A REVIEW OF EXISTING MARINE TOURISM GUIDELINES AND CURRENT PRACTICES

Supporting document to the Pacific responsible marine wildlife viewing guidelines

EUROPEAN UNION

SPREP

Pacific BioScapes

PACIFIC SUSTAINABLE TOURISM COMMITMENT

PACIFIC TOURISM ORGANISATION

This report on Marine Tourism in the Pacific was prepared by TRC Tourism for the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP).

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Version control

Report name	Version	Date submitted	Author / Reviewer
Draft Report on Pacific Marine Tourism	2	17/04/2024	PS
Final Report – Pacific marine tourism	3	5/9/24	PS

The Pacific BioScapes Programme is a European Union (EU) funded action, managed and implemented by the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP). It includes 30 focused activities taking place across a diversity of ecosystems in 11 Pacific island countries that are addressing critical issues concerning coastal and marine biodiversity, and ecosystem-based responses to climate change adaptation.

The Pacific Marine Tourism Guidelines have been prepared by the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) in partnership with the Pacific Tourism Organisation (SPTO) as part of the Pacific BioScapes Programme to support implementation of the Pacific Islands Regional Marine Species Programme 2022–2026 and the Pacific Sustainable Tourism Policy Framework 2030. Feedback on the usefulness and applicability of the guidelines will help shape future updates. Queries regarding this document should be directed to SPREP.

Contents

1 Introduction

1.1 Background

The Pacific Ocean is the largest geographic feature of planet Earth. The Pacific region is home to more than 38 million people[1] who rely on it for economic, social and cultural wellbeing, and it is critically important to the global ecosystem.

Coastal and marine tourism represents at least 50% of total global tourism.[2] It is the largest economic sector for most small island developing states and coastal states, creating jobs and income for communities and foreign exchange earnings. Coastal and marine tourism is highly dependent on the quality of ecosystems to attract visitors.

For many communities within the region, coastal and marine tourism forms a crucial part of their livelihood offering a variety of tourism products and experiences including scuba diving, snorkelling, interactions with marine animals, whale watching, fishing, kayaking, and other aquatic activities. The appeal of these offerings heavily relies on ecosystem quality, making them particularly susceptible to challenges such as climate change and biodiversity loss.

Similarly, activities associated with marine tourism can have detrimental effects on marine ecosystems. With the growth of the marine wildlife tourism industry, there has been a significant amount of research into the negative impacts of human–marine wildlife interactions[3]. Rapidly moving boats, the employment of aerial devices like drones, and direct interactions can negatively affect marine species, including whales, dugongs, and sea birds, affecting their chances of survival and reproductive success. Such disruptions can jeopardise the health of both individual animals and entire populations.

The regulatory frameworks and management systems required to facilitate the sustainable functioning of the marine tourism industry differ across Pacific nations. Some countries have implemented measures to regulate marine tourism, through regulations, policy and voluntary guidelines while other nations have few regulations or guidelines to support sustainable marine tourism practices.

Considering the present challenges confronting marine ecosystems in the Pacific and the critical role of tourism, the development of a tailored set of guidelines is considered critical.

As part of the Pacific BioScapes Programme the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) has funded the development of the Pacific Marine Tourism Guidelines as part of the Pacific Islands Regional Marine Species Program 2022–2026[4]. The guidelines aim to provide practical advice for Pacific nations and their marine tourism operators and will cover interactions with whales, dolphins, dugongs, sharks, rays, turtles and seabirds.

The guidelines will support the Pacific marine tourism sector to protect marine biodiversity and ensure the long-term sustainability of the blue economy more effectively.

[1] Office of the Pacific Ocean Commissioner (2021). Blue Pacific Ocean Report: A report by the Pacific Ocean Commissioner to the Pacific Islands Forum Leaders.

[2] Northrop et al. 2022. 'Opportunities for Transforming Coastal and Marine Tourism: Towards Sustainability, Regeneration and Resilience'. Report. World Resources Institute, Washington D.C.

[3] Stephen Pratt & Wantanee Suntikul (2016) Can Marine Wildlife Tourism

Provide an "Edutaining" Experience?, Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing, 33:6, 867-884, DOI:10.1080/10548408.2015.1069778

[4] Pacific Islands Regional Marine Species Program 2022–2026 SPREP, 2022

1.2 Report Scope

This report serves as a critical starting point in the development of the Pacific Marine Tourism Guidelines. It provides a comprehensive overview of existing marine tourism practices, challenges, and gaps in knowledge about marine tourism activities in the Pacific. This baseline understanding allows for the formulation of guidelines that are relevant and designed to address the unique challenges and opportunities within the specific context of the Pacific.

The report has been informed by an extensive examination of global, regional, national policies and guidelines and regional consultation including an online survey of government and industry representatives across nineteen Pacific nations and a series of online workshops. It has also been informed by insights and discussion with the marine science community and species specialists.

1.3 Report Structure

- Chapter 1 (this chapter) of the report introduces the project background and objectives.
- Chapter 2 contains an overview of the Pacific marine environment, including its cultural, economic, tourism and biodiversity significance.
- Chapter 3 provides an overview of the significant marine species in the Pacific and the tourism activities that depend on them.
- Chapter 4 provides an overview of the ocean and tourism governance for the region.
- Chapter 5 provides a comparative analysis of international, regional and national guidelines and approaches for managing marine tourism activities.
- Chapter 6 summarises the insights derived from consultation with marine stakeholders on marine tourism.
- Chapter 7 translates these insights into recommendations for the proposed structure and content of the Pacific Marine Tourism Guidelines.

2 The Pacific Marine Environment

This chapter provides an overview of the cultural, biodiversity and economic significance of the Pacific Ocean and the biodiversity challenges it faces.

2.1 Cultural Significance

There is an inseparable link between Pacific peoples and the marine environment. The ocean unites and divides, connects and separates, sustains and threatens the very survival of the region; it influences every aspect of Pacific life, and has done so for millennia.[5]

The Pacific Ocean is home to some of the most majestic and iconic species in the world with many revered as guardians or totems for families and clans. The cultural role of a range of marine species spans across societies in the region, and they are recognised as a fundamental element of Pacific Island culture and heritage. For some Pacific Island nations, marine species are considered taboo[6]. Many Pacific Island cultures have legends, stories, and traditional uses of marine species that highlight the importance of these species to peoples' identities, ways of life, and heritage.[7]

In certain areas of the Pacific, extensive hunting of species like turtles and dugongs has occurred for both traditional and subsistence reasons, and more recently for commercial purposes. Marine species continue to be highly prized for their meat, fat, oil, medicinal properties (oil and bone), and in the creation of jewellery and ornaments (using turtle shells, and the skin and bones of dugongs and cetaceans).

Pacific Island communities depend largely on marine resources. At least 50% of Pacific islanders live within 1.5 km of the coast.[8] Marine resources are crucial for food, livelihoods, health, and water security. About 70% of the protein in the diet of Pacific islanders is from near-shore pelagic, reef, and lagoon fisheries.

The economic importance of coral reefs, beaches, seagrass beds, mangrove forests, and coastal estuarine ecosystems derives mostly from their linkage to other resources, especially coastal and marine tourism and fisheries. For example, the Pacific Islands are home to the world's largest remaining healthy stocks of tuna, with the region's proportion of the global tuna catch valued at around US$2.4 billion.[9]

2.2 Biodiversity Significance

Spanning an expansive 32 million km², the Pacific region boasts a higher diversity of marine species than any other oceanic region in the world, making it a hub for rich biodiversity across its islands, atolls, coastal areas, and marine environments. These ecosystems offer critical habitats for both resident and migratory species that are of global importance.

The region's ecological value is recognised worldwide, highlighted by its 12 UNESCO marine and coastal heritage sites. Among these, one site is listed as endangered, and two rank among the largest World Heritage sites globally. Additionally, the Pacific is home to 26 designated marine ecologically and biologically significant areas (EBSAs), highlighting its critical role in marine biodiversity conservation.[10]

2.2.1 Decline in marine biodiversity

There has been an alarming rate of decline in marine biodiversity: with 33% of reef forming corals and over 40% of amphibian species under threat.[11] A major concern is that habitat loss could become irreversible with many species and ecosystems threatened, all being driven by a range of development pressures. This decline in biodiversity around the Pacific has contributed to high levels of loss globally.

The marine environment is subject to compounding pressures from:

- overexploitation
- habitat loss and degradation
- climate change impacts including rising sea levels, warming ocean temperatures, ocean acidification, extreme weather events
- deep sea mining exploration
- pollution, particularly plastics
- nutrient loading

[5] Framework for a Pacific Oceanscape: a catalyst for implementation of ocean policy, Pratt C and Govan, H (2010)
[6] Ibid
[7] Pacific islands regional marine species programme 2022–2026. Apia, Samoa: SPREP, 2022.
[8] Second Quadrennial Pacific Sustainable Development Report 2022 / Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, 2022.
[9] Conservation International, 2024. Located at: https://www.conservation.org/places/pacific-ocean-and-islands
[11] Second Quadrennial Pacific Sustainable Development Report 2022 / Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, 2022

- sedimentation
- disease, invasive species and predator outbreaks
- coastal development
- marine noise and light pollution.[12]

Some of the most significant challenges to marine species' conservation in the region include:

- lack of data and information, including basic population parameters, migration routes, and long-term data sets
- lack of identification and quantification of the threats that marine species face
- absence and lack of ongoing and long-term research, survey, and monitoring programmes
- limited public awareness and education programs
- limited in-country capacity to provide leadership in marine species research and conservation management
- lack of resources, including access to sustained funding
- limited information exchange, linkages, and collaboration at national and regional levels
- lack of monitoring, control, and surveillance (MCS) capacity[13]
- lack of regulation, policies and guidelines associated with marine tourism activities.

2.3 Tourism Significance

Tourism is a crucial economic sector in the Pacific, contributing significantly to regional GDP and employment. It is the economic driver for most nations, creating jobs and income for communities and foreign exchange earnings. The sector tends to be characterised by a high share of micro, small, and medium enterprises, often individually or family-owned, notably in the accommodation, restaurant, tours and services segments.

Throughout the region, there are several opportunities that allow visitors to participate in marine tourism activities and actively engage with marine species. Whale watching and whale swimming has become an important tourist attraction for many countries and territories, in particular French Polynesia, New Caledonia, Niue, and Tonga. Diving with, and in some instances feeding sharks is also a popular experience in Fiji and Vanuatu. Diving with dugongs is also popular in Vanuatu and turtle tours are popular in the Cook Islands. These experiences are central to the tourism offering in these destinations, but they also have the potential to place further pressure on marine biodiversity and species that are already under threat.

A summary of most popular experiences is explained further in this chapter and illustrated in Figure 1.

2.3.1 Factors Impacting on Marine Tourism in the Pacific

Marine tourism businesses in the Pacific face a range challenges that are likely to significantly impact on their operations and sustainability over the next decade. The most pressing challenges are:

Demand for resources: Population and tourism growth is increasing demand for resources in the Pacific, which is impacting on the quality and diversity of its ecosystems. The Lowy Institute projects that the total population of the Pacific Islands is forecast to grow from 11 million to 17.7 million or more than 60 per cent by 2050, mostly in Vanuatu, Kiribati, Solomon Islands, and Papua New Guinea.

[13] Pacific islands regional marine species programme 2022–2026. Apia, Samoa: SPREP, 2022.

Climate related issues: Marine tourism businesses in the Pacific face several economic vulnerabilities related to climate change, which can significantly impact their operations and sustainability. Key issues are:

Damage to Marine Ecosystems: coral bleaching, ocean acidification, and loss of marine biodiversity, which are detrimental to attractions like coral reefs and marine wildlife. This can reduce the appeal of diving, snorkelling, and wildlife watching activities, directly impacting businesses reliant on these ecosystems.

Sea Level Rise: Rising sea levels can lead to the loss of beaches and coastal infrastructure, crucial for beach tourism. Resorts, hotels, and other facilities near coastlines may face increased risks of flooding and erosion, necessitating expensive protective measures or relocation.

Changing Weather Patterns: Increased frequency and severity of storms, hurricanes, and other extreme weather events can disrupt tourism activities. The uncertainty and perceived risks associated with travel to affected areas can lead to a decline in tourist arrivals.

Market Perception and Demand Shifts: Increased awareness of climate change can lead to shifts in tourist preferences, with a growing demand for sustainable and environmentally friendly tourism options. Businesses slow to adapt may lose market share.

For example Vava'u in Tonga is especially dependent on nature-based tourism activities such as swimming with whales. In recent years, climate impacts have reduced the number of seasonal visitors, significantly reducing this source of tourism revenue. Some sites, such as Tongatapu and Ha'apai, are already experiencing economic losses due to climate impacts on the ecosystem, coastal landforms, and vegetation, with estimated significant revenue loss. Concerning coastal ecosystems, the Ha'apai and Vava'u sites face major consequences due to damages to the ecosystem health. Corals and some species of flora and fauna that live only in the coastal zone are a key driver for visitation, which means that ecosystem damage such as dying corals will likely have a detrimental impact on overall tourism growth and related development in the longer term.

2.4 Marine science and the tourism industry

Modern ocean sciences and traditional knowledge are essential to inform how the region responds to escalating threats from climate change and other pressures on the ocean environment and its iconic marine species.

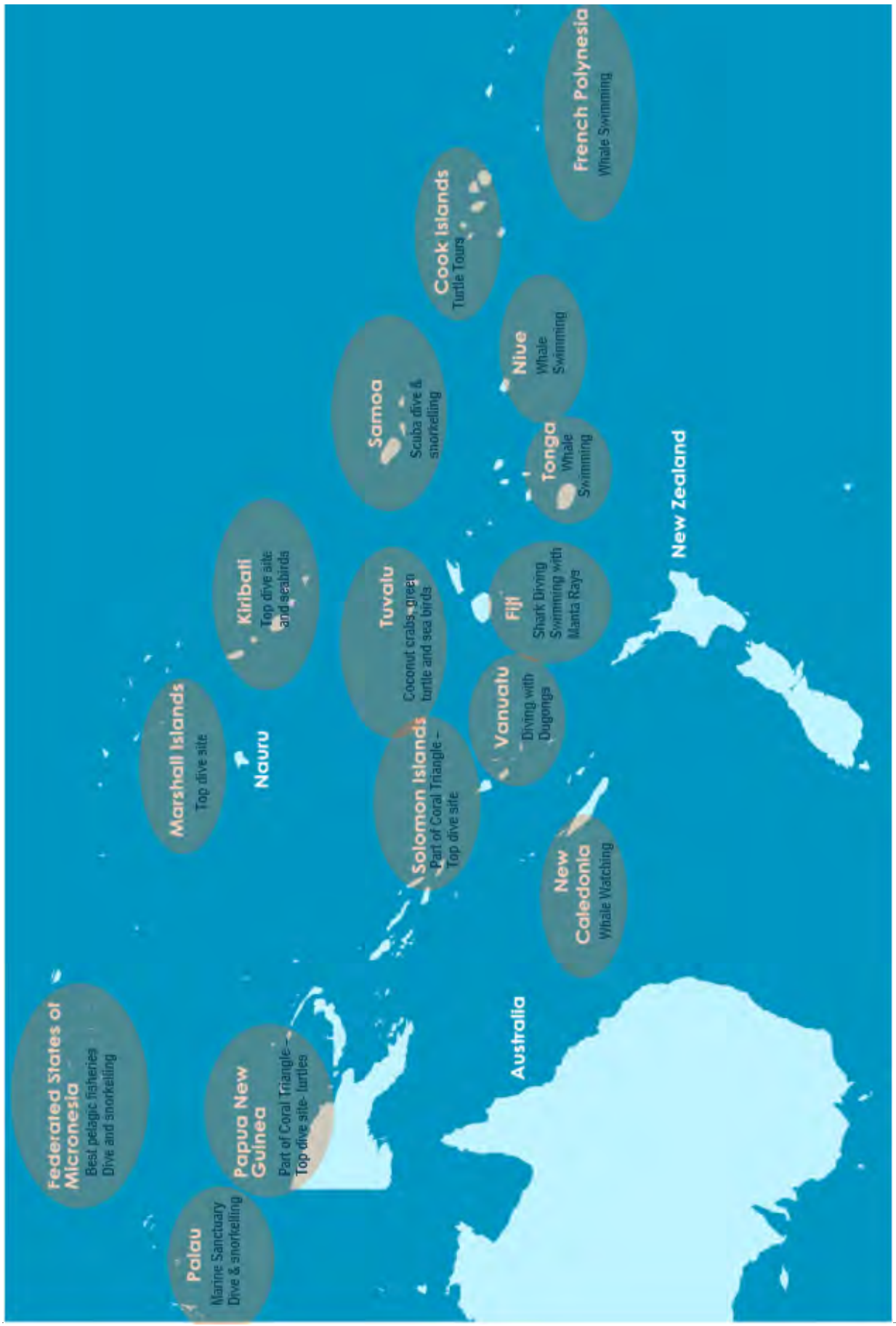
The variability and lack of information available on marine tourism and industry practices has hindered the development of informed decision making and improvement in sustainable marine tourism practices.

Tourism operators are often not required or incentivised to record information on marine species distribution, abundance, and behaviour of species as part of their tourism activities. Whilst there are examples where tourism operators do contribute to marine species monitoring through recording wildlife sightings and underwater surveys, these programs, while valuable, are ad hoc and are not co-ordinated. The information recorded is not centralised or used to inform marine conservation or improve marine tourism operations.

As tourism continues to expand in the region and amid escalating pressures on the ocean and its biodiversity, the need for evidence-based decision-making is increasingly apparent.

Robust research can provide crucial insights into the ecological impacts of various marine tourism activities including how human interactions with marine wildlife impact their behaviour, population dynamics, and ecosystem health. This information can support policymakers to develop effective responses to mitigate negative impacts, promote sustainable practices and balance conservation efforts with the economic interests of the marine tourism industry, ensuring the long-term viability of both biodiversity and tourism enterprises.

Figure 1. Marine Tourism Hotspots in the Pacific



3 Marine Species and Tourism in the Pacific

This chapter provides an overview of the significant marine species in the Pacific and the tourism activities that depend on them.

The Pacific Ocean provides habitat for a wide array of significant marine life, including various species of cetaceans (whales and dolphins), sirenians (dugongs), testudines (marine turtles), elasmobranchs (sharks and rays), and numerous seabirds. Coral reefs also have significant biodiversity values and provide the main attraction for most marine tourism activities.

