation

- Index for ecotourism
- Status and trends of key species
- Financial benefit to communities
- Success of compliance
- Educational programmes
- Tourist feedback
- Cost-benefit analysis

Theme 6: Sustainable economic development and commitment of local communities

Objective 1: Marine Ecotourism shall be considered as a tool for sustainable development which brings opportunities that benefit communities in a way that does not exaggerate economic benefit over cultural, environmental, and development aspirations

- Action a. Examine benefit sharing systems - how national, provincial and community level tourism benefits may be fairly and equitably enjoyed
- Action b. Undertake visioning and planning exercises with communities on how to sustain and maintain the community tourism growth (over the short, medium and long term) that does not diminish the feel and values of the local area, including considerations on the scale of growth
- Action c. Undertake research on the carrying capacity of the local context for various types of sustainable tourism
- Action d. Develop regional strategic action plans over the long term that include numbers and timeframes, and local agency oversight for specific locations

Objective 2: Balance top down and bottom up approaches for high-quality product ecotourism management, that recognizes the need for regulation but is built on community aspirations and values

- Action a. Examine national case studies that can showcase balanced regulation
- Action b. Target high yielding products that avoid putting excessive pressure on natural and social resources

Objective 3: Communities are engaged in a continuous process of product development from idea to certification that includes authentic cultural activities

- Action a. Tourism development and high quality products include and incorporate community views and consultation, before approvals or permits are granted by Government
- Action b. Work within governments on certification processes to ensure that cultural decision-making paradigms are well considered

Theme 7: Traditional knowledge and local cultures

Objective 1: Develop an inventory of traditional knowledge including knowledge related to marine species, developed through community participatory approaches

- Action a. Undertake a scoping exercise to identify what information exists, including relating it to work being undertaken as part of other conventions such as the UNESCO Convention on Intangible Cultural Heritage and the Convention on Biological Diversity and ensuring information is shared with stakeholders across different sectors

Objective 2: Ensure that in activities developed around traditional knowledge and culture integrity, authenticity, appropriateness and local guardianship of traditional knowledge are maintained

- Action a. Develop or adopt codes of conduct or other relevant tools based on existing country commitments (Nagoya Protocol, CBD, Traditional Knowledge Act) and the Framework for Nature Conservation and Protected areas 2014-2020 to ensure ownership/guardianship of traditional knowledge.

Theme 8: Awareness, environmental and cultural education

Objective 1: Integration of environmental and cultural education in ongoing programmes for all stakeholders

- Action a. Develop processes and initiatives within local communities and agencies for reciprocal growth and understanding of environmental and cultural values
- Action b. Identify, promote and replicate best practice for environmental, cultural and ecotourism education for the Pacific

Objective 2: Strengthen mechanisms for information-sharing and networking

Action a. Develop regional networks to share and develop best practice and resources

Action b. Identify tools to empower communities in the development and sustainability of ecotourism

Theme 9: Capability-building

Objective 1: Ensure that capabilities of the stakeholders involved in the tourism and environmental sector are enhanced through technical assistance and training and the industry is enhanced through community knowledge and cultural appreciation in a two-way relationship

Action a. Partner with the Pacific Vaka initiatives to promote the understanding and efforts of ecotourism, and engage communities in marine conservation while promoting traditional knowledge and cultural practices of ocean navigation and revival of cultural expressions

Action b. Sensitize communities as a whole to tourism and ecotourism where relevant

Action c. Plan and implement regular training of Guides and other professionals

Action d: Integrate and connect documents such as the Framework for Nature Conservation and Protected Areas across relevant stakeholders to ensure their implementation and coordination of regional and national efforts

Action e: Establish community local level partnerships and mentoring schemes e.g. hosting of Indigenous communities engaged in ecotourism; internships and seconding between countries and/or communities

Theme 10: Promotion of sustainable marine ecotourism in the Pacific Islands region

Objective 1: Ensure that the SPTO marketing strategy is informed by the supply, demand and needs assessments for marine ecotourism

Action a. Strengthen links between key sectors (CROP Agencies, Government Tourism, Environment, Fisheries, etc...) to promote a common vision for marine ecotourism in the region

Objective 2: Utilise regional and national initiatives for the protection of the marine environment and preservation of culture and traditions to promote the Pacific Islands region as a unique sustainable destination

Action a. Develop a shared marketing strategy at national and regional levels for marine ecotourism and conservation initiatives

Action b. SPREP and SPTO to collaborate for a strategy promoting marine ecotourism in the region