



Status of implementation of the whale and dolphin action plan

4th meeting of the
signatories to the Pacific
Island Cetacean MOU
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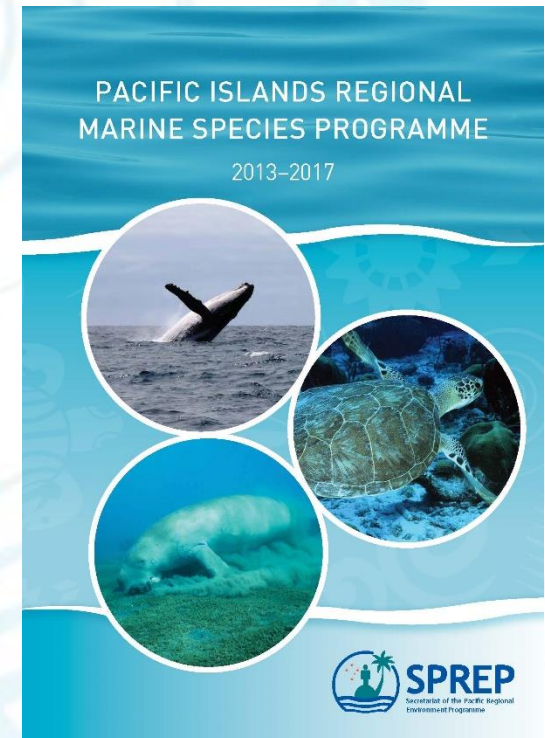


The purpose of this work was to consult with Pacific Island countries and territories to:

- Determine progress on implementation of the 2013-2017 Action Plans.
- Identify issues and challenges with implementing the plans.
- Obtain feedback about the plans in general.

Objective:

- Develop a series of Marine Species Action Plans for 2022-2026.



- Implementation tables created
- Prefilled with info where members had already reported on actions from:
 - Whales in a Changing Ocean Conference

Action in Regional Whale and Dolphin AP	National Activities	Comments on progress, gaps and road blocks	Future actions or recommendations
THEME 1: INFORMATION, AWARENESS/EDUCATION AND COMMUNICATION			
OBJECTIVE 1: Develop communication strategies, training programmes and protocols for key issues within the Whale and Dolphin Action Plan			
1.1 Identify key issues for each member and support development of appropriate education strategies and programmes (e.g. known threats; species ID; status).			
1.2 Develop appropriate education and awareness tools incorporating scientific and traditional knowledge for different target audiences at a regional and national level.			
1.3 Integrate traditional knowledge, stories and customs into education and awareness tools and materials.			
INDICATORS			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community and school education programmes implemented. • Regionally relevant factsheets to inform governments and industries on key issues are produced e.g. fisheries interaction, cultural practices, regulation, biology, natural history, species ID etc). 			



PROCESS AND LIMITATIONS

- Requests via SPREP focal points to have video calls.
- Collect information and feedback July 2020 until March 2021.
- Video calls: Solomon Islands, Palau, Tonga, American Samoa, Niue, and Tuvalu.
- Completed tables: New Caledonia, Tonga.
- Low engagement, possibly due to impact of COVID-19 = limited information we can provide about implementation of the plans and their usefulness, as well as feedback we could take forward in reviewing the plans.
- Implementation tables + video calls + email communications + previous conference workshop reports → implementation report.



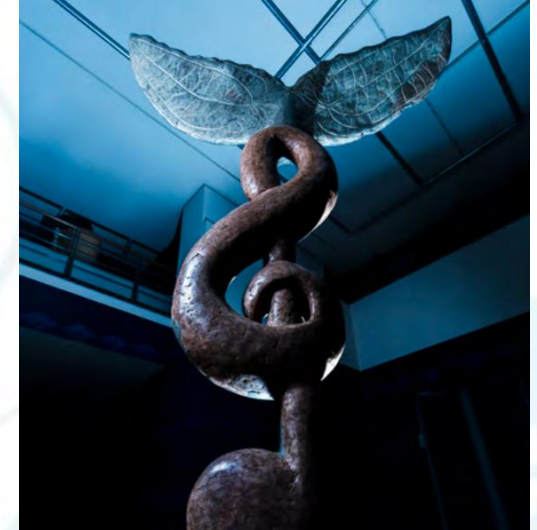
**SPREP
PROE**

PROCESS AND LIMITATIONS

- SPREP *members* only
- Self-reporting exercise, not thorough review
- Unlikely to capture everything, particularly for countries/territories that didn't respond.