Species such as dugongs, turtles, whales, dolphins, sharks, rays, seabirds, and other large marine animals are crucial for the health and functioning of both coastal and oceanic environments. Each species has a role in the complex ecosystem where they dwell. The removal of or stress upon one or several species can have dramatic impacts on entire ecosystems, which in turn impacts on humans.

Many of these species are long-lived and have low reproductive rates, making them particularly susceptible to population declines from human-caused mortality or environmental pressures affecting their reproduction.

3.1 Coral reefs

There are no other places in the world where coral reefs are so prevalent and have flourished and evolved, as they have in parts of the Pacific. The region is home to approximately 25% of the world's corals. They nourish and stabilise shorelines, provide income through tourism and fishing, are a vital source of protein for many people and are part of the nations' cultural identity. The region's coral reefs not only benefit the Pacific but also the world, in terms of their contribution to biodiversity, habitat and the fishing industry.[14]

3.2 Whales and Dolphins

Whales and dolphins (cetaceans) evolved from land mammals approximately 50 million years ago. While thoroughly adapted to sea life, they retain some traces of their evolutionary past. Cetaceans bear live young and feed them milk, investing heavily in the upbringing and development of each offspring. Cetaceans live long, mature late, reproduce slowly and engage in complex social relationships. They are capable of advanced activities including echolocation and long-distance communication, which provide them with sophisticated tools to perceive and understand their environment. A complex respiratory system allows them to spend long stretches under water, but they must surface regularly to breath air.

The spectacular leaps of whales and dolphins above the water's surface, as well as the sounds some species use to communicate and function underwater, fascinate humans. In many communities, there are significant cultural connections between cetaceans and humans.

The Pacific Islands region provides permanent habitat, breeding grounds and a migration corridor to more than 30 different species of cetaceans ranging from large, migratory baleen whales such as blue whales and fin whales – to small estuarine-associated dolphins. Species occurring in the Pacific vary greatly in life history characteristics, ecology, biology and habitat range. For most of the recorded species, there is limited information available for important characteristics such as abundance, birth rates, potential biological removal, level of residency or site fidelity, genetic distinctiveness, or critical habitat.

Cetacean migration routes pass through the coastal waters of various countries and territories as well as the high seas. During the last century, many larger whale species became endangered due to commercial whaling. Although protected by an international moratorium on whaling, most of these species that frequent the Pacific Islands region remain endangered or vulnerable.

To provide an international framework for coordinated conservation efforts throughout the region, a *Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for the Conservation of Cetaceans and their Habitats in the Pacific Islands Region* was launched in 2006 under the auspices of the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS), in collaboration with the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP). The MOU includes plans to protect and conserve Pacific cetaceans and their habitats, including their migratory corridors to bring coherence to ongoing cetacean conservation activities in the Pacific Islands Region.

Pressures

The survival of many cetacean populations that frequent the waters of the Pacific Islands region, particularly those that have been severely depleted, can be affected by interactions with fisheries, hunting, pollution, collisions with boats, noise, habitat degradation, climate change, disruption of food chains and irresponsible tourism.

Whale and dolphin watching tours provide platforms for research, conservation, and environmental education,

[14] Toki, Beth and Davies Peter. 2021 Pacific Coral Reef Action Plan 2021–2030. Secretariat of the Pacific Environmental Programme.

but they can also lead to disturbance, habitat displacement and even physical injury to cetaceans when poorly managed. When poorly managed, whale and dolphin watching tourism in all its forms has been shown to negatively impact cetaceans, compromising welfare, and potentially even causing declines in populations, with likely implications for the health of associated marine ecosystems.

Risks to whales and dolphins may include physical damage from collisions with vessels and people and ecological impacts caused by changes in normal behaviour of the animals. By contrast, well managed whale and dolphin watching tours put the welfare and conservation of the species they wish to encounter first and have the potential to contribute to improved species conservation.

Swimming with whales or dolphins may place both people and animals at risk. Risks to humans may include injury and possible death from interactions with large, wild animals. Studies show that common, observable responses to interactions include avoidance behaviours and the interruption of critical activities, especially those of mother-calf pairs whose surface resting, travelling and nurturing activity may be impacted.

Although there is limited evidence, it appears that in-water activities may generate more disturbance than boat-based whale and dolphin watching, possibly due to closer vessel approaches and encounters which involve intrusive and not compliant behaviour with loud and splashing swimmers.

Whale and Dolphin Tourism in the Pacific

French Polynesia: Observation of cetaceans by tourist operators began in 1990 on Moorea and has now become a major commercial activity in French Polynesia. This activity takes place on the islands of Tahiti and Moorea (Society archipelago), Rurutu (Austral archipelago), and Rangiroa (Tuamotu archipelago). Visitors can swim with the whales on group tours with a certified guide, with a range of day tours. Tours that offer opportunities to swim with dolphins are also available.

There are more than forty commercial organisations offering this activity on a regular or occasional basis.

Commercial companies are required by law to obtain a dolphin and whale-watching permit, with conditions to ensure they respect the relevant legislation concerning the approach and observation of the animals. In 2002, to protect the cetaceans visiting the Polynesian territorial waters, a Sanctuary for Cetaceans was established. In this 5.5 million[2] km wide area, cetaceans are protected, and all tourism operators are required to seek authorisation and to comply with a number of rules for the approach and observation of cetaceans at sea.[15]

Niue: Humpback whales migrate every year from Antarctic waters and travel to the warm waters of Niue to give birth, feed and raise the newborn calves. The whales start arriving around June and then normally depart for the return trip to Antarctica around the beginning of October. Whale tours are offered by up to three operators and are only available between mid-July and September.[16]

Cook Islands: In Rarotonga, and across the Cook Islands, tourists can engage in whale watching and swimming through various tours offered by experienced operators. and Aitutaki based operators - swimming with the Humpbacks is much more established over in Aitutaki, whereas in Rarotonga it tends to be just whale watching.

New Caledonia: Between July and September each year, humpback whales enter the warm waters of New Caledonia to reproduce and give birth. Visitors can take a trip aboard a sailing catamaran or a motor boat to observe them in the southern lagoon of New Caledonia – one of the largest marine reserves in the world.[17]

Tonga: The shallow and warm waters of the Kingdom of Tonga provide protected waters for whales to give birth to their young between June to November. Vava'u is a significant breeding ground for Oceania humpback whales, attracting tourists for whale-watching and swimming-with-whales activities, particularly targeting mother-calf pairs.

Whale watching tourism started in 1994 with two operators who took tourists to see, and sometimes swim with humpback whales. By 2008, this number had increased to 14 operators, involving over 3,000 individual tourists in whale watching tours each year[2] with most tourists engaging in multiple whale watching tours during a single visit – an average of three tours per visit.

The industry was estimated to generate a combined direct and indirect income of just over 2 million USD for Tonga in 2008. Today there are around 40 licensed whale watching vessels in Tonga.[18] Of these, roughly 20% are completely Tongan owned, but many included foreign managers or owners. Most operators are on the island of Vava'u which has an international airport and is the centre of whale watch tourism, but a smaller

[15] www.temanaotemoana.org/observation-networks/marine-mamals-observation-network/

[16] niuepocketguide.com/the-guide-to-swimming-with-whales-in-niue/

[17] www.newcaledonia.travel/nz/whale-watching-caledonie-charter

[18] https://www.rnz.co.nz/international/pacific-news/410468/tonga-curtails-licensing-for-whale-watching-tour-operators

number of operators offer tours from Tongatapu, 'Eua and Ha'apai.

While various dolphin species can also be observed during whale watching tours, commercial whale watching in Tonga focuses almost exclusively on one species and is limited to the months that humpback whales are present in their tropical breeding grounds.

Research on Tourism Impacts

The ecological effects of whale and dolphin watching are summarised by the international Whale Commission[19] who divide the potential impacts of whale watching into short-term, long-term, and non-visible effects:

Humpback Whales

A study on the behavioural responses of humpback whales to whale-based tourism activities in Vava'u, Kingdom of Tonga was undertaken in the 2016 and 2017 whale breeding seasons[20]. The study found that the presence of boats and swimmers affected the whales' behaviours, particularly increasing dive times and the proportion of time spent diving for mother-calf pairs. These findings suggest that swim-with-whale activities, especially targeting mother-calf pairs, might negatively affect the whales.

The study also revealed low compliance with existing regulations regarding whale-watching and swimming activities. For example, the stipulated rest periods between interactions were often not respected, potentially increasing the stress on the whale population in this important breeding and calving ground.

The researchers suggest several management actions, including improving compliance with regulations, reducing the number of swim-with-whales licenses, and introducing mandatory break times during peak interaction periods. Further information is available at https://wwhandbook.iwc.int/en/case-studies/tonga

Research on tourists' motives for participating in dolphin watching and the impact of the dolphin watching experience on tourists'[21] highlighted that:

- tourists primarily participate in dolphin watching for the experience of seeing dolphins and the outdoor recreational opportunities, rather than for educational purposes.
- despite the low initial motivation for education, tourists express a high level of interest in learning about dolphin conservation and behaviour.
- the dolphin watching experience leads to a moderate increase in tourists' knowledge about dolphins and marine conservation.
- There is significant satisfaction among tourists with the dolphin watching experience, indicating its success as an entertaining activity.
- A positive correlation was found between learning from the experience and tourists' intended pro-environmental behaviour, suggesting that increased knowledge can lead to a higher likelihood of engaging in conservation efforts.

The research highlights the important role of marine tourism operators in providing information to tourists about marine species and ways to help their conservation.

3.2.1 Early indicators of disturbance

Cetaceans may be disturbed by the presence of people, vessels or aircrafts. Research indicates that whales respond to approaches and interactions with both horizontal (i.e., increased swim speeds, erratic movements, heading away from the vessel and vertical avoidance (i.e., altered dive patterns. Whale and dolphin watching activities can potentially cause long term disturbance to cetacean populations, which include:

- displacement from important habitat breeding areas (e.g. resting feeding breeding and calving areas)
- long term stress
- injury
- reduced breeding success and
- increased mortality

Populations and individual cetaceans may react differently depending on the species their age, sex and if accompanied by a calf.

[19] https://wwhandbook.iwc.int/en/responsible-management/benefits-and-impacts-of-whale-watching

[20] Fiori L, Martinez E, Orams MB, Bollard B (2019) Effects of whale-based tourism in Vava'u, Kingdom of Tonga: Behavioural responses of humpback whales to vessel and swimming tourism activities. PLoS ONE 14(7): e0219364. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0219364

[21] Stephen Pratt & Wantanee Suntikul (2016) Can Marine Wildlife Tourism Provide an "Edutaining" Experience?, Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing, 33:6, 867-884, DOI: 10.1080/10548408.2015.1069778

The following behaviours may indicate that a whale or dolphin is disturbed by tourism operations[22]:

- **Avoidance tactics:** change in heading or swim pattern to move away from the source of disturbance, hasty/prolonged dives, change in diving and breathing intervals, changes in group size and cohesion.
- **Change in surface activity:** tail slaps, head slapping, trumpet blows, aggressive and agonistic behaviour, e.g. pectoral slapping.
- **Change in behavioural state:** such as interruption of feeding, resting and nursing, separation of mother-calf pairs, change in acoustic behaviour, socialising.

For dolphins, the following signals may indicate aggressive behaviour:

  - head slapping flipper slapping breaching lob-tailing
  - jaw clapping
  - open jaw
  - tail slapping
  - fast directional swimming towards swimmers
  - dolphin creates an 'S' shaped posture with its body.

For whales the following signals may indicate disturbance or avoidance behaviour:

  - changes in swimming speed and direction, either horizontally or vertically (to avoid a boat or swimmers)
  - changes in breathing/diving patterns
  - stopping or changing activity patterns
  - changes in group size or cohesion
  - changes in acoustic behaviour
  - tail or flipper slapping and trumpet blows
  - increased time spent diving compared to time spent at the surface and
  - mothers shielding their young.

3.3 Dugongs

The Dugong (Dugong dugon), or sea cow, is the only herbivorous marine mammal. They live in over 40 different countries throughout tropical and subtropical coastal waters. Their home ranges in the Pacific Islands Region include the waters off Palau, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and New Caledonia. They stay close to the coast and live in places where seagrass grows, eating up to 40kg a day. Dugongs help maintain seagrass habitats also important for other species such as marine turtles and play an important role in the culture of many coastal communities.

Dugongs are slow growing and can live for a long time. They can grow up to three metres in length and weigh up to 500 kilograms. A dugong will have its first calf between 6-18 years old. Dugongs are pregnant for 14 months and give birth to live young. They usually only have one calf at a time which is breast-fed for 18 months before it can eat seagrass. A dugong will have a calf every 3-7 years under ideal conditions.

Dugongs have traditionally been hunted in Vanuatu for their meat and oil, and other parts have been known to be used in handicrafts. However, in some areas Dugongs are protected by customary seasonal restrictions known as "tabu", which aim to ensure the sustainability of natural resources. In the late 1980s dugongs were thought to be hunted mainly in southeast Malakula, northern Epi and parts of Efate, but dugong meat was not considered to be a major component of the local diet.

Dugongs have a priority for conservation action through their listing in the respective appendices of the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS) and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES).

[22] https://wwhandbook.iwc.int/en/responsible-management/benefits-and-impacts-of-whale-watching

The *Memorandum of Understanding on the Conservation and Management of Dugongs and their Habitats* throughout their Range (Dugong MOU) is an agreement under the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species. It aims to promote internationally coordinated actions to ensure the long-term survival of dugongs and their seagrass habitats throughout their range. Signatories to the Dugong MOU include Palau, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Timor-Leste and Vanuatu. National laws protect dugongs in the Pacific range states, but enforcement is a challenge.

3.3.1 Pressures

Dugongs are classified as "vulnerable to extinction" on the International Union for Conservation of Nature's (IUCN) Red List of Threatened Species, indicating that there is high-risk of extinction in the wild in the medium-term future. Dugongs are known to migrate and disperse over vast distances; as such, their survival is dependent on their conservation and management over a wide area and in a wide range of marine and coastal habitats.

Some of the key threats to dugongs include:

- Habitat degradation: coastal development, pollution, and habitat destruction from activities like dredging can disrupt seagrass beds, which are the primary food source for Dugongs.
- Bycatch: Dugongs can become entangled in fishing gear such as nets and traps, leading to injury or death.
- Boat Strikes: Dugongs are often struck by boats and watercraft, especially in areas with high marine traffic. This can result in injuries or fatalities.
- Overfishing: Overfishing of the seagrass habitats can deplete the Dugong's food source, leading to starvation and malnutrition.
- Climate Change: Climate-related impacts such as sea level rise, ocean acidification, and changes in water temperature can affect the availability and quality of seagrass habitats.

Marine tourism activities can impact dugongs in the following ways:

- Boat Traffic: Increased boat traffic can lead to higher risks of collisions with dugongs.
- Noise Pollution: Boat engines and other tourist activities can create underwater noise pollution, which can disrupt dugong communication, feeding, and breeding behaviours.
- Anchor Damage: Improper anchoring practices by tourist vessels can damage seagrass beds, which are critical habitats for dugongs.
- Tourist Interaction: Unregulated tourist interaction, such as feeding or approaching dugongs, can disturb their natural behaviours and cause stress.

Dugong Tourism in the Pacific

Vanuatu is famous for dugong encounters. Many of the islands are surrounded by large seagrass beds, creating ideal dugong habitat. Viewing is possible in many locations and dugongs have a reputation of being 'friendly' and not afraid of people.

Timor Leste and Palau also offer opportunities for diving with Dugongs.

3.3.2 Early indicators of disturbance

Indicators of disturbance include:

- avoidance tactics: displacement from the source of disturbance, changes in direction or swim pattern, swimming at maximum speed, swimming away from disturbance,
- change in surface activity - shorter surface intervals.
- sudden change of activity - abrupt dives, dives with violent fluke slaps or swimming actively to deeper areas.
- change in behavioural state: interruption of resting, feeding, and nursing.

3.4 Marine Turtles

Marine turtles are among the oldest vertebrate life forms on Earth. Globally distributed and highly migratory, marine turtles spend most of their lives in coastal waters and the open ocean, although little is known about their lives in this environment.

Geographically, a single marine turtle will pass through numerous habitats on land and at sea, cross the borders of several countries, and swim through international waters during its life. Marine turtles are slow growing and take decades to reach sexual maturity. Only female turtles emerge to lay eggs – to do this, they return to the region where they were born to lay their eggs, using the same nesting area year after year. If a nesting colony is destroyed, the turtles may never return.

Female turtles lay 50 to 130 eggs per nest, dug into sandy beaches. Some turtles will lay multiple nests in a single nesting season. After a period of 45 to 65 days, depending on the species, turtle hatchlings crawl to the sea and spend much of their life cycle in the open ocean. Low survival rates in the first life stages and their long and varied life journey guarantee that marine turtles will face numerous threats during their life cycle. [23]

There are five key international conventions that address sea turtles and their nesting, migratory and feeding habitats. These are the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) 1992; the Bonn or CMS Convention (Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals) 1979; the World Heritage Convention (Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage) 1972; CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora) 1973; and the Ramsar Convention (Convention on Wetlands of International Importance) 1971. Many Pacific nations are signatories to some or all of these conventions.

The Pacific Ocean is home to six species of the world's seven sea turtle species. The Green; the Hawksbill; the Loggerhead; the Leatherback, the Olive Ridley; and the Australian endemic Flatback. The Green and the Hawksbill are the two most common turtles in the Pacific.

Based on tagging data, turtles found in Vanuatu have been documented using habitat in the waters of the following Pacific nations [24]:

- American Samoa
- Cook Islands
- Fiji
- French Polynesia
- New Caledonia
- Niue
- Papua New Guinea
- Samoa
- Tonga.

Pressures

Each of the world's seven marine turtle species have declined dramatically in the last several hundred years.

The Hawksbill is critically endangered globally. The Green turtle is globally endangered and in many parts of the Pacific they are extremely fragile and likely highly endangered. The Leatherback, Loggerhead and Olive Ridley species are all listed as vulnerable on the 2020 IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. [25]

Sea turtles face different pressures at different levels in different places. Key threats to sea turtles in the Pacific region include unsustainable human consumption, poaching of eggs by humans and animals, and accidental capture in fisheries. Turtles are most vulnerable to human impact during the nearshore phase of their nesting migration and beach nesting activity. Turtle nesting is also vulnerable to land-use change, given the requirement for space and appropriate sand to dig a nest, over the decades between a given turtle's hatching and return to nest.

[23] Hickey F., Aromalo D. and Straza T. 2023. A review of the management and conservation of sea turtles in Vanuatu. Apia, Samoa: Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme, Apia, Samoa. 138 pp

[24] Ibid

[25] Hickey F., Aromalo D. and Straza T. 2023. A review of the management and conservation of sea turtles in Vanuatu. Apia, Samoa: Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme, Apia, Samoa. 138 pp

Threats to sea turtles also include:

- by-catch in both pelagic and coastal fisheries
- entanglement and ingestion of sea debris including fishing gear
- boat collision
- harvesting of adults, eggs and hatchlings (legal traditional and illegal take).
- disturbance by people or boat traffic
- predation of nests by animals such as pigs and dogs
- climate change causing changes in sea temperature, currents and oceanographic processes that can affect turtles
- increasing temperatures of the nests producing more females than males.
- sea-level rise resulting in loss of nesting beach habitat
- nests washed out during storms and tropical cyclones
- degradation of nesting habitat from construction and development, beach furniture and structures, and sand extraction
- habitat degradation of foraging sites
- light pollution
- disease
- chemical and plastic pollution.

Growing concern about the plight of Pacific marine turtles has led to concerted conservation efforts, with several countries establishing turtle sanctuaries (American Samoa, Samoa, New Caledonia, and French Polynesia).[26]

Ongoing efforts include initiatives to strengthen community management and enhance local turtle population monitoring. NGOs are also actively working on turtle conservation within the region; for instance, the World Wildlife Fund for Nature (WWF) is working to reduce hawksbill turtle harvest and trade across the Coral Triangle, working intensively in Malaysia; WWF is also active in satellite tagging projects and advocacy for eliminating turtle by-catch.[27]

Turtle Tourism in the Pacific

Seeing turtles is a highly desired experience for in Cook Islands, Vanuatu, Fiji, Papua New Guinea and many other Pacific nations. Tourism operators' market both chance encounters and the opportunity to swim with turtles, which involves holding onto or touching the turtles. Interactions at captive turtle facilities also allow handling of hatchlings, juveniles and adult sea turtles.

Turtle tourism, when conducted responsibly, can contribute to the local economy and support conservation efforts by raising awareness and generating funding for turtle protection programs.

The most popular conservation activities include head-starting programs, where turtles are raised for a time before being released, and tag-and-release programs, where turtles are tagged for tracking and then let go. While relocating nests and establishing hatcheries in vulnerable areas are seen as last-resort measures supported by conservationists to ensure species survival, with strict handling guidelines, headstarting lacks evidence of benefiting sea turtle populations and is deemed problematic by many.

Currently, there are no turtle related wildlife activity minimum standards or guidelines in place. However, Vanuatu is currently developing a guideline and Cook Islands has an MOU in place for its operators.

COOK ISLANDS

Swimming with turtles has become the most poular experience on Rarotonga, holding immense appeal for visitors. Tours typically last around two hours and are led by guides who will take visitors to the best spots for turtle sightings and may also see a variety of other marine life, including rays, fish and coral reefs.

Touching turtles is prohibited and visitors are encouraged to approach them with respect and caution, and to maintain a safe distance to avoid disturbing them and their natural habitat. Safety briefings are conducted on each tour and an acknowledgement of risk form is completed by all guests.

VANUATU

Many tourism businesses in Vanuatu, both tour operators and accommodation providers, use the chance of seeing a turtle on their tour or while at their accommodation, in their promotions and marketing. They might be kept in man-made environments or caught and then quickly released back into the wild. Despite laws against it and the ease of seeing turtles in

[26] I Hickey F., Aromalo D. and Straza T. 2023. A review of the management and conservation of sea turtles in Vanuatu. Apia, Samoa: Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme, Apia, Samoa. 138 pp

[27] Ibid

the wild, many tour operators in Vanuatu keep turtles captive for tourist attractions. Tourists often interact with these turtles, including handling, swimming together, or even "riding" them. Some operators run head-starting programs, buying hatchlings, raising them for about a year, and then releasing them into the ocean, funded by tourists sponsoring the release.[28]

In a questionnaire survey conducted by the Vanuatu Environmental Science Society (VESS) in 2018 under the Dugong and Seagrass Conservation Project[29] 68.2% of respondents mentioned baiting turtles with food to attract them, 38% reported tourists could touch the turtles, and 38% also indicated tourists could enter the water with them.[30]

Despite lacking permits from fisheries authorities, these businesses still receive tourism permits, contradicting Vanuatu's laws and conservation standards.[31,32]

3.4.1 Research on Tourism Impacts

Despite current practices interacting with wildlife, such as touching and feeding, is generally discouraged due to risks to both the animals and humans, including disease transmission. Human contact with turtles may bring a range of risks, largely unquantified. For instance, there are issues of water contamination from sunscreens and other cosmetics and personal-care products used by people who may place their hands/arms on or enter the water with the turtles.

There is also concern about endorsing headstarting, acknowledging its shortcomings in contributing to conservation efforts.[33]

The number of small, motorised craft for transport, pleasure and fishing has increased across many Pacific Islands in the past decade, potentially leading to increased boat strikes and/or disruptions to turtle foraging areas.[34]

3.4.2 Early indicators of disturbance

Marine tourism activities can impact turtles in the following ways:

- injuries or death due to collision with boats
- changes in distribution and habitat use
- changes in behaviour due to harassment in their critical feeding and resting areas
- destruction of feeding and resting habitats

Early indicators of disturbance include:

  – change in behavioural state: interruption of feeding, resting and breathing
  – avoidance tactics: swimming away, swimming actively towards deeper areas, keeping away, surfacing, fast diving and
  – change in surface activity: shorter breathing intervals.

3.5 Sharks and Rays

Sharks and rays belong to the Elasmobranch class, which are fish that have skeletons made from soft cartilage rather than bone. They are one of the oldest and most ecologically diverse vertebrate group that inhabits the ocean. They play a key role in the balance and productivity of marine ecosystems, often occupying top positions in food chains. Sharks and rays connect marine communities and habitats and increase biodiversity.

Around 1,250 known species of sharks and rays are found today in all oceans and habitats — freshwater, coastal, estuarine, pelagic, and deep water. The IUCN has assessed 1200 of these and at least 189 of these species have been recorded within the Pacific islands' region.

Oceanic sharks and rays are important for food, human livelihoods, tourism and their ecological roles. They also play an important part in the cultures, beliefs and traditions of the Pacific people. These species are not only featured in songs, legends and myths, they are also considered sacred and taboo in many of the Pacific

[28] Marine Tourism Guidelines Online Workshop, Vanuatu 20 March 2024

[29] The Vanuatu Environmental Science Society, Dugong and Seagrass Conservation Project, https://www.dugongconservation.org/

[30] Ibid

[31] Ibid

[32] Pers Comms, Dr Christina Shaw, March 19 2024.

[33] Mortimer, J.A. (1999). Reducing threats to eggs and hatchlings: hatcheries. In K. L., Eckert, K. A. Bjorndal, F. A. Abreu-Grobois, and M. Donnelly (Eds). Research and Management Techniques for the Conservation of Sea Turtles. IUCN/SSC Marine Turtle Specialist Group Publication No.4, p 175-178

[34] Pilcher N.J. (2021). Review of the status if sea turtles in the Pacific Ocean 2021. Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme, Apia, Samoa, 136pp

Islands. Sharks and rays are also used to identify or symbolise different families and clans in a community.

Seven years of sighting records of Sharks, Rays, and Turtles across Fiji presents comprehensive findings from 15 month-long counts conducted over 7.5 years, involving 34 participating dive operators and accumulating 40,331 observations from 7,331 dives across various regions of Fiji.[35]

Research on ray diversity in Fijian waters identified 19 batoid species across seven families in Fiji, using a combination of literature review, participatory science programs, and eDNA metabarcoding[36]. The study noted that approximately 68% of the documented species face an elevated risk of extinction according to the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List criteria.

Many Pacific countries are Parties to international conventions and measures to protect sharks and rays through regional cooperation. International and regional protections for sharks and rays include multilateral fisheries and trade agreements such as the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), the Convention on Migratory Species of Wild Animals which aims to conserve migratory species throughout their range, and the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations' International Plan of Action for the Conservation and Management of Sharks (IPOA–Sharks), which is a voluntary international instrument developed for member nations to take positive action to ensure the conservation and management of sharks, and their long-term sustainable use.

Regional tuna management bodies including the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) also recognise the ecological and cultural significance of sharks and rays in the Pacific Ocean and have developed conservation and management measures for sharks to be implemented throughout the region.

Memorandum of Understanding on the Conservation of Migratory Sharks (Sharks MOU) is the first global instrument for the conservation of migratory species of sharks and rays. The MOU is a legally non-binding international instrument. It aims to achieve and maintain a favourable conservation status for migratory sharks based on the best available scientific information and considering the socio-economic value of these species for the people in various countries. Signatories to the Sharks MOU from the Pacific region include: Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Nauru, Niue, Palau, PNG, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Timor Leste, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu.

Because sharks and rays frequently cross Pacific jurisdictions, a number of countries have established sanctuaries that provide a haven for sharks and rays within a country's exclusive economic zone (EEZ) including, French Polynesia, Kiribati, New Caledonia, Palau, Republic of Marshall Islands, Samoa, Federated States of Micronesia and the Cook Islands.

3.5.1 Pressures

Many shark and ray species are facing extinction due to overfishing and bycatch, ocean pollution, climate change, tourism, and severe loss of habitat. Nearly all shark and ray species recorded in the Pacific have been assessed by IUCN, with approximately half listed as threatened (Vulnerable, Endangered, Critically Endangered) or Near Threatened.[37]

The biological characteristics of sharks and rays make them especially vulnerable to human activities. Because they grow slowly, are late to mature, and produce few young, they are especially vulnerable to overfishing and slow to recover from depletion. As an example, Manta Rays typically have just a single pup every 4–5 years, so reduced survival of these baby rays can quickly lead to a population crash.

Overfishing - Overfishing, where fish are removed from a population faster than they can replace themselves through reproduction, has already led to the probable global extinction of three shark and ray species. Several more are now extinct through most of their historical range. All the sharks and rays listed on the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS) are there primarily because they are, or have been, overfished.[38]

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[35] Community-driven shark monitoring for informed decision making: a case study from Fiji C. A. Ward-Paige, H. Sykes, G. J. Osgood and J. Brunnschweiler Pacific Conservation Biology [Published 11 October 2022].doi:10.1071/PC2200

[36] Glaus, K.; Gordon, L.; Vierus, T.; Marosi, N.D.; Sykes, H.Rays in the Shadows: Batoid Diversity, Occurrence, and Conservation Status in Fiji. Biology 2024, 13, 73. https://doi.org/10.3390/biology13020073

[37] Machernis, Abigail, J.R. Powell, L.K. Engleby, and T.R. Spradlin, 2018. An Updated Literature Review Examining the Impacts of Tourism on Marine Mammals over the Last Fifteen Years (2000-2015) to Inform Research and Management Programs. U.S. Dept. of Commerce, NOAA. NOAA Technical Memorandum NMFS-SER-7: 66 p.

[38] Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species Guidelines for Recreational In-Water Interactions With Marine Wildlife UNEP/CMS/Cop14/Doc.27.3.1/Annex 2

Environmental pollution - Sharks and rays are highly susceptible to environmental pollution. Persistent organic pollutants, heavy metals, crude oil, and marine debris (such as plastic waste, and lost or discarded fishing gear) are the most common ocean pollutants. Pollutants typically bioaccumulate, where the amount in the body grows faster than the ability to excrete it and this is compounded by ingesting the pollutants within prey species too. These pollutants can be passed on to people whose diets include sharks and rays as a key source of protein.

Climate change - The ocean is presently absorbing an estimated 90% of the heat trapped in the earth's atmosphere, causing a clear rise in surface temperatures. Ocean temperature has a direct effect on physiological and metabolic functions in sharks, including digestion, growth, and reproduction, although lack of data on sharks and rays makes it difficult to project how they will respond to rising ocean temperatures.

Habitat degradation and loss -. Many sharks and rays rely on mangroves and shallow bays as nurseries for their pups. These environments provide food sources and refuge from larger hunters. Mangrove forests have been increasingly cleared to make way for coastal development and siltation from degraded rivers and dredging chokes shallow seagrass beds. Human pressures on coral reefs across the world are reducing both the quantity and quality of habitat available, even to widespread reef shark species, leading to the decline and fragmentation of their populations.[39]

Tourism - Shark and ray encounters are one of the fastest-growing sectors in the wildlife tourism industry. Many sharks and rays are naturally cautious around the unfamiliar setting of divers and boats. In some instances, to ensure reliable viewing, operators will feed or otherwise attract them to the boat or dive site, or alternatively take the tourists to swim or dive with them at feeding areas, cleaning stations, or other places that they visit regularly. Provisioning of sharks and rays (using food or another attractant to lure them to a site) is highly controversial as it has the potential to significantly alter animal behaviour, for example residency time and physiology, and can affect their habitat and human safety**.** Feeding can create dependency.

Shark & Ray Tourism in the Pacific

French Polynesia: The islands of Tahiti, Bora Bora, and Rangiroa offer snorkelling and diving with blacktip reef sharks, lemon sharks, and occasionally nurse sharks. Moorea is particularly famous for its stingray encounters, where you can swim with and feed the friendly rays in shallow waters.

Palau: As a shark sanctuary, Palau offers dives with grey reef sharks, whitetip sharks, and on rare occasions, bull sharks.

Cook Islands: Muri Lagoon in Rarotonga is a popular place for swimming with both stingrays and reef sharks in shallow, clear waters.

Fiji: Beqa Lagoon is famous for its shark dives, offering encounters with bull sharks, tiger sharks, and sometimes even the rare hammerhead shark. The Yasawa Islands offer opportunities to swim with manta rays, especially between May and October during their migration season.

Guided shark diving excursions typically take place in areas known for high shark activity, such as coral reefs and underwater channels. The Shark Reef Marine Reserve (SRMR) is home to 8 different species of sharks. Shark Reef was officially designated Fiji's first National Marine Park in 2014 and Beqa Adventure Divers (BAD) given stewardship for its day-to-day management. BAD collaborate with the Fiji Department of Fisheries and Galoa village, the traditional owners of the reef. The village gave up their rights to fish in exchange for an 'SRMR Levy' which every diver pays when they dive the Reserve. [40]

Poaching poses the biggest threat to the Reserve so BAD conducts poaching patrols with the support of the Ministry of Fisheries to protect the area from illegal fishing activities.[41]The Reserve has benefitted with increases in both abundance of fish and the variety fish species.

Fiji is also known for the famous "Manta Ray Passage" in the Yasawa Islands between the southern end of Naviti Island and Drawaqa Island where manta rays regularly swim through the passage between May and October. Listed on the IUCN Red List as endangered (oceanic) or vulnerable (reef), manta rays are protected in Fijian waters.[42]

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[39] : O'Malley MP, Lee-Brooks K, Medd HB (2013) The Global Economic Impact of Manta Ray Watching Tourism. PLoS ONE 8(5): e65051. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0065051

[40] Ibid

[41] https://www.fiji.travel/articles/diving-with-sharks

[42] Pacific Islands Regional Marine Species Program 2022–2026 SPREP, 2022

The Manta Project Fiji is part of a global conservation group (the Manta Trust) made up of researchers, scientists and conservationists who work with local communities, businesses, resorts and government to protect manta rays. Working closely with resorts, the Manta Project Fiji monitors manta populations by identifying individuals, observing their behaviour and guiding guests on how to swim with manta rays.[43]

3.5.2 Research on Tourism Impacts

Shark tourism, which often involves using bait or chum to attract sharks for divers to see, has been expanding globally. To date, research on elasmobranchs (sharks and rays) has shown that baiting and supplemental food provisioning can affect the behaviour, physiology and health of the animals.[44]

Research suggests that tourism increases the probability of sharks being in a disturbed behavioural state, likely increasing energetic expenditure and potentially leading to downstream ecological effects.[45]

Research also suggests that that shark diving is having a direct impact on species other than sharks and that many species are expanding their trophic niches to accommodate the hyperabundance of resources provided by tourism.[46]

The regular appearance by people in important shark and ray habitats, such as feeding areas, cleaning stations, or reproduction sites, creates the risk of disturbing the animals or disrupting important natural behaviours. Where there is a near-constant human presence, there is a threat of chronic stress and disruption. Proactive management is needed to avoid negative effects. Sharks and rays can also suffer injuries or death due to collision with boats.

Although it remains unknown whether these responses translate to biologically significant impacts on the population, it is proposed that the precautionary principle be used to guide management intervention in the absence of conclusive evidence of the magnitude of tourism impacts. [47] Other studies show that avoidable risks are likely widespread throughout the industry. Encouragingly, the application of activity specific management controls is likely to be effective at reducing risks across activity types.[48]

3.5.3 Early indicators of disturbance

Sharks

- Avoidance tactics: changes in direction of movement, increased swim speed, altered diving patterns.
- Change in activity: altered patterns of habitat use.
- Change in behavioural state: interruption of current behaviour, agonistic behaviour, threatening displays.

Mobulid Rays (Manta)

- Avoidance tactics: changes in swimming speed and direction, abrupt movements.
- Change in activity: departure from area (e.g., cleaning station).
- Change in behavioural state: interruption of current behaviour (e.g., feeding).

[43] https://www.fiji.travel/articles/sustainability-manta-rays

[44] runnschweiler JM, Barnett A (2013) Opportunistic Visitors: Long-Term Behavioural Response of Bull Sharks to Food Provisioning in Fiji. PLoS ONE 8(3): e58522. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0058522

[45] Gayford, J.H., Pearse, W.D., De La Parra Venegas, R. et al. Quantifying the behavioural consequences of shark ecotourism. Sci Rep 13, 12938 (2023). https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-023-39560-1.

[46] Shark-based tourism presents opportunities for facultative dietary shift in coral reef fish, Joshua A. Drew, Mallory McKeon, August 29, 2019 https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0221781

[47] Venables Stephanie, McGregor Frazer, Brain Lesley, van Keulen Mike (2016) Manta ray tourism management, precautionary strategies for a growing industry: a case study from the Ningaloo Marine Park, Western Australia. Pacific Conservation Biology 22, 295-300. https://doi.org/10.1071/PC16003

[48] Teleah Joy Healy, Nicholas James Hill, Adam Barnett, Andrew Chin, A global review of elasmobranch tourism activities, management and risk, Marine Policy, Volume 118, 2020.