- SPREP designated 2016/2017 as the Year of the Whale.
- Various public lectures, school programmes, flyers and posters etc, celebrations and social media outreach, online publication of whale tracking (New Cal, French Polynesia).
- Whales exhibition in New Caledonia.
- Various awareness campaigns incl. whale watching and how to operate vessels around whales.
- Tonga citizen science programme for schools.



- Some stranding workshops (American Samoa, New Cal).
- Whale-watch best practice training (New Cal, Niue).
- Scholarships and internships.
- Delegate from Samoa sponsored to attend CMS COP 12 in Philippines in 2017.
- Tongan NGO employee sent to Australia to do research on whales
- Capacity building workshop and tour of NZ marine mammal tourism was planned for Tonga but cancelled due to COVID-19.





- Pacific Island Whales in a Changing Climate report – 2017.
- 11% of dolphins photographed presented anthropogenic marks (New Cal – Bonneville *et al* 2021).
- Solomon Islands: live capture and export of dolphins banned.
- Some disentanglement training has occurred in the region – in Tonga also looking at alternatives to buoys and ropes for marking boundaries etc.
- VEPA has a ghost fishing project.
- By-catch and integrated ecosystem management initiative (BIEM) engaging with WCPFC to improve data collection, mitigate bycatch, safe handling guidance etc.





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THEME: ECOSYSTEM AND HABITAT PROTECTION

- New Caledonia Natural Park of the Coral Sea in 2014.
- Marae Moana Marine Park in Cook Islands in 2017.
- Palau National Marine Sanctuary implemented 2020.
- IMMA regional workshop for South Pacific in Samoa in 2017 – 29 candidate IMMAs identified, 18 confirmed by the review panel.
- Solomon Islands developing its Marine Spatial Plan.
- Over 36 million km² of SPREP member EEZs declared as whale sanctuaries.
- Challenges with monitoring, control and surveillance.
- Assessment of habitat suitability for mother/calf humpback whales in Tonga.