Other Rays

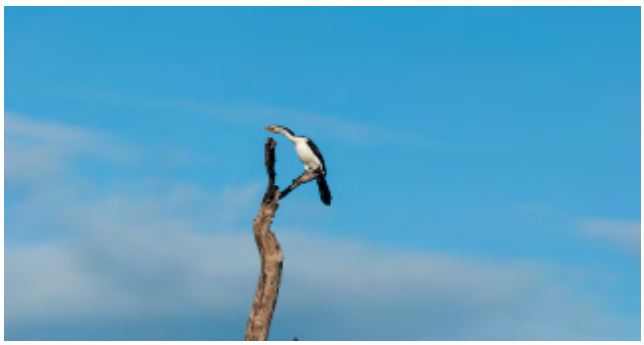
- Change in activity: attraction to humans and/or vessels, aggressive competition, altered diel patterns and patterns of habitat use.
- Change in behavioural state: interruption of feeding behaviour, agonistic behaviour towards conspecifics and humans.

3.6 Fish-Feeding

Many marine tourism operations provide fish feeding activities. Studies have indicated that fish feeding significantly alters behavioural patterns, creates health problems and disrupts the natural processes within the marine community.[49]

In the Mamanucas, particularly at sites where fish feeding occurs, there has been an increase in aggressive behaviour within schools of surgeonfish, fighting amongst themselves and causing injury, even to the point of destroying their own reef habitat by breaking hard corals. Triggerfish have also been observed biting and destroying the reef structure. Sergeant Damselfish swarm around snorkellers or divers expecting to be fed.[50]By feeding the algae eaters that control algae growth, they become handout feeders that soon neglect their important role of eating algae, which in turn can overgrow coral.

Conservation organisations, including UNEP, WWF and Environmental Defence encourage passive interaction with marine life and avoiding feeding and petting, which may lead to accidental injury.[51]



3.7 Seabirds

Seabirds are birds that are adapted to life in the marine environment. They either spend most of their life at sea coming onshore to nest, or they occupy near-shore and coastal habitats all year round. They feed from the ocean either at or near the sea surface. In general, seabirds usually show slow growth, live longer, breed later and have fewer young than other birds and they invest a great deal of energy in their young. [52]

Most species nest in colonies, which can vary in size from a few dozen birds to millions. They nest everywhere from high mountainous islands to low-lying atolls. Seabird migrations can cover whole oceans, with millions of seabirds migrating annually across the Pacific Ocean. It's a cycle that's critical for healthy ecosystems.

Seabirds are essential for restoration of land and nearshore habitats because they bring nutrients from sea to land, where they nest Seabirds also have a valued place in the cultures of the Pacific, including as oceanic guides to fish schools and for navigational support.

There are 42 seabird species known or suspected to breed in the Pacific with many more migrating across and breeding outside of the region. Seventeen of the Pacific's seabirds are Endemic, including the Fiji petrel, Phoenix petrel, Collared petrel, Murphy's petrel, Tahiti petrel, Beck's petrel, Henderson petrel, Polynesian storm petrel, White-necked petrel, Heinroth's shearwater, Christmas shearwater, Rapa shearwater, Grey-backed tern, Little white tern and the New Caledonian fairy tern. [53]

Migratory seabird species in the Pacific region are protected under international treaties and agreements including the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS, Bonn Convention), the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands and

[49] Mamanuca Environment Society , Fiji https://mesfiji.org/

[50] Ibid

[51] Mamanuca Environment Society , Fiji https://mesfiji.org/

[52] Pacific Islands Regional Marine Species Program 2022–2026 SPREP, 2022

[53] Pacific Islands Regional Marine Species Program 2022–2026 SPREP, 2022

the Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels (ACAP).

3.7.1 Pressures

Three species are Critically Endangered: Fiji Petrel, Beck's Petrel, Rapa Shearwater; three species are Endangered: Henderson Petrel, Phoenix Petrel, Polynesian Storm Petrel; five species are Vulnerable: White-necked Petrel, Collared Petrel, White-winged/Gould's Petrel, Heinroth's Shearwater, New Caledonian Fairy Tern and one species, the Tahiti Petrel is Near Threatened. [54]

Key threats to seabirds include:

- Overfishing: Depletion of fish stocks through overfishing can reduce prey availability for seabirds, leading to declines in their populations.
- Bycatch: Seabirds are often accidentally caught in fishing gear such as longlines, gillnets, and trawls, leading to injuries and mortality.
- Marine pollution, including plastic debris, oil spills, and chemical pollutants can harm seabirds through ingestion, entanglement, and contamination of their habitats.
- Habitat destruction: Destruction and degradation of nesting sites, such as islands and coastal areas, due to human activities like development, invasive species, and habitat alteration, threaten seabird populations.
- Climate change: Rising sea levels, ocean acidification, and changes in temperature and currents impact seabirds' food availability, breeding habitats, and migration patterns.
- Invasive species: Predatory mammals like rats, cats, and mongooses introduced to seabird nesting islands can prey on eggs, chicks, and nesting adults, disrupting seabird colonies.
- Human disturbance: Activities such as tourism, fishing, and coastal development can disturb seabirds during breeding, feeding, and resting, affecting their behaviour and reproductive success.

3.7.2 Seabird Tourism in the Pacific

There are a number of popular destinations for bird watching in the Pacific:

French Polynesia

Tetiaroa Atoll: Known for its vibrant birdlife, including brown noddies, white terns, and frigatebirds.

Rangiroa Atoll: Offers sightings of various seabirds such as red-tailed tropicbirds and great frigatebirds in its many motus (small islands).

Fiji

Taveuni Island: Known as the "Garden Island," Taveuni is home to a variety of bird species, including orange doves and several seabird species.

Kadavu Island: Offers pristine natural environments with minimal human impact, ideal for observing seabirds in their natural habitat.

Solomon Islands

Rennell Island: Part of the Rennell and Bellona Province, Rennell Island is a UNESCO World Heritage Site with significant seabird populations.

Palau

Rock Islands Southern Lagoon: A UNESCO World Heritage site that is home to nesting sites for several species of terns and other seabirds.

Samoa:

Aleipata Islands: These islands are important seabird nesting sites, offering opportunities to see various species in a relatively untouched setting.

3.7.3 Tourism Impacts

Seabirds can be impacted by tourism activities that occur when viewing birds on the water, and also through onshore activities, particularly when important breeding sites on atolls, islands, low isles and coral cays are accessed. Marine and land-based tourism activities can impact seabirds in the following ways:[55]

- Changes in distribution and habitat use through tourism related development.
- Disturbance at breeding sites can seriously affect the survival of offspring because of nest abandonment by adults. People walking into seabird colonies or to within less than the critical distance of the most

[54] Office of the Pacific Ocean Commissioner (2021). Blue Pacific Ocean Report: A report by the Pacific Ocean Commissioner to the Pacific Islands Forum Leaders. Suva, Fiji.

[55] Guidelines for Managing Visitation to Seabird Breeding Islands, WBM Oceanics Australia and Gordon Claridge for the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority and Environment Australia-Biodiversity Group.

sensitive species in the colony can lead to adults flying off nests which can lead to death of eggs and chicks through exposure. It can lead to trampling of nests/burrows – leading to death/suffocation of young, disturbance of the adult birds when they are departing from or returning to the colony – possibly leading to regurgitation of food carried for chicks, littering with food scraps which attract gulls and risk of fire from discarded cigarette butts.

- Reduced time spent foraging - disturbance at foraging sites can seriously reduce the reproduction and survival of adult seabirds and their offspring.
- Modification or destruction of feeding and nesting habitats
- Species' reaction to boats and human presence: different species of seabird show different reactions to boats and human presence. Some birds can become habituated to human presence, while others will always tend to fly away if boats or people are too close.
- Use of 'chum' to attract seabirds to vessels encourages birds to attend boats and can lead birds to associate boats with food. Birds habituated to attending vessels may also attend fishing vessels where they may be exposed to lethal fishing techniques.
- All species active at night are vulnerable to artificial light which can disorient seabirds, causing collision, entrapment, stranding, grounding, and interference with navigation (being drawn off course from the usual migration route). These behavioural responses may cause injury or death. Problematic sources of artificial light include coastal residential and hotel developments, street lighting, vehicle lights, floodlights, vessel deck and search lights, cruise ships, fishing vessels, gas flares, navigation aids and lighthouses.

Early indicators of disturbance

Indicators of disturbance include:

- Increased paddling speed if in water
- Flight or dive if in water
- Flushing (sudden take off).

4 Ocean and Tourism Governance in the Pacific

This chapter outlines marine and tourism governance in the Pacific, highlighting regional frameworks and national strategies that help to conserve marine biodiversity and support a prosperous tourism sector.

4.1 Ocean governance

Multiple actors are involved in setting the agenda and implementing various ocean priorities in the region, making it a complex governance environment. These include SPREP and other CROP Agencies, UN and Development Agencies, International Non-Governmental Organisations, Community led agencies, Pacific Ocean Alliance Agencies and national agencies.

Several global and regional frameworks and agreements play a crucial role in conserving marine biodiversity and protecting marine species in the Pacific Ocean, addressing issues from species-specific conservation to broader ecosystem protection.

The Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development, also known as the Ocean Decade, is a United Nations initiative aimed at mobilising global efforts to advance ocean science and promote the sustainable use and management of the ocean and its resources. The Decade was officially launched by the United Nations General Assembly in December 2017 and is set to run from 2021 to 2030.

4.1.1 International protection of marine species

United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) – The UNFCCC is an international treaty adopted in 1992 with the aim of addressing global climate change. The UNFCCC was established in response to growing concerns about the potential impacts of human-induced climate change on the environment, economies, and societies around the world.

UNESCO Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage – Establishes the list of World Heritage Sites and details what is required to maintain them.

Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) – Regulates international trade in endangered species, including many marine species.

Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) – A comprehensive agreement addressing all aspects of biological diversity including marine species conservation.

Nagoya Protocol – A supplementary agreement to the CBD, it addresses the access to genetic resources and the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from their utilisation.

United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) – Establishes a legal framework for all marine and maritime activities, including marine conservation.

Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS) – Protects migratory species that cross international borders, including many marine species.

International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships (MARPOL)- The main international convention covering prevention of pollution of the marine environment by ships from operational or accidental causes.

Conservation and Management Measures implemented by Regional Fisheries Management Organisations (RFMOs) – such as the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) which manage fishery resources in the Pacific.

International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling which provides for the proper conservation of whale stocks.

Ramsar Convention on Wetlands – Includes protection for marine and coastal wetlands which are crucial habitats for many marine species.

Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF), is the blueprint for the conservation and restoration of Biodiversity, sustainable use of biological diversity and the sharing of benefits arising from the use and access of genetic resources. This global agreement sets the pathway to reach the vision of a world living in harmony with nature by 2050.

4.1.2 Key regional policies and programs

Leaders and communities have developed and are implementing many significant local, national, sub-regional, regional and international initiatives relating to ocean management in the Pacific. A comprehensive regional umbrella framework, the **Pacific Islands Regional Ocean Policy (PIROP)** was implemented in 2002 followed by the **Pacific Oceanscape framework (FPO)**, which was launched by the Pacific Island Forum Leaders in 2010.

The **Pacific Ocean Alliance** is a collaborative effort among Pacific Island nations aimed at addressing common challenges related to ocean conservation, sustainable development, and climate change resilience. The alliance arose from Pacific Oceanscape framework and brings together governments, organizations, and stakeholders from across the Pacific region to promote cooperation, knowledge sharing, and collective action for the protection and management of the Pacific Ocean's resources.

It provides a holistic approach to ocean governance, emphasising the interconnectedness of marine ecosystems, biodiversity conservation, sustainable fisheries management, and climate change adaptation.

Through the Pacific Ocean Alliance, member countries collaborate on various initiatives, including marine protected area networks, sustainable fisheries management, marine pollution prevention, and capacity building programs. By working together, Pacific Island nations aim to strengthen their collective voice on ocean issues, advocate for sustainable ocean policies at the regional and international levels and secure a resilient and prosperous future for the Pacific Ocean and its coastal communities.

2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent – The 2050 Strategy features 10 commitments that Pacific Leaders have made to strengthen their collective action and deepen regionalism to realise the strategy vision. In support of these commitments, the Strategy brings together seven interconnected thematic areas:

- Political Leadership and Regionalism
- People-Centred Development
- Peace and Security
- Resource and Economic Development
- Climate Change and Disasters
- Ocean and Environment
- Technology and Connectivity

The Ocean and Environment thematic area focuses on the region's stewardship of the Blue Pacific Continent through collective responsibility, commitment and investment in its ocean and lands. The collective ambition is effective regional coordination and cooperation on transboundary ocean and land-based environmental policy, regulatory and legislative measures to ensure all Pacific peoples to live in a fully protected Blue Pacific Continent.

The strategy recognises the significant environmental and ecosystem-based services that the Blue Pacific provides to the planet, the region's ability to benefit from its ocean and environment depends on its capacity to make the right policy choices, partnerships and investments, including by adopting a precautionary and forward looking approach to protect the region's biodiversity, its environment and resources from exploitation, degradation, nuclear contamination, waste, pollution, and health threats.

Pacific Islands Regional Marine Species Program 2022–2024[56] – The Pacific Islands Regional Marine Species Program 2022-2024 emphasises conservation and management of marine species, integrating cultural knowledge, capacity building, and addressing threats to marine biodiversity. It focuses on the conservation and management of marine species in the Pacific Islands. The Program aims to support these communities through several key initiatives:

- Enhancing Knowledge and Awareness: Increasing understanding of marine species, their habitats, and their ecological, cultural, and economic significance, alongside sharing best practices.
- Integrating Cultural Knowledge: Recognising and incorporating cultural knowledge and traditional conservation practices in raising public awareness.
- Capacity Building and Resource Mobilisation: Strengthening capacities and securing human resources for effective action plan implementation and ensuring sustainable financing.
- Addressing and Mitigating Threats: Identifying emerging threats and working towards reducing or mitigating existing ones.
- Improving Marine Species and Habitat Conditions: Enhancing management and protection to improve the condition of marine species and their habitats.

[56] Pacific Islands Regional Marine Species Program 2022–2026 SPREP, 2022

- Promoting Traditional Stewardship: Encouraging customary management practices and traditional stewardship.
- Ensuring Species Recovery and Ecological Balance: Aiming for the recovery of marine species populations to maintain their ecological roles.
- Encouraging Non-Consumptive Economic Benefits: Promoting responsible tourism that leverages the socio-economic advantages of non-consumptive use of marine resources.
- Fostering Collaboration and Cooperation: Enhancing cooperation at national, sub-regional, regional, and international levels.
- Supporting Ecosystem-Based Approaches: Advocating for multi-species management approaches based on ecosystem considerations.

Pacific Coral Reef Plan 2021 -2030 – a comprehensive strategy to address the conservation and management of coral reef ecosystems across the region. The plan aims to promote the sustainable use of coral reef resources, enhance resilience to climate change impacts, and support the livelihoods and cultural practices of coastal communities.

Framework for Nature Conservation and Protected Areas – a regional strategy to guide conservation efforts and the establishment and management of protected areas across the region. The Framework aims to promote the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, ecosystems, and natural resources in the Pacific, while also supporting the cultural, social, and economic well-being of Pacific Island communities.

Cleaner Pacific 2025 – the region's framework to address waste and pollution with thematic plans to address regional marine litter and regional marine spill contingency.

Pacific Regional Action Plan on Marine Litter is a collaborative strategy developed by Pacific Island countries and territories to address the issue of marine litter in the region.

Future of Fisheries Regional Roadmap for Sustainable Fisheries – a strategic framework developed by the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA) and its member countries to guide the sustainable management and development of fisheries resources in the Pacific region. The roadmap aims to ensure the long-term sustainability of Pacific fisheries while maximising economic benefits for Pacific Island countries and their communities.

4.1.3 National Marine Protections

Nationally, there are a diverse array of management and conservation strategies, each tailored to meet each nation's specific objectives. [57]

With the increasing degradation of the ocean and its ecosystems and species, there has been increased protection, conservation and management measures at a national level. Vast areas of national Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) and 40% of areas in the region now under some form of protection or management, relevant to the context of each nation. The designation and establishment of area-based management and protection measures vary in shape, form, denomination, and objectives. Some are conservation focused and can include strict measures.

They range from no-take zones and reserves to areas where some activities are allowed. Some are sustainable use focused and managed by sectoral agencies, such as fisheries zone-based management – managed by fisheries agencies (regional, sub-regional and national). Other areas are also managed by local coastal communities, such as the locally managed marine areas network.[58]

Marine Protected Areas not only serve as vital refuges for marine biodiversity but also underpin the sustainability of the marine tourism industry in the Pacific, emphasising the need for continued and effective management to ensure the protection and resilience of these marine environments.

Notable protected areas include the Cook Islands and Palau, both achieving near or complete protection of their Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs), and New Caledonia with 96.26% of its waters protected. The Phoenix Islands Protected Area in Kiribati are examples of large-scale MPAs, providing critical habitat protection while supporting commercial activities and tourism.

Countries like French Polynesia, Kiribati, and Niue offer unique opportunities for marine tourism in the MPA such as whale swimming and diving with dugongs. The Cook Islands Marae Moana and New Caledonia's Coral Sea Nature Park emphasise integrated management from ridge to reef, aiming for sustainable development alongside conservation. Initiatives in French Polynesia's Marine Educational

[57] Office of the Pacific Ocean Commissioner (2021). Blue Pacific Ocean Report: A report by the Pacific Ocean Commissioner to the Pacific Islands Forum Leaders. Suva, Fiji.

[58] Office of the Pacific Ocean Commissioner (2021). Blue Pacific Ocean Report: A report by the Pacific Ocean Commissioner to the Pacific Islands Forum Leaders.

Areas and the Micronesia Challenge showcase innovative approaches to marine conservation, engaging communities and aiming for significant conservation targets.

The Blue Pacific Ocean report highlights the significant role of marine protected areas (MPAs) in the Pacific, demonstrating diverse management practices across various Pacific nations. Despite the extent of protected areas, the report highlights the importance of effective management over mere spatial coverage, highlighting the need for sustainable marine tourism practices to safeguard these critical ecosystems. The report also indicates there is collective difficulty in implementing a well-coordinated and well-integrated approach to the ocean space, with inadequate high seas regulations, and issues relating to implementation and enforcement, which contribute to the difficulty in effectively addressing direct pressures on the ocean.

Appendix A provides a high level overview of the national policy context for ocean governance throughout the region.

4.2 Tourism governance

4.2.1 Regional tourism frameworks

As the mandated organisation representing tourism in the region, the Pacific Tourism Organisation (SPTO) has a core mission to deliver sustainable tourism in partnership with donors and development agencies, the region's tourism industry comprised of 20 member countries led by their National Tourism Organisations and associated tourism ministries, tourism industry operators, the travel trade, airlines, regional coordination bodies (CROP partners), development partners, academic institutions, and a range of non-government organisations.

The crosscutting nature of tourism requires the SPTO to leverage the work of other CROP partners and engage and influence them to support the regional sustainable tourism agenda. The maintenance of effective regional partnerships is essential to maximising the outcomes of regional investment activities and reducing overlap and duplication of precious resources.

Pacific Sustainable Tourism Policy Framework (PSTPF) The PSTPF reflects the collective vision, goals and objectives of international and regional agencies, national governments, industry, community Organisations and development partners. It provides a guide for nations, industry and partners to advance sustainable tourism in the Pacific. The Framework calls on regional agencies, national governments, industry, businesses, civil society organisations, communities and development partners to co-ordinate and collaborate to advance the actions identified in the PSTPF.

The shared vision of the PSTPF is "By 2030 we are empowered by, and benefitting from tourism that is resilient, prosperous and inclusive. It improves the wellbeing of our communities and protects, restores and promotes our cultures, islands and ocean ecosystem".

The PSTPF has four goals one of which is Healthy Islands and Oceans. One of the actions under this goal is for the SPTO to develop region wide tour operator guidelines for island and ocean environments that can be adapted by each country. It also includes actions for Pacific nations and the tourism sector to protect ocean ecosystems though responsible tourism practises.

Pacific Sustainable Tourism Standard (PSTS) The PSTS is a tool to support Pacific destinations and the tourism industry to inform their approach to improving sustainable practices. The standard is relevant to governments, tourism organisations, tourism businesses, communities and funding partners and is comprised of a Destination Standard and an Industry Standard.

The Destination Standard is specifically designed for destinations irrespective of what organisation may be responsible for it or how or by whom any related action is implemented. The Industry Standard is specifically designed for tourism enterprises. Each standard corresponds to the four goals of the Pacific Sustainable Tourism Policy Framework.

4.2.2 National tourism policies and strategies

Appendix B provides a summary of the national tourism policy context for most nations, highlighting the links to sustainable tourism, aspirations for better regulation and management of the industry and where specified, the marine tourism linkages. Most Pacific nations where tourism is recognised as a sector for economic growth have national tourism policies, strategies or frameworks in place. Several national tourism policies have been or are being progressively aligned to the goals and policies within the PSTPF.

Some nations have adopted regulatory measures to oversee marine tourism activities, ensuring visitor safety, and managing environmental impacts. These range from legislation and licensing systems for operators to collaborative efforts like memorandums of understanding (MOUs) and codes of conduct between governments and the industry. These efforts

also include initiatives to promote responsible behaviour through engagement and education of both industry stakeholders and tourists.

However, specific strategies directly targeting the marine tourism sector are scarce across the region, with a notable lack of detailed approaches for enhancing regulation, management, and the quality of services and experiences within this sector.

Some countries such as Fiji, Vanuatu, Samoa, and the Republic of the Marshall Islands, have expressed an interest or recognised the need to develop guidelines, educational materials, and monitoring systems to mitigate tourism's impact on ocean resources and manage human interactions with migratory species, underscoring the necessity for regional marine tourism guidelines. A review of existing guidelines is presented in Chapter 5.

4.2.3 Ocean and tourism policy and governance and collaboration

An analysis of national ocean policies (Appendix 1) shows minimal recognition of tourism beyond its categorization as an economic sector. Except for Vanuatu, there is an absence of detailed strategies for effectively integrating the tourism sector into ocean policy implementation.

The apparent disconnect between tourism and ocean policies indicates a compartmentalised approach, with a clear division between entities managing marine environments and those overseeing the marketing and development of marine tourism.

To reduce the impacts of tourism on the marine environment and its iconic species and enhance the role that tourism can play in supporting marine conservation objectives, greater collaboration is required between government agencies, tourism industry, development partners and NGOs. The development of the Marine Tourism Guidelines is a good starting point for this dialogue.

4.2.4 The Ocean Panel for a Sustainable Ocean Economy

The High Level Panel for a Sustainable Ocean Economy is an alliance of 17 world leaders who are building momentum for a sustainable ocean economy incorporating protection, sustainable production and equitable prosperity.

The panel's goal for the tourism sector is that by 2030 'coastal and ocean-based tourism is sustainable, resilient, addresses climate change, reduces pollution, supports ecosystem regeneration and biodiversity conservation and invests in local jobs and communities.' Outcomes of the panel's investigations into coastal and marine tourism emphasise the importance of regeneration and resilience and balances action across the traditional environmental, economic and socio-cultural pillars of sustainability. These are important considerations for the Pacific Marine Tourism Guidelines.

5 Existing Marine Tourism Guidelines

This chapter summarises existing international, regional, and national marine tourism guidelines. It identifies the most relevant content and highlights existing gaps to aid in crafting a comprehensive regional guideline for the Pacific.

5.1 Existing marine tourism guidelines

There are a number of international, regional and national guidelines that are relevant to the Pacific produced by government or non-government alliances supported by scientific research. Table 1 provides a summary of the existing international, regional and national marine tourism guidelines reviewed for the analysis. A comprehensive analysis and comparison of the guidelines is presented in Appendix C.

The analysis shows that the international guidelines are generally based on scientific research concerning the needs of specific species and address boat behaviour, people behaviour and have been commonly used to inform national approaches. The national guidelines present a combination of global best practice and legal requirements specific to the nation, with many consistencies and some gaps.

5.2 Comparative Analysis of Guidelines

5.2.1 Boat behaviour

Most guidelines around marine tourism at all scales cover some aspect of boat behaviour. Vanuatu, French Polynesia, Tonga, Timor Leste and Cook Islands all have a guideline relating to boat behaviour. Boat behaviour guidelines generally include the following:

- **Caution Zone.** Generally specified a minimum distance from a particular species where no vessels are allowed, and then a zone beyond that where certain behaviours are required, such as slower speeds, maximum vessels allowed in the zone, etc. which are covered below.
- **Speed recommendations in presence of animals.** Often specified in terms of wake speed, the animal's speed, or knots.
- **Approach angle.** The direction from which it is advisable to approach the animal.
- **Vessel considerations.** Specific needs around how the vessel behaves or is outfitted, such as the skipper having line of sight to the animal, no vessels between a mother and calf, and no leapfrogging.
- **Maximum vessels allowed in caution zone.** Usually a specific number of vessels allowed within the caution zone.

In general, these guidelines are consistent with the following exceptions:

- For **Dugongs**, Vanuatu specifies a minimum 10m distance from the animals, whereas the UNEP specify the caution zone as 15-100m. Timor Leste specifies 50 – 100m.
- For **Whales**, Tonga specifies a minimum 20m from adults and 50m from calves, whereas all other nations specify a 100m – 300m caution zone. In terms of speed in presence of animals, French Polynesia specifies <3 knots, whilst other guidelines at regional and international levels specify by the animal's or wake speed. Angle of approach also varies, with most saying parallel and slightly to the rear, and French Polynesia saying 30 degrees. Timor Leste and the IFAW at the regional level both prohibit personal watercraft, such as jet skis.
- For **Dolphins**, the IFAW regional guidelines specify a caution zone of 50 – 100m, whereas the UNEP/WCA specify 100m+ distances. As with whales, Timor Leste and the IFAW at the regional level both prohibit personal watercraft, such as jet skis.
- Other boat behaviour aspects covered in the international guidelines but not locally include making use of available moorings, waste management on vessels, propeller guards, and manoeuvrability of the vessel.

5.2.2 People behaviour

Vanuatu, French Polynesia, Tonga, Timor Leste and Cook Islands all have some guidelines at the national level around people behaviour. They generally include the following:

- **Guiding**. This is mostly covered as an international general guideline that is not species specific and includes the need to have guides on board, training on the biology and behaviour of the species, management of risks to humans and animals, educating visitors, involvement in scientific research, understanding cultural values, monitoring and reporting sick or injured animals. Vanuatu requires tourism operators to display the guidelines to customers.

- **Visitor interactions with species**. Many of the international guidelines have specific regulations around visitors touching, riding, feeding, swimming and photography. Vanuatu, French Polynesia and Tonga all have specific guidelines around some of these aspects.
- **Maximum interaction duration**. This is about regulating the maximum time spent per vessel or swimmer.
- **Cumulative time**. Recognising the cumulative impact of engagement with visitors on each species, a number of guidelines identify a maximum amount of visits per day that each pod or group can be visited. Of the species reviewed, only dolphins do not have any regulation specifying a maximum cumulative time per day.
- **Swimming regulations**. These address how many people per group can swim in each encounter, guide to group ratios, not touching animals/coral, buoyancy and entry and exit points (particularly in the case of coral reefs) and the use of motorised swimming aids.

Again, these regulations are consistent with the following exceptions:

- For whales, French Polynesia and Tonga are the only guidelines that specify maximum cumulative interaction durations and they are different. Same with the cumulative time spent (1 hour vs 1.5 hours).
- Tonga and Timor Leste both require one vessel per pod per day at 1 hour.
- French Polynesia specifies six people maximum in the water, and Tonga specifies a maximum of 4.
- The UNEP /CMS Guideline says that swimming with whales and dolphins is not recommended at all.

Additional considerations

There are a number of other considerations that fall outside boat and people behaviour that the guidelines address. These include the following:

- **Aircraft regulations**. Many dugong, whale and whale shark experiences rely on drones, helicopters or aircraft to spot their location or to view them. Only Vanuatu (for Dugongs), Tonga and Timor Leste (for Whales) have aircraft guidelines or regulations relating to this.
- **Scuba**. Some guidelines specifically address whether scuba is appropriate for species interactions.
- **Leapfrogging**. The act of dropping swimmers, collecting them and then going in front of the animal again for another swim is called leapfrogging. This is specifically not allowed in many of the guidelines.
- **Retail and holiday choices**. The CORAL guideline specifically states guidelines around choosing eco friendly resorts and retail options, especially not souvenirs made from marine life.
- **Licensing**. The CORAL guidelines address the need for licensing and minimum training to be allowed to be licensed. Industry Perspectives.

Table 1. Summary of Existing International, Regional and National Marine Tourism Guidelines

SPECIES	SCOPE	NAME OF GUIDELINE
WHALE AND DOLPHIN GUIDELINES	International	General Principles for Whale Watching, International Whaling Commission, IWC68 (2022) Revision of General Principles for Whale Watching
		Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species Guidelines for Recreational In-Water Interactions With Marine Wildlife UNEP/CMS/Cop14/Doc.27.3.1/Annex 2
		Lewis, S. & Walker, D. (2018). Global Best Practice Guidance for Responsible Whale and Dolphin Watching: Tourism activities involving wild cetaceans. A guide by the World Cetacean Alliance with support from ClubMed. Brighton, UK.
	Regional	Pacific Islands Regional Guidelines For Whale And Dolphin Watching, SPREP 2008
	National	Niue Reg 2016-03 Whale Watching Regulations
		Tonga Whale Watching and Swimming Regulations 2013
		Guidelines for Observing Dolphins Whales in French Polynesia
		Timor-Leste Cetacean Watching Guidelines
DUGONG GUIDELINES	International	Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) Annex to Resolution 11.29 (Rev. COP12) Species-Specific Guidelines for Boat-Based Wildlife Watching
		Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species Guidelines For Recreational In-Water Interactions With Marine Wildlife UNEP/CMS/Cop14/Doc.27.3.1/Annex 2
	National	Vanuatu Environmental Science Society (VESS) Code of Conduct for Tourism Operators Interacting with Dugongs
		Vanuatu Environmental Science Society (VESS) Guidelines for Interacting with Dugongs
SHARK AND RAY GUIDELINES	International	Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) Annex to Resolution 11.29 (Rev. COP12) Species-Specific Guidelines for Boat-Based Wildlife Watching
		Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species Guidelines For Recreational In-Water Interactions With Marine Wildlife UNEP/CMS /Cop14/Doc.27.3.1/Annex 2
		Lawrence, A.J., Budziak, A., Campbell, I., Cornish, A., Ender,I., Jeffries, B., Kanstinger, P., Macdonald,C., Marston, J., Stevens, G., Ward-Paige, C. A. (2016). Responsible Shark & Ray Tourism: A Guide to Best Practice. Gland, Switzerland: WWF, and Rancho Santa Margarita, USA: Project AWARE and Dorset, UK: Manta Trust.
		Manta Trust Code of Conduct
SEABIRD GUIDELINES	International	Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) Annex to Resolution 11.29 (Rev. COP12) Species-Specific Guidelines for Boat-Based Wildlife Watching
		BirdLife Australia Ethical Birdwatching Guidelines
		BirdLife Australia Photography Code of Ethics
	Other	International Association Antarctica Tour Operators (IAATO) Guidelines for Birdwatching

SPECIES	SCOPE	NAME OF GUIDELINE
		Guidelines for Managing Visitation to Seabird Breeding Islands, WBM Oceanics Australia and Gordon Claridge for the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority and Environment Australia-Biodiversity Group
		Resolution 13.5/Annex – Australian Government National Light Pollution Guidelines for Wildlife including Marine Turtles, Seabirds and Migratory Shorebirds, January 2020
		DCCEEW 2023, National Light Pollution Guidelines for Wildlife, Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water, Canberra
TURTLE GUIDELINES	International	Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals, Species-specific Guidelines for Boat-based Wildlife Watching, Resolution 11.29 (Rev.COP12)/Annex
		Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species Guidelines For Recreational In-Water Interactions With Marine Wildlife Unep/Cms/Cop14/Doc.27.3.1/Annex 2
		Coral Reef Alliance Turtle Watching Good Practice Guide
		Certified Sea Turtle Friendly™ Tourism Standards - A project of the Wildlife Friendly Enterprise Network (WFEN)
	Other	DCCEEW 2023, National Light Pollution Guidelines for Wildlife, Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water, Canberra
		Code of Practice for Sustainable Management of Dugong and Marine Turtle Tourism in Australia

5.3 National approaches to managing marine tourism

There are many different approaches to managing marine tourism activities in the Pacific including legislation, licensing, standards, codes of conduct and guidelines. A summary of national approaches is presented in Table 2. Note: some nations do not have marine tourism guidelines in place, but legislation and regulation provide the framework for marine tourism operations. Notably, there is a lack of enforcement of regulations across most Pacific nations with respect to marine tourism activities.[59]

Cook Islands

In 2023, Cook Islands Tourism undertook several activities to actively address concerns related to the sustainable management of turtle tours. This included empowering visitors to make informed decisions by providing readily available information in the public domain. Visitors are provided with advice on how to choose a tour operator and encouraged to choose an operator that strives to provide both best-practice customer safety and responsible eco-tourism practices.

The advice includes recommending that visitors:

- Choose a tour operator that is Cook Islands Quality Assured. This confirms that they meet the minimum standards of being a quality tourism operator.
- Confirm with the tour operator that they abide by the 4:1 safety ratio.
- Only book tours that operate during the low tide on weekdays. Weekend tours are not permitted.
- Make sure the tour operator conducts safety briefings, has working safety equipment and quality snorkelling gear.
- Choose a tour operator that practices eco-friendly tourism. This means they encourage their guests on the right steps to take to reduce impact on the turtle's natural environment, including not touching the turtles.

It also encourages industry best practice and offers support to Turtle Tour Operators who embrace these practices. A comprehensive toolkit and additional resources to support the current voluntary standards and guidelines is being developed to assist operators in adopting and implementing the best safety measures.

In 2023, Cook Islands Tourism hosted a workshop with turtle tour operators to review and update the Turtle Tour Operator Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). The MOU serves as an interim measure given the lack of regulation, and is a voluntary agreement that operators sign in good faith to abide by the best practices outlined within it. Given the number of new operators, it was agreed that the MOU will be reviewed every 3-4 months to ensure that it remains relevant. Key points of discussion included suitable conditions to operate in, environmental education, safety, customer ratios, use of boats, and days of operation.

Cook Islands Tourism entered into agreements with turtle tour operators through the MOU process with the majority of turtle tour operators signing the MOU and reaffirming their commitment to working with Cook Islands Tourism and providing a safe experience for their guests. The MOU guidelines include:

- Restrictions to operate only on weekdays only (Monday to Friday)
- All guides must have a current Cook Islands Bronze Medallion Certificate, correct water safety and lifesaving equipment available at all times
- A maximum of four visitors per certified guide in all passages on Rarotonga and deep lagoon waters at all times
- Tours in the Avaavaroa Passage are restricted to operate only during low tide; and up to two hours either side of low tide
- All guides must have a current First Aid Certificate.[60]

The Cook Islands Tourism Industry Council has provided support to ensure that visitors have access to vital information and an enhanced communications plan has been established, emphasising the importance of regular and transparent updates to the industry, public and visitors. This plan reinforces the principles of frequency, consistency, and transparency.

[59] Project Consultation Marine Tourism Survey and Online Workshops, TRC Tourism March 2024

[60] Https://www.cookislandsnews.com/uncategorised/internal/national/environment/travel/mou-on-turtle-tours/

Figure 2. Example of information provided to visitors to Cook Islands

Fiji

Fiji has established a Code of Conduct for Tourism Operators, which was identified as a strategy in the Fijian Tourism Plan (FT2021) to address the need for higher standards of service for tourism operators, especially when engaging with clients, other businesses and host communities in their daily business operations. In terms of the environment, the Code of Conduct specifies that tourism providers need to:

- Place special attention to the specific challenges of coastal areas and island territories
- Be responsible and conscious of their impact on the environment and wildlife, adopt sustainable practices and advocate for such behaviour to their clients through their actions and interactions
- Manage their activities in a way that don't conflict with conservation efforts
- Conduct Environmental Impact Assessments.