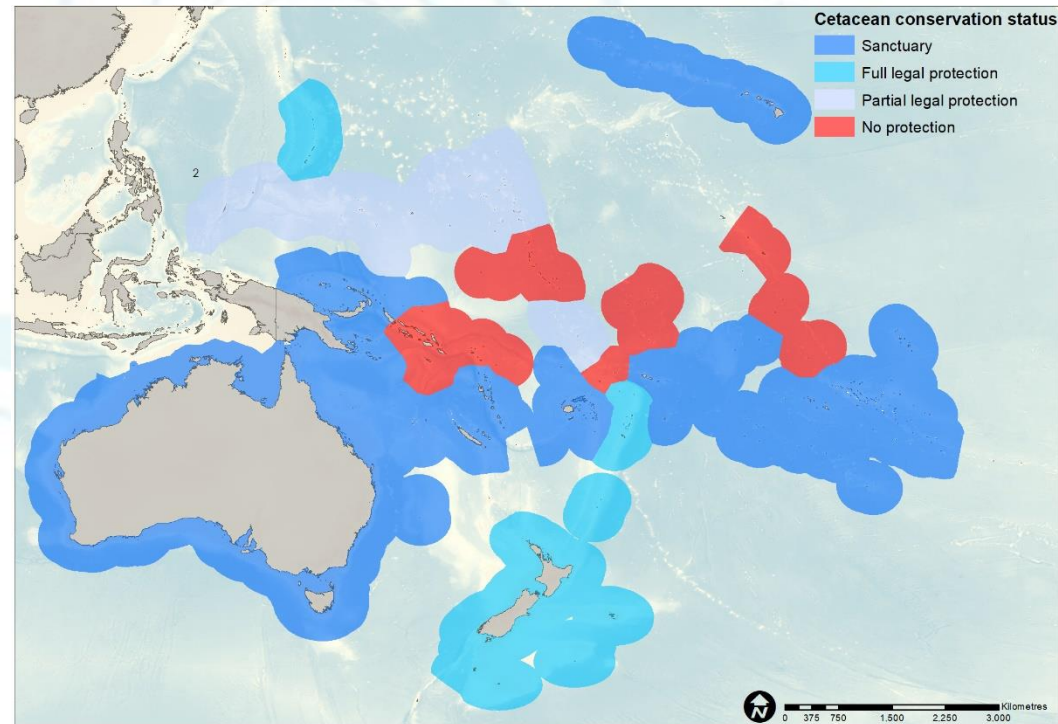


Figure 2. Map of whale and dolphin protected areas and sanctuaries. **Note: this is to be updated based on new information before finalisation of document.**

- At least 2 countries have national action plans for whales and dolphins.
- Palau review and update of marine legislation, 2018.
- Solomon Islands National Ocean Policy, 2018.
- Fiji National Biodiversity Strategy and Action plan 2020-2025 and National Ocean Policy (2020-2030).
- New Cal: management plans for protected areas and UNESCO sites.
- Review of natural resource and environment related legislation was published for Tonga in 2018.



- New Cal: 2019 workshops to promote the cultural and linguistic heritage on themes that link man to the ocean.
- New Cal: natural park of the coral sea committee includes customary authorities.
- Solomon Islands cultural harvesting in Malaita province.
- Deceased whales utilized for meat and bone by local communities.
- Community consultations for marine spatial planning included collecting community knowledge and perceptions about whales and their use of Tongan waters now and in the past.
- Traditional knowledge and cultural values of turtles, dugongs and cetaceans have been documented from many different areas of Vanuatu.



- Marine mammal research programmes – photo ID, genetic sampling, song recording (American Samoa, New Caledonia, Cook Islands, Tonga).
- Demographic and genetic assessments of dolphins taken in Solomon Islands (Oremus *et al* 2014).
- WHERE programme in New Caledonia (humpback whale habitat exploration).
- Understanding the environmental drivers of humpback whales in the context of climate change (Derville *et al*, 2019).
- Recording of strandings across region.
- Palau cetacean research project with Whaleology.



- New Caledonia annual pre-season training for whale-watch operators.
- Tonga ratified whale watching and swimming regulations in 2013.
- Tonga input into recent IWC Whale Watching Handbook.
- Niue established whale watching regulations in 2016.
- Study highlighting impact of swim-with operations in Tonga – Fiori *et al* 2019.
- Licenses limited for 2020 season in Tonga (before COVID-19 disrupted tourism).
- New Cal: new regulations integrating cetacean approach charter into environmental code, 2019 – prohibit approach to mothers with calves.
- Training gaps in Tonga industry identified.





THEME: NATIONAL, REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATION AND COOPERATION

- Whales in a changing ocean conference hosted by Tonga in 2017, attended by 13 SPREP members (excl partners).
- Collaboration with South Pacific Whale Research Consortium.
- 7 countries are members of CITES.
- 13 countries are members of CBD.
- 4 countries are members of CMS.
- 9 countries signed the year of the whale declaration.
- 13 members are signatories to the cetacean MOU.
- Fiji co-chaired the UN Oceans Conference in New York with the Government of Sweden in June 2017.





THANK YOU!



See the full Regional Marine Species Action Plans Implementation Review on the [meeting website](#) (note: includes info on turtles and dugongs as well).

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FOR MORE INFO