In addition to the code of conduct, many operators work to establish Marine Conservation Agreements (MCAs) to protect the areas they rely on for their incomes. In Fiji, while the ownership of the physical seabed below the high-water mark is vested in the Government, the traditional access rights of the land owning community to the fishing resources are recognised, leading to a unique but complex systems when it comes to conservation, use and management of marine resources. These agreements range from informal or verbal Tabu agreements through to statutory gazetted reserves, which fall under the Fisheries Act 1942.

The University of the South Pacific (USP) has also completed research on whales and dolphins in Fiji. In 2012 they worked extensively with a local village tourism project who were running a spinner dolphin encounter trip at Moon Reef in the passage between the two main islands of Fiji. This work with a voluntourism project[61] recording dolphin sightings developed important insight on interactions with whales and dolphins, including a management plan for Fiji Spinner Dolphins.[62]

French Polynesia

French Polynesian laws limit boats operating tours from getting closer than 100 meters to whales.

In 2010, te mana o te moana (an association that acts for the protection of the Polynesian marine environment) implemented various awareness raising activities for tourism operators about sustainable tourism, reminding them of the regulations and "good practices" for whale watching.

To support ongoing education of operators, in 2011, te mana o te moana set up the Cetaceans Observatory in French Polynesia. The Cetaceans Observatory's aims are:

- To collect observations.
- To analyse and make available the collected data.
- To develop educative tools for tourists and residents, helping them in their efforts for a more environment-friendly behaviour at sea.[63] Limit observations to a maximum of one hour per boat and per group of cetaceans; 30 minutes for groups containing a mother/little one.

[61]<https://www.gvi.co.uk/volunteer-in-fiji/

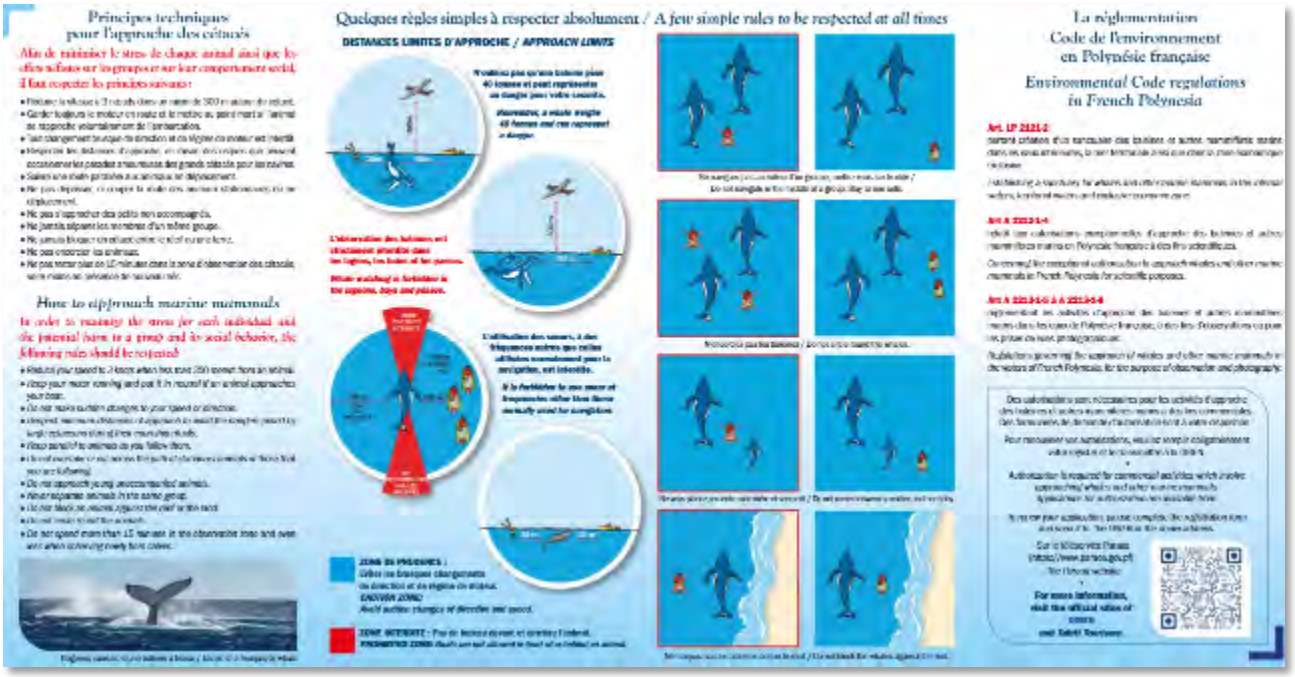
[62] Miller, C. (2011) Moon Reef Spinner Dolphin Research Program. University of the South Pacific report.

[63] www.temanaotemoana.org/observation-networks/marine-mamals-observation-network/

- Limit the cumulative observation time per group of animals to 3 hours per day; at 1:30 a.m. for groups containing a child.
- Before leaving the observation area, determine the position of the animals to avoid collisions, then gradually increase the speed of the boat
- Maintaining a distance of at least 100 metres from the whales
- Approaching neither from behind nor in front of the whale or group
- Refraining from chasing the whales
- Avoiding actions that may obstruct their movement
- Not observing calves (those less than 8 metres in length) or groups with calves
- Limiting observation to a maximum of one hour continuously per boat and per group of whales
- Crossings of whale groups are strictly prohibited, and boats must maintain an approach speed not exceeding 3 knots of the animal's speed.

A whale watching monitoring project conducted between 2005-2007 led by Operation Cetaceans highlighted an obvious change in behaviour of humpback whales in the presence of too many boats. In order to ensure the sustainable continuity of whale-watching as a tourist activity, the Southern Province has put in place a participatory management plan for whale watching, allowing the signing of a charter of good conduct by tourist operators.

Figure 3. Regulations for Whale Watching in French Polynesia[64]



[64] www.calameo.com/read/003461503c9c229625a55

CHARTE D'OBSERVATION DES CÉTACÉS

Cette charte officielle est individuellement remise aux skippers désireux de respecter les règles d'observation des cétacés. Le skipper et son équipage signent ce document et l'affichent dans leur bateau. N'hésitez pas à leur demander ce document lors de votre réservation de sortie en mer.

Pavillon des signataires de la charte

TOUTE OBSERVATION DE BALEINES OU DE DAUPHINS DANS LEUR MILIEU NATUREL DOIT :

Respecter les comportements et les déplacements des animaux.
Être interrompue si les cétacés montrent des signes de perturbation, tels que :

- Un changement de vitesse de déplacement ou de direction (pour éviter un bateau),
- Une modification du temps d'apnée,
- Un arrêt ou une modification de l'activité comportementale (ex : vocalisations, allaitement, socialisation),
- Un changement dans la composition et/ou cohésion du groupe,
- Des manifestations actives en surface telles que des coups de queue sur l'eau.

IL EST DONC RECOMMANDÉ DE :

- Ne pas toucher un cétacé ;
- Ne pas nourrir un cétacé ;
- Ne pas nager avec un cétacé ;
- Ne pas produire de bruits forts et soudains ;
- Ne pas effectuer de changements brusques et répétés de vitesse et de direction ;
- Placer au moins un membre d'équipage en poste d'observation pour suppléer le capitaine du bateau ;
- Ne pas positionner un bateau au vent d'un cétacé ou se laisser dériver dans une zone d'approche non recommandée ;
- Lorsqu'un bateau se trouve dans la zone de prudence :
  - Approcher les cétacés lentement et avec précaution,
  - Observer les cétacés à une vitesse ne dépassant pas celle des animaux ;
- Le nombre maximum de bateaux en observation simultanée dans la zone de prudence est de 4 ;
- Laisser les moteurs allumés lors de l'observation de cétacés ;
- Ne pas disperser ou séparer les membres d'un groupe de cétacés ;
- Ne pas poursuivre, ni encercler les animaux, bloquer leurs déplacements, ou se positionner au milieu d'un groupe ;
- Lorsqu'un animal approche le bateau, réduire progressivement sa vitesse et placer le moteur au point mort ;
- Lorsqu'un animal nage à l'étrave du bateau, maintenir une vitesse réduite et constante et éviter les changements soudains de direction ;
- Limiter les observations à un maximum d'une heure par bateau et par groupe de cétacés ;
- Limiter cette durée à 30 minutes pour les groupes contenant une maman/petit ;
- Limiter la durée cumulée d'observation par groupe d'animaux à 3 heures par jour, limiter cette durée à 1 h 30 pour les groupes contenant un petit ;
- Avant de quitter la zone d'observation, déterminer la position des animaux afin d'éviter les collisions, puis augmenter progressivement la vitesse du bateau.

TYPE D'EMBARCATION

EMBARCATIONS NON CONSEILLÉES

Certaines embarcations ne sont pas recommandées pour l'observation des baleines et des dauphins. Celles-ci incluent tous les véhicules nautiques à moteur (jet skis et autres engins nautiques similaires, dont les engins sous marins), parasails, engins télécommandés, hydroglisseurs, aéroglisseurs, windsurfs, kitesurfs.

EMBARCATIONS PRÉCONISÉES

Toute autre embarcation, motorisée ou à voile, est adaptée pour la pratique du whale watching (ex : bateaux à moteur, pneumatiques ou semi-rigides, voiliers).

ANGLE ET DISTANCE D'APPROCHE

La méthode d'approche la plus propice à l'observation des baleines et des dauphins est une approche de trois quarts arrière, en suivant une route parallèle à celle des animaux. Il est recommandé de ne pas approcher les animaux directement de front ou par l'arrière.

ZONE DE PRUDENCE
La zone de prudence est définie par un périmètre de 300 mètres autour d'une baleine ou d'un dauphin.

CES DISTANCES CONCERNENT L'APPROCHE ACTIVE DES CÉTACÉS PAR UN BATEAU. ELLES NE S'APPLIQUENT DONC PAS AUX SITUATIONS DANS LESQUELLES UN CÉTACÉ APPROCHE DE LUI-MÊME UNE EMBARCATION.

- Pour un bateau, la distance minimum d'approche est de 100 mètres pour les baleines et de 50 mètres pour les dauphins.
- Si un bateau approche accidentellement un cétacé à une distance inférieure à celle recommandée, il doit s'écarter de l'animal à petite vitesse.
- Les embarcations non conseillées ne devraient pas pénétrer dans la zone de prudence.
- Les hélicoptères doivent éviter d'approcher à moins de 500 mètres (altitude et distance horizontale) d'une baleine ou d'un dauphin.
- Les autres aéronefs doivent limiter leur approche à 300 mètres (altitude et distance horizontale) d'une baleine ou d'un dauphin.
- Les bateaux en attente à l'extérieur de la zone d'observation veillent à se tenir à une distance suffisamment éloignée afin de ne pas risquer de perturber les observations en cours.

APPROCHE DES GROUPES AVEC PETIT

Le terme «petit» fait référence à un jeune dauphin ou baleineau, mesurant au plus la moitié de la taille des individus adultes.
Il se déplace généralement à proximité de sa mère.

Les groupes de cétacés contenant des petits sont particulièrement vulnérables aux perturbations et requièrent une protection supplémentaire. Il est donc recommandé d'agir avec la plus grande prudence en présence de groupes contenant des petits.

province-sud.nc

PROVINCE SUD

New Caledonia

Whale watching is closely regulated in New Caledonia to ensure protection of the animals. All tour operators have signed the Cetacean Watching Charter and received educational training to ensure a respectful and enjoyable experience while protecting the animals.[65]

To make the public aware of the preservation of the lagoon and these animals, tablets made available by the WWF are available in most of the association's boats. This educational and interactive mobile cetacean identification application allows you to learn more about marine mammals and participate in their census.

Whales and dolphins in French territorial waters are protected by the national public ordinance (arrêté) of July 1st, 2011, which details the list of marine mammals protected under French law. Whale watching in New Caledonia is governed by environmental codes to ensure the safety and well-being of the animals.

New Caledonian laws stipulate that any disturbance of a protected species is forbidden and a fine is imposed for any voluntary approach to a marine mammal within 50m. Following a study conducted by Operation Cétacés, guidelines were adopted and implemented in 2008 by the Southern Provincial Environment Department in New Caledonia. They are voluntary and rely on operators to sign them every year, in order to obtain a certification/label. The most important components of the guidelines include advice on:[66]

- Approach distance: no less than 100m
- Maximum observation time: 1 hour per boat if no calf is present, reduced to half an hour if calf present in the group. Additionally, a group cannot be followed for more than 3 hours during a day or 1h30 if the group contains a calf
- Maximum number of boats: no more than 4 boats with any whale or group of whales/dolphins at the same time.

Observers must adhere to specific rules[67], including:

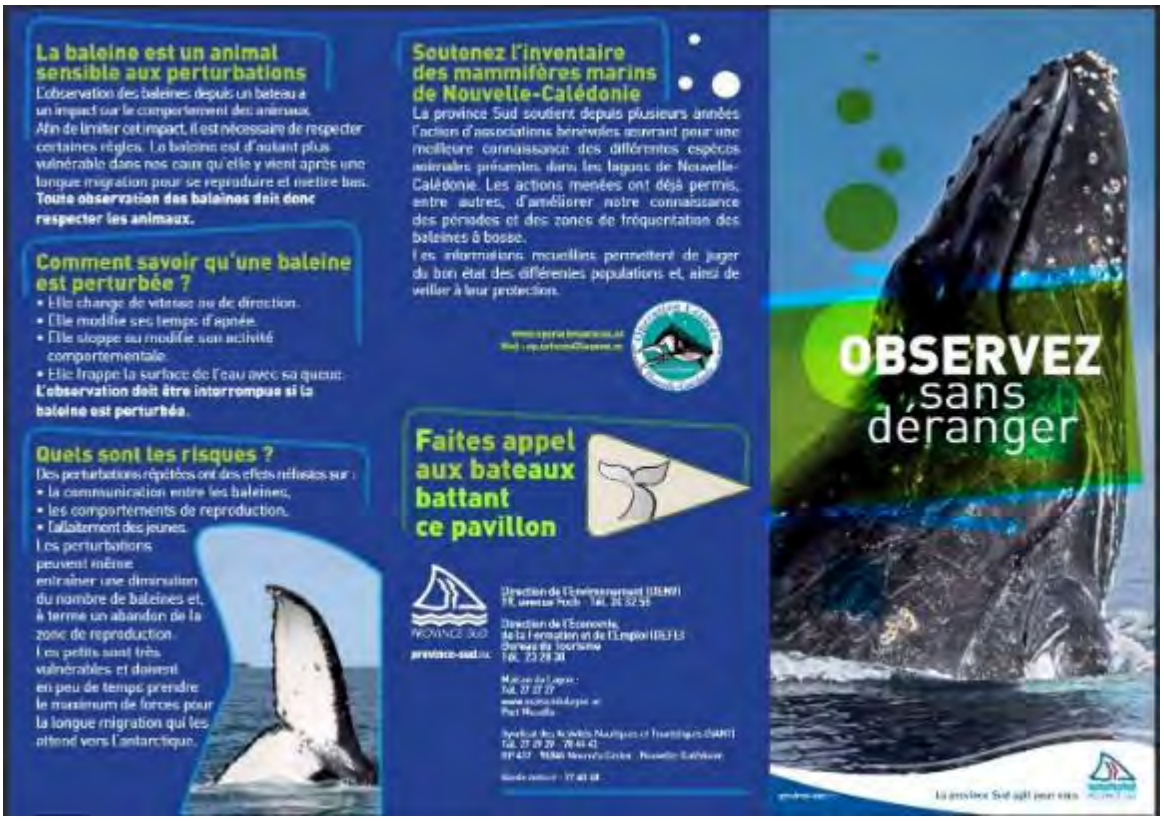
- Do not touch or feed a cetacean
- Do not swim with a cetacean
- Do not produce loud and sudden noises
- Do not make sudden and repeated changes in speed and direction
- Do not position a boat upwind of a cetacean or allow yourself to drift into a non-recommended approach zone
- Limit observations to a maximum of one hour per boat and per group of cetaceans; 30 minutes for groups containing a mother/little one
- Limit the cumulative observation time per group of animals to 3 hours per day; at 1:30 a.m. for groups containing a child
- Before leaving the observation area, determine the position of the animals to avoid collisions, then gradually increase the speed of the boat.
- Do not position a boat upwind of a cetacean or allow yourself to drift into a non-recommended approach zone

[65] www.newcaledonia.travel/nz/whale-watching-caledonie-charter

[66] https://au.newcaledonia.travel/activities/heavenly-lagoon/whale-watching/

[67] https://operationcetaces.wordpress.com/conservation/protection-en-nouvelle-caledonie/

Figure 4. Examples of guidance provided in New Caledonia



Niue

Visitors can only swim with whales in Niue with an operator licensed to run whale swimming tours. The tours must follow strict guidelines as part of having a license to keep everyone safe: no touching, no feeding, no chasing or harassing the whales in any way. Only six swimmers are allowed in the water with the whales at a time, swimming with mothers and calves for five minutes or less, or swimming with adult whales for up to 30 minutes. Boats must also keep 50 m (160 ft) from the whale, swimming in open water and getting on and off the boat multiple times may be required.

At the beginning of any whale swimming tour, visitors are given a full briefing on how to interact with the whales. Flouting the rules will force the tour operator to stop the whale swim. Some operators will call everyone back onto the boat to go through the entire whale briefing again, and in turn, ruin the swim for all participants.

Niue's Whale Watching Regulations 2016 establish rules for whale watching, i.e. a person being transported, conveyed, conducted, or guided in a vessel or aircraft with a purpose to view or come into contact with marine mammals. Whale watching also includes swimming encounters. Some of the rules are:

- Swimmers will not be allowed to swim with a calf that is too young, i.e. if its dorsal fin is not yet black
- Boats can go as close to the whale as 50 m (165 ft)
- The guide goes in the water before the swimmers
- Enter the water quietly
- Don't scream or call the whales
- Swim at the surface (no diving)
- Swim with mother and calf for only up to five minutes
- Swim with adult whales for up to 30 minutes.[68]

Tonga

In 1998, the Tongan Government, the South Pacific Regional Environment Program (SPREP) and Whales Alive collaborated to draft guidelines for whale watching, which were followed by some operators, and adapted by the Tongan Whale Watching Operators Association to form their own Industry guidelines in 2001. For many years, these were the only guidelines in place, as subsequent draft guidelines produced for the government in 2003 and 2005 failed to be formally ratified and implemented.

In 2008, the Whale watching and Swimming Act formalised the license application process, creating two separate categories of permits for boat-based whale watching and for in-water interactions with the whales and formally designating the Ministry of Tourism as the authority responsible for management of whale watching.

In 2013, a comprehensive set of guidelines was formally ratified by the government, recognising the Ministry of Tourism the authority to issue licenses, to limit the number of licenses issued each year, and to only issue licenses to those operators that can fulfil certain conditions, including: proof that the intended activities will not harm or jeopardise the whales; proof that the operator and its staff have sufficient knowledge and understanding of the whales and their conservation needs; and proof that the operator and its staff have the "required skills and knowledge to provide valued services to customers"

The guidelines set forth clear approach guidelines for boat, helicopter and air-based whale watching as well as in-water interactions. Some of the key stipulations of the guidelines applicable to swimming with whales include:

- Only licensed whale watching providers are allowed to approach whales to within distances of less than 300m, and only swimming providers are permitted to put swimmers in the water with whales.
- No more than four clients plus one trained local guide per certified vessel may be in the water with any one pod of whales at a time.
- Only one certified vessel under license may put swimmers in the water with any one pod of whales.

[68] niuepocketguide.com/the-guide-to-swimming-with-whales-in-niue/

- Each licensed service provider is solely responsible for determining whether the conditions for clients to swim with whales are safe.
- Vessels with swimmers in the water shall fly a special flag provided with their permit.
- If a second service provider arrives, the approaching vessel shall make contact by VHF radio (Channel 74 – low power) and stay outside 100 metres.
- No swimmer shall approach any whale closer than 5 metres.
- No vessel shall approach any whale closer than 10 metres for the purposes of dropping off or picking up any swimmer except in an emergency where the safety of a swimmer is at risk.
- No person shall make any loud or disturbing noise near whales.
- No person shall use Self Contained Underwater Breathing Apparatus (SCUBA) for diving or swimming with whales or use artificial light sources around whales.

The guidelines also include a clear description of the penalties for infractions – ranging from 1,000-5,000 USD for individuals to 10,000-20,000 for operators.

In 2017, inspections on licenses and guide permits were monitored through Ministry of Tourism and on the water operator behaviour were monitored through Ministry of Police.[69.]

Despite these management arrangements, whale swimming in Tonga has faced multiple challenges. In Vava'u there has been an on water death, a shark attack, swapping out of local guides for foreign guides, overloading of boats, more people swimming in the water than recommended, people being left behind in the water to be collected by another company and returned to their original boat, people put into the water in unsafe conditions, manipulation of 3rd party insurances, nonpayment of fees, incorrect information given in applying for a license, skippers and guides passing courses when they have no clear understanding of what is involved.[70] There has been international pressure to reduce the number of licences issued to conduct the activity and significant concern for the welfare of the whales.

Vanuatu

Vanuatu Environmental Science Society (VESS) has developed robust guidelines on how to interact with dugongs. In addition to the Guidelines, there is a Code of Conduct for Tourism Operators Interacting with Dugongs.

Turtle management in Vanuatu is overseen by the Vanuatu Fisheries Department (VFD), based on the Fisheries Act No. 10 of 2014 and Fisheries Regulation Order No. 28 of 2009.

The Department of Tourism requires tourism operators to comply with turtle conservation regulations, requiring coordination with DEPC and VFD.

Best-practice guidelines and a code of conduct for tourism interactions with turtles is currently being developed.

[69] https://wwhandbook.iwc.int/en/case-studies/tonga

[70] https://matangitonga.to/2020/04/27/rise-and-fall-vava-u-whale-watch-industry

Figure 5. Example of guidance provided for dugong engagement in Vanuatu

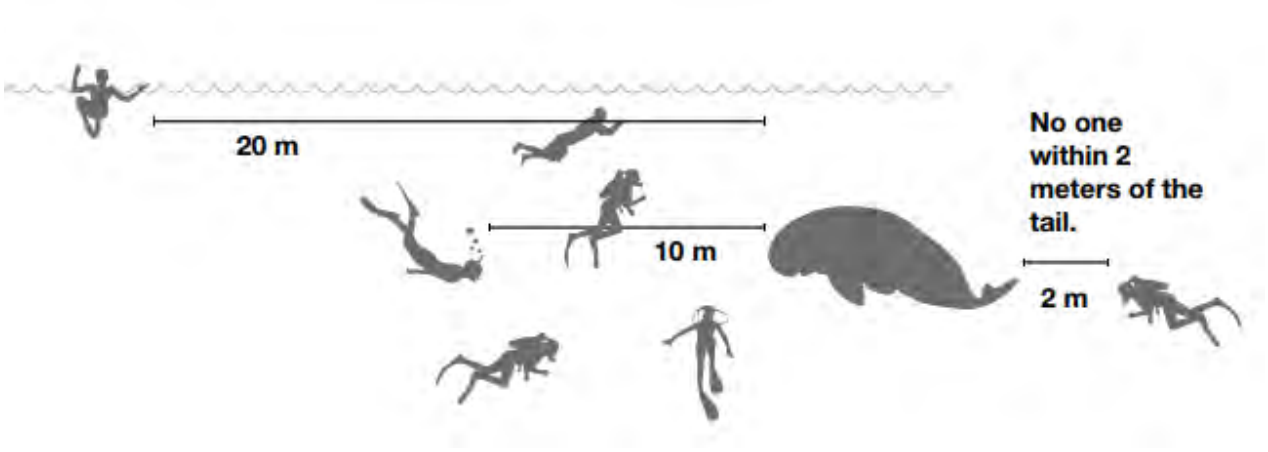


Table 2. National approaches to marine tourism management

COUNTRY	NATIONAL APPROACHES TO MARINE TOURISM MANAGEMENT
AMERICAN SAMOA	• American Samoa Code of Regulations for Environmental Protection • Coastal Zone Management, Marine & Wildlife and associated regulations.
COOK ISLANDS	• Cook Islands Marine Tour Dive Operators Standards and Guidelines (voluntary) • Turtle Tour Safety:[71] How to choose a best practice tour operator • Mana Tiaki Eco Certification • MOU for Turtle Tour Operators
FEDERATED STATES OF MICRONESIA	• No guidelines or regulations found
FIJI	• Maritime (Fiji Small Craft Code) Regulations 2014 • Code of conduct for tourism service providers[72] • Guidance for the tourism industry in Fiji on establishing Marine Conservation Agreements • Fisheries Act 1942 • Endangered & Protected Species Act 2002 & 2017 • Environment Management Act 2005
FRENCH POLYNESIA	• Guidelines for observing dolphins whales in French Polynesia – pt 1 and pt 2 • Regulations for whale watching in French Polynesia • Rules for approaching marine mammals • Ban on feeding sharks • National public ordinance (arrêté) of July 1st, 2011 • Environment code • Maritime affairs regulations • AMP Protected Marine Areas, AMG Managed Marine Areas, Protected Zones in lagoons of most islands

[71] Located at: https://cookislands.travel/corporate/safety-resources/turtle-tour
[72] Located at https://mcttt.gov.fj/division/tourism/code-of-conduct, https://mcttt.gov.fj/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Code-of-Conduct-Final.pdf

COUNTRY	NATIONAL APPROACHES TO MARINE TOURISM MANAGEMENT
KIRIBATI	• Environment Act 1999 • Kiribati Tourism Act 2018
MARSHALL ISLANDS	• Management plans for atolls and islands and Marine Protected Areas
NEW CALEDONIA	• Cetacean Watching Charter and educational training for operators • National public ordinance (arrêté) of July 1st, 2011 • Environment Code
NIUE	• Whale watching regulations 2016 • Compulsory licensing • Niue Sustainable Tourism Guidelines
PALAU	• Palau Pledge • Responsible Tourism Education Act • Palau National Marine Sanctuary Act • Responsible Tourism Framework • Protected Areas Network Act
PAPUA NEW GUINEA	• Maritime Zones Act • Policy on protected areas 2014
SOLOMON IS	• The Environment Act 1998 + Regulations • Protected Areas Act 2010 + Regulations • Fisheries Management Act 2015 • Solomon Islands Maritime Act 2018
TIMOR LESTE	• Cetacean Watching Guidelines
TONGA	• Tonga Whale-Watching and Swimming Act 2008 • Tonga Whale Watching and Swimming Regulations 2013
TUVALU	• Marine Resources Act 2008
VANUATU	• Code of Conduct for Tourism Operators Interacting with Dugongs • Vanuatu Water Recreational and Soft Adventure Operator Standards • Dugong Guidelines Swimming Diving • Guidelines for Operating Watercraft Near Dugongs • Scuba Diving Operator Standards • Tourists Guide for Interacting with Dugongs • Yacht and Boat Tour Operator Standards • Fisheries Act No. 55 of 2005 Sea Turtles. Handling, capture and use of turtles • Review of the Management of Conservation of Sea Turtles in Vanuatu - Guidelines for Turtle Tourism currently under development
WALLIS AND FUTUNA	• National public ordinance (arrêté) of July 1st, 2011

7 Marine Tourism Stakeholder Engagement

Marine Tourism stakeholders across the Pacific region were invited to participate in an online survey and workshops between December 2023 and March 2024 to inform the development of the Pacific Marine tourism Guidelines.

7.1 Marine Tourism Survey

Between December 2023 and January 2024 an online survey was distributed to marine tourism operators, government and associations.

Respondents were asked to provide information relating to marine tourism issues and guidelines for their country, including:

- Existence of Marine Tourism Guidelines
- Regulatory Framework for Marine Tourism
- Top Challenges in Marine Tourism
- Protection of Marine Species
- Concerning Locations for Marine Tourism.

This effort garnered 389 replies, with approximately 120 substantive responses emanating from 19 Pacific nations. Of these respondents, 37% were affiliated with the tourism sector, 20% represented national governments, 16% came from non-governmental organizations, and 12% were private sector consultants.

7.1.1 Key issues

Table 3 summarises the main issues identified through the online survey and the issues that will be considered in the the development of the Marine Tourism Guidelines.

Table 3. Key Issues raised by Marine Tourism Stakeholders – Online Survey

ISSUE	DESCRIPTION
The condition of the aquatic environment generally	**Environmental integrity** • Water quality • Reef quality • Biodiversity Specifically, from climate change impacts, plastics, nonpoint source pollution, fishing, fish nets, sedimentation, oil and diesel, waste disposal, pests.
Minimising impacts on endangered and target species	**Main species of concern** • Whales • Turtles • Sharks • Dolphins **Main reasons for concern** • Lack of knowledge and understanding about impacts of interactions and changing marine environments • Physical impacts of people, vessels, reef changes, aquatic flora and fauna changes, water quality changes
Impacts specifically from the tourism industry	**Pollution** • Littering of tourists and operators • Physical reef impacts from snorkelling and diving • Boats disposing of waste • Boat motors with oil and diesel • Coastal development – mangrove clearing, coastal alterations and pollution **Physical impacts** • Moorings and anchorages • Boat damage • Snorkeler and diver kicking • Construction of jetties and coastal infrastructure **Interaction with marine life** • Interfering with animals through crowding, feeding, duck diving • Handling marine life (for examination and photos) • Harvesting by local guides whilst working
Impacts not specifically from the tourism industry	• Moorings and anchorages • Waste management on shore and in non-tourism vessels • River condition leading to water pollution • Erosion – from urban growth, logging, agriculture, mining. • Sand & seabed mining • Coastal development – mangrove clearing, coastal alterations and pollution • Fishing – illegal and legal. Overharvesting, harvesting at wrong times, population pressures on increasing catches.

ISSUE	DESCRIPTION
Licensing and regulation	• Low barrier to entry and few or no licensing requirements means there are many operators, not all of whom operate well. • No limit on licensing means many people are operating tours. • No conditions on licensing means limited knowledge and skills on safety, interpretation, marine protection. • Unregulated access to species impacting species, all operators and visitor experience. • Need to mandatory code of conduct, strict laws, enforcement and penalties. • Articulating maximum numbers of operators, vessels, visitors. • Management of the activities of high speed and private vessels.
Enforcement and management	• Collective concern around lack of enforcement of rules and regulation • Lack of funding and will for enforcement and management cited as major issue.
Safety	• Cited lack of legislation supporting protection of species and reefs, safe operations, quality operations well managed for optimal visitor experience and a sustainable industry • Particularly in overcrowded areas with many people and many boats in a marine environment • Linked to enforcement – vessel standards, standards of operation, swimming zones, vessel zones, etc.
Monitoring and data	• Need for centralised reporting of sightings, animals in distress, areas to rest • Need for greater understanding of species needs and impacts of interactions • Understanding cumulative impacts on species, reefs and the aquatic environment.
Tourism Planning	• Need to better plan for coordinated tourism management across areas to manage cumulative impacts, providing rest times, set areas for interaction, dispersal to other activities to ensure maximum benefit to community. • Need for better, more robust coastal infrastructure – jetties and boat ramps that are environmentally friendly.
Community benefit/partnerships	• Recognised need for connection with local people, traditional practices, cultural connection • Education needed for guides and locals on best practice • Need for skilled labour • Some expressed concern about a lack of local commitment to maintaining environmental integrity (Samoa, Vanuatu, Marshall Is).

7.1.2 Issues of most concern

The table below indicates the thematic categories arising from the issues mentioned. Note respondents had three issues to identify and as such around 350 issues were identified, with around 500 mentions of separate issues categorised. The issues highlighted in the green and yellow signal the areas of most concern.

MENTIONS	ISSUE
50	Waste management & Ocean pollution – plastics, littering, non point source, fish nets
46	Fishing & harvesting – pressure on resources, overharvesting
43	License, Policy, MPAs and Regulations
42	Endangered species – minimising impacts
35	Community/operator education
34	Environmental degradation – reefs, mangroves, coral
31	Enforcement/management – lack of
30	Environment carrying capacity – overcrowding & use conflicts
24	Coastal & inland development
23	Climate change impacts
21	Environmental protection/ Sustainability
17	Community benefit/partnerships
15	Safety
14	Vessels – commercial boats, Superyachts, sailing, private boats, high speed craft, PWC
9	Tourism planning
9	Coastal infrastructure – e.g. jetties, dredging, sea walls
8	Funds – access and management
8	Moorings & anchorages
8	Monitoring and data
7	Access
5	Skilled labour
4	Local attitudes
4	Cruise
4	Fish/animal feeding
3	Pests – e.g. COTS
2	Coordination of programs
2	Seabed mining

7.2 National Workshops on Marine Conservation:

In March 2024, workshops were conducted across several Pacific nations, including the Cook Islands, Fiji, Tonga, New Caledonia, Vanuatu, and Palau, focused on marine conservation issues and the role of tourism. An additional workshop gathered stakeholders from across the Pacific, aiming to address the challenges and opportunities in marine conservation. The workshop was attended by stakeholders from Fiji, Maldives, New Zealand, Samoa, American Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Federated States of Micronesia.

Key Concerns and Suggestions:

Environmental Challenges: Key issues discussed included poor water quality, climate events leading to reef destruction, and coral bleaching.

Capacity and Conservation: Concerns about certain sites reaching their capacity and the need for better regulation to support both the industry and species conservation were highlighted.

Strengthening Regulations and Enforcement: The need for stronger regulations and the limited capacity of regulatory authorities to enforce marine conservation laws was noted.

Training and Awareness: The need for more training for operators and crew, better communication between governmental departments, and industry involvement in developing marine tourism regulations were emphasised. The importance of industry support in reporting non-compliance was also raised on a number of occasions.

Education and Awareness: The workshops highlighted the potential of marine education for tourists and addressing practices that are not in line with best practices for marine conservation.

Marine Edu-tainment Risks: Activities like fish feeding and turtle touching were identified as potential risks to marine life.

Community and Visitor Engagement: Engaging both visitors and local communities in conservation efforts was seen as essential, alongside the need for more accessible information on preserving coral reef ecosystems and the management of marine tourism activities. Involving local communities in sustainable tourism practices was a raised on several occasions.

Community Initiatives: The effectiveness of community-based marine conservation efforts was raised on a number of occasions and the need for better co-ordination.

The need for clear, unified Coral Planting Guidelines was mentioned on many occasions.

Collaboration and Monitoring: Although various NGOs and operators are actively engaged in marine conservation efforts (e.g., Marine Debris, Coral Reef restoration, Shark Research), there is a lack of coordination. These efforts are often localised and supported by community and industry partners.

Potential for a Community of Practice: The establishment of a community of practice for marine tourism was suggested to enhance collaboration among researchers, NGOs, operators, and governments for protecting marine biodiversity.

In summary, the workshops brought to light the multifaceted challenges and opportunities within marine conservation and tourism in the Pacific, emphasising the need for collaborative efforts, unified guidelines, and enhanced education and training to safeguard marine biodiversity.

8 The Pacific Marine Tourism Guidelines

8.1 A new guideline for the Pacific

The analysis of existing international, regional, and national guidelines and the feedback from marine tourism stakeholder provide useful insights for the development of the Pacific Marine Tourism Guidelines.

The review emphasises the need for clear evidence-based guidelines that cover all major species interactions, vessel management practices, areas where existing guidelines fall short, such as coral reef interactions and broader environmental management practices.

Additionally, the feedback from industry stakeholders points to the need for greater enforcement, community engagement, and coordinated tourism planning to address the cumulative impacts of tourism and ensure the sustainability of marine environments.

These insights are crucial for formulating guidelines that not only protect marine biodiversity but also support sustainable tourism development in the Pacific.

The lack of detailed data on Pacific marine wildlife populations limits our understanding of their ecological roles and conservation needs. This gap affects knowledge of species occurrences, seasonal behaviours, and the reasons for their presence in certain areas, such as breeding or feeding. It is for this reason that the guidelines need to adopt a precautionary approach to marine tourism activities.

They will be designed to support industry stakeholders in protecting marine biodiversity and mitigate the impact of marine tourism on marine species and their habitats in the Pacific. They will aim to minimise risks, ensure the safety of participants, and promote sustainable tourism practices that align with visitor expectations and animal welfare standards.

Specifically tailored for the Pacific Region, the guidelines will encompass all marine tourism activities, including interactions with key marine species during various water activities. They will serve as a resource for improving marine tourism practices and aligning them with international standards, ultimately supporting the sustainable management of marine resources.

The guidelines will be based on globally recognised best practices noting that each country faces unique circumstances, governed by its own set of local regulations and laws or marine tourism. As such, marine tourism operators and national authorities are encouraged to tailor the guidelines to align with the specific conditions, legal framework, and the nature of the tourism experiences offered within their country.

This may involve specifying activity locations, adhering to legal frameworks, enforcing penalties for non-compliance, and identifying areas of ecological significance.

The following principles will be used to frame the Pacific Marine Tourism Guidelines

GENERAL PRINCIPLES FOR SUSTAINABLE MARINE TOURISM IN THE PACIFIC

Tourism practices must not disrupt the natural behaviours, movements, or habitats of marine wildlife.

Interactions with marine wildlife should be dictated by the animals themselves, in terms of both nature and closeness.

The sustainability of marine species populations must not be compromised by tourism activities.

The safety of both observers and wildlife, alongside human health risks, must be prioritized in tourism practices.

Marine tourism should yield social and economic benefits for local communities in a sustainable manner.

Operators in the tourism sector are encouraged to actively engage in and advocate for the conservation of critical marine habitats and species.

An educational aspect should be integrated into all interactions with marine wildlife, enhancing public awareness and support for conservation efforts.

Proceeds from marine tourism should fund the conservation of the species involved, including habitat protection and the continuation of best practices.

Appendix A – Overview of National Ocean Policies in the Pacific Region

COUNTRY	OCEAN POLICY
Fiji	**Republic Of Fiji National Ocean Policy (NOP) 2020 – 2030** • Although Fiji is globally defined as a Small Island Developing State (SIDS), Fiji considers itself to be a "large ocean state". • Fiji's 1,290,000 km^2 EEZ is nearly 70 times larger than its landmass, which consists of an archipelago of over 300 islands. • The Marine Spaces Act 1977 defines Fiji's internal waters, archipelagic waters, territorial seas, and EEZ. • Fiji has had a long history of marine resource management led to the establishment of the globally recognised Fiji Locally Managed Marine Area (FLMMA) Network which has since then adopted and employed this traditional tool of management and merged it with science and research to adapt and formalise it into more than 460 traditionally managed inshore areas[7]. • The private sector has played an instrumental role protecting Fiji's natural biodiversity. The most formalised arrangements include businesses entering into conservation leases (land), and informal or traditionally established marine protected or managed areas. Examples include the Upper Navua Conservation Area, Namena Marine Reserve, and Vatu-i-Ra Conservation Park. A 2017 study identified 56 tourism operators committed, or becoming involved, in some form of marine conservation agreement with local communities, largely to set up temporary or permanent no-fishing zones or marine protected areas. Tourism-related marine conservation agreements have contributed an estimated 266.25 square kilometres of marine protection over deep water and offshore reefs, as well as shallow fringing reefs and slopes in recent years. • The vision of the NOP is to provide for "a healthy ocean that sustains the livelihoods and aspirations of current and future generations of Fiji." The mission of the NOP is "to secure and sustainably manage all of Fiji's ocean and marine resources." • Government is steadily strengthening legislation and policy and committing resources to ensure a healthy and productive ocean. At its core, this Policy lays out Fiji's commitment to the 100 percent sustainable management of its ocean and its designation of 30 percent marine protected areas by 2030. • The Ministry of Commerce, Trade, Tourism and Transport is indicated as a partner in the governance structure of the National Ocean Policy. • The following tourism related outputs are highlighted within the policy: • Output 5.2 2 Enhance opportunities for mitigating or reducing effects on the ocean of new developments and existing activities, including impacts from tourism, waterways, coastal and land-based sources.
PNG	**National Oceans Policy of Papua New Guinea 2020 – 2030** • This is the first National Oceans Policy for PNG • PNG aims to increase the economic benefits from the sustainable use of marine resources, including through sustainable management of fisheries, aquaculture, and tourism. • The goal of the NOP is to sustainably develop and manage PNG's marine resources through an integrated ocean management system within its national jurisdiction as well as in areas beyond the country's national jurisdiction, and at the same time, facilitate for cooperation and collaboration in areas beyond PNG's national jurisdiction.

COUNTRY	OCEAN POLICY
Solomon Islands	**Solomon Islands National Ocean Policy November 2018** • The policy is a strategic roadmap for integrated ocean management and governance. • The Solomon Islands as a large ocean state has made advances in ocean resources management, including managing its tuna fisheries and policing its exclusive economic zone. However, many challenges remain including the degradation of the ocean environment, unsustainable harvesting of some marine resources, increase in competing uses and claims over the ocean, and emerging challenges such as climate change and ocean acidification. • Ocean12 is the national steering committee for the Solomon Islands' integrated ocean governance efforts. The Ocean12 is a Permanent-Secretary-level steering committee co-chaired by the Ministries of Fisheries and Marine Resources, of Environment, Climate Change, Disaster Management & Meteorology, of Foreign Affairs and External Trade and the Office of the Prime Minister and Cabinet. In total it comprises of the twelve Ministries with the most direct influence in the use and management of the Solomon Islands' Ocean, including the Ministry of Tourism. • The SI Ocean Policy supports key sectoral aims including the Solomon Islands National Tourism Strategy 2015. Specifically, the policy aims to support the formalisation and sustainable management of marine and land based protected areas.
Vanuatu	• Protected areas in Vanuatu are predominantly supported by Community Conservation Areas (CCAs) registered through the Environmental Protection and Conservation Act [Cap 283]. Custom tabu areas and Local Marine Management Areas (LMMAs) are also important mechanisms that can be supported by the tourism sector. • Active management of protected areas and aiding custom landowners to effectively manage the conservation of key ecological sites is an opportunity for Vanuatu to work towards achieving the National Sustainable Development targets. • Vanuatu's National Ocean Policy 2016 • Vanuatu is the first country in the region to have an integrated, holistic Ocean Policy. This Policy allows for cross-sectoral coordination and collaboration to maintain and enhance the cultural, social and economic values that we, the people of Vanuatu, derive from our ocean. • It states the marine tourism sector has now become the largest single maritime economic activity in Vanuatu. A range of economic activities such as yachting, boating and cruising are specific to marine tourism. • The tourism policy, together with initiatives taken in the National Ocean Policy, such as integrated management, maritime spatial planning, promoting marine heritage, will provide a basis to support a sustainable and competitive marine tourism sector for Vanuatu. • Objective 6.3.is to facilitate the ecologically sustainable growth of the marine tourism sector in Vanuatu, whilst providing further employment opportunities. Policy actions include: – 6.3.1.1 is to establish and implement clear, coordinated institutional mechanisms for integrated marine management across relevant sectors such as fisheries, tourism, transport, mining and environment including, where appropriate, partnerships between the different levels of government, private sector and civil society and supporting traditional management systems. – 6.3.1.2 Promote and support programmes and actions to direct and stimulate the development of tourist activities associated with protecting and learning about the marine environment and coastal zone.

COUNTRY	OCEAN POLICY
	– 6.3.1.3 Facilitate the establishment of community-based tourism ensuring that the local community has substantial control over, and is involved in the development of, tourism in an area and that a major proportion of the benefits accrued remain within the community. – 6.3.2.5 The Government will work with tour operators and their suppliers to determine the level of contributions that should be made towards local communities in the management of marine protected areas and/or tabu areas. Contributions can come from various sources, for example: – entrance fees charged to visitors for access to MPAs; – user fees charged to visitors undertaking specified activities, or for use of specified facilities (e.g. fishing, diving, boating); – concessions and lease contracts between MPAs and businesses operating within the area – investment and sponsoring of specific facilities by the tourism industry; and/or – offering opportunities to visitors to support MPAs through voluntary donations.
Palau	• **The Palau National Marine Sanctuary Act** is a landmark legislation that designates 80% of Palau's maritime territory as a Marine Sanctuary. • The Minister of Natural Resources, Environment, and Tourism (MNRET), Palau International Coral Reef Center (PICRC), and Ministry of Justice share responsibility for implementing the Act. • A Climate Resilient Marine Spatial Planning project is currently underway to support the Republic of Palau government to develop a marine spatial plans (MSP) informed by the best scientific information available, including climate change scenarios, paving the way to a sustainable, inclusive, and resilient ocean-based economic development.
Cook Islands	**Marae Moana Policy 2016-2020** • Marae Moana is a multiple-use marine park which extends over the entire Exclusive Economic Zone of the Cook Islands, an area of 1.9 million square kilometres. It is currently the largest commitment by a single country for integrated management and conservation from ridge to reef and from reef to ocean. Marae Moana was legally designated on 12th July 2017 by the Marae Moana Act 2017 which has the primary purpose of protecting and conserving the" ecological, biodiversity and heritage values of the Cook Islands marine environment." • The purpose of this policy is to conserve biodiversity and natural assets in the oceans, reefs and islands while ensuring sustainable development of economic growth interests. • The policy contains a section on marine tourism development with the objective being to harness opportunities in the tourism industry for optimum economic use of Marae Moana, whilst ensuring ecological sustainability and social development. • It also states that maritime safety practices for tourism operators and other users within the Marae Moana shall be improved.
Niue	**Niue Ocean Wide (NOW) Trust** • Niue has made progressive ocean conservation and sustainable development commitments over the last decade, culminating in 2021 and 2022 when the country ensured legal protections for its entire exclusive economic zone. The Niue Nukutuluea Multiple-Use Marine Park safeguards 100 percent of its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ and Territorial seas), building on legislation passed in 2020 to fully protect 40 percent as a no-take Large Scale Marine Protected Area (Niue Mona Mahu). • This designation of the Nukutuluea Multiple-Use Marine Park and Moana Mahu Large-scale Marine Protected Area (MPA) was widely endorsed by Niue's government, people, and partners[8].

COUNTRY	OCEAN POLICY
	Through the Niue Ocean Wide (NOW) Trust, direct donations, and the innovative 'Ocean Conservation Commitment' (OCC) sponsorships, Niue hopes to secure sustainable sponsorship for building a climate resilient, sustainable blue economy that reinforces long term ocean conservation.
Samoa	**Samoa Ocean Strategy 2020–2030** • This Strategy encompasses the many uses and values derived from Samoa's ocean, including subsistence and commercial fishing, marine transport, recreation and eco-tourism, as well as addresses problems that threaten the health and prosperity of Samoa's ocean. • This integrated policy framework, the first of its kind, will support Samoan stakeholders to effectively manage, conserve and ensure longstanding economic, subsistence and cultural benefits from our ocean into the future. • Vision: Samoa's ocean remains healthy and abundant through integrated management, robust coordination, and respectful use and stewardship that supports cultural, social and economic opportunities for Samoa's people. The policy aims to foster a longer-term integrated vision to guide the sustainable and integrated management of Samoa's ocean and its resources. One of the objectives within this strategy states is that by 2025, the population status of whales, sharks, dolphins, mantas, marine turtles and seabirds is identified and feasibility for ecotourism explored, with the goal being that by 2030, monitoring systems to support sustainable management of migratory species are established and their interaction with humans is regulated through a licensing system.
Tonga	**Fisheries Management Act 2002** • There are obligations for protecting whales under the Fisheries Management Act 2002. Oceans 7 Process[9] • The Oceans 7 working group is (Tonga's marine spatial planning technical working group), and is comprised of seven ministries, including tourism. • The working group's vision is for ecologically sustainable social and economic development of Tonga's ocean for the benefit of all Tongans. Tonga Ocean Management Plan • The country of Tonga comprises 98 percent ocean. • In 2017 the Tongan government approved the Tonga Ocean Management Plan, a milestone in the work to ensure sustainable management of the country's exclusive economic zone (EEZ). The plan covers the management of the 700,000 km^2 EEZ, its resources and activities. • The Ministry of Internal Affairs, Infrastructure, Tourism, Marine and Ports is one of the implementing partners.
Federated States of Micronesia	• The Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) is comprised of 4 states (Yap, Chuuk, Pohnpei, and Kosrae) and includes 607 islands spread over 1 million mi^2 of the western Pacific Ocean. Its coral reefs, estimated at 14,517 km^2 are home to nearly 1000 species of fish and over 350 hard species of coral. • FSM has committed to achieving the goals of the Micronesia Challenge (MC), an ambitious initiative by the jurisdictions of Micronesia to effectively conserve at least 30% of their near shore marine resources and 20% of their terrestrial resources by 2020. • To begin to address this challenge a team comprised of representatives from the FSM government, the Micronesia Conservation Trust, and TNC, has been working with State government and local conservation NGOs to raise awareness and build support for protected areas.

COUNTRY	OCEAN POLICY
New Caledonia / French Polynesia	**French National Strategy for Protected Areas 2030** • The national strategy for protected areas presents ambitions and an action programme for 2030 and spans all protected areas and natural land and marine heritage in metropolitan France and its overseas territories. • By 2022, this strategy aims to cover at least 30% of the national land territory (metropolitan and overseas territories) and marine waters under jurisdiction or sovereignty with protected areas and 10% under high-level protection.
Guam	**Marine Conservation Plan Guam, 2011** • The plan lists eight program objectives covering a diverse range of fishery conservation and management issues and initiatives. For each objective, strategies that are designed to specifically to meet the objective are identified. Only two of the objectives are loosely related to tourism: • Develop and implement effective surveillance and enforcement mechanisms, promote acceptance and practice of the marine conservation plan by all facets of the fishing community and general public. • Encourage marine conservation education.
Marshall Islands	**Marshall Islands Marine Resources Authority Strategic Plan 2019-2023** • The Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI) is made up of 29 coral atolls and five single islands in the equatorial and tropical Pacific Ocean between 2° and 17°N latitude and 157° and 175°E longitude. It has an exclusive economic zone (EEZ) of about 2,131,000 km^2 with a land area of about 181 km^2 making it the fourth largest EEZ amongst the other Pacific Islands Countries (excluding the Territories) and the 19th largest EEZ in the world. • About half of its EEZ borders international waters to the north and the other half borders three other Pacific Island nations (Federated States of Micronesia, Nauru and Republic of Kiribati) to the south. • The Marshall Islands Marine Resources Authority (MIMRA) is the agency responsible for managing the fisheries resources for RMI. Its mandate covers both the inshore coastal resources and the offshore fishery resources in the 200 nautical mile Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) as well as any RMI flagged vessels fishing outside the RMI EEZ. • Strategic Goal 2 states that MIMRA will conserve and manage the aquatic resources for current and future generations in RMI. There is no mention of tourism in this plan. RMI National Environment Management Strategy 2017–2022 • Theme three is centred on Marine, with a number of relevant strategies related to management of the marine environment and protection of marine species. • There is no mention of tourism in this plan. • Implementation Plan for the National Guiding Principles to Sustain and be Sustained by Our Ocean and Coral Reefs 2018. • The National Oceans Symposium Implementation Plan (NOS IP) sets out actions to be taken by authorities in the Republic of the Marshall Islands in response to the outcomes of RMI's 1st National Oceans Symposium (3-5 April 2017) as endorsed by the participants and representatives of Local Governments. The Plan identifies the agencies responsible for actions under the four themes of the Symposium (Sustainable Fisheries, Climate Change, Marine Pollution, and Coral Reefs and Marine Protected Areas).

COUNTRY	OCEAN POLICY
	Action 3.11 states: Promote a "culture of compliance" amongst local communities and visitors such that there is a strong willingness to respect and protect RMI waters. Strategies to support implementation include producing awareness material and educate public and visitors on environmental/fisheries rules and compliance and initiating enforcement action for those failing to comply with the rules.
Tokelau	Tokelau has begun preparing its Blue Economy Roadmap for five years from 2025 to enhance the governance, management and protection of its marine ecosystem and ocean resources. The sustainable atoll ecosystems and ocean management strategy will be completed by 2024. This will serve as a Sustainable Blue Economy Strategy for Tokelau.
Wallis and Futuna	None identified
Tuvalu	At present, Tuvalu does not have a national ocean policy.
American Samoa	• No national ocean policy. • The National Marine Sanctuary of American Samoa is one of 14 federally designated underwater areas protected by NOAA's Office of National Marine Sanctuaries • The sanctuary is comprised of six protected areas, covering 13,581 square miles of near shore coral reef and offshore open ocean waters across the Samoa Archipelago.
Kiribati	• Kiribati is a nation of ocean stretching over an area of more than 3.5 million km^2 across the central Pacific Ocean, forming one of the biggest Exclusive Economic Zones, and encompassing some of the world's most diverse and productive ecosystems. • At present, there is no national ocean policy. In 2017, the interim inter-ministerial ocean committee was formed, through the Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources Development and Ministry of Environment, Lands and Agricultural Development, to prepare for the United Nations Ocean Conference and discuss marine spatial planning efforts in Tarawa and Kiritimati Islands. • The Ministry of tourism is on this committee. • The Government is now moving into the direction of initiating marine spatial planning processes in Tarawa, Kiritimati Island and other Line Islands, as well as finalising steps for institutionalising functional ocean governance committees and policy instruments to oversee broad range of issues concerning EEZ of Kiribati. **Kiribati National Fisheries Policy 2013–2025** • The Kiribati National Fisheries Policy (KNFP) aims to portray short to medium and long-term strategic objectives that will enhance responsible fisheries with emphasis on the need to support, improve and sustain the people's livelihood, food security and economic growth today and for future generations. **Kiribati National Coastal Policy—2016** • This policy aims to promote and safeguard the natural protective shorelines of Kiribati to reduce coastal vulnerability and ensure long term coastal security for the people of Kiribati.

Appendix B – Overview of Marine Tourism Strategies and Polices in the Pacific Region

COUNTRY	MARINE TOURISM RESOURCES	TOURISM STRATEGIES, POLICIES AND PLANS
FIJI	• 332 islands • Coral reefs (Soft and hard corals) • 1,200 species of fish and a dozen species of whales and dolphins	**Fiji National Sustainable Tourism Framework, Phase A: Setting A Strategic Foundation** • The Fiji Government, through the Ministry of Tourism and Civil Aviation (MTCA), is developing a 10-year National Sustainable Tourism Framework (NSTF) that shares a collective vision for a sustainable Fijian tourism sector. • The final framework will articulate Fiji's tourism sector stakeholders aspirations for sustainable development, including the need to protect Fiji's unique biodiversity and act as responsible stewards of the marine and terrestrial environment, as well as playing its part in reducing carbon emissions and addressing climate and disaster risks. • Some of the key messages in the report prepared to support preparation of the framework are to: • Promote partnerships between tourism operators and communities to support conservation efforts through conservation leases (land), and informal or traditionally established marine managed areas • Integrate conservation, environmental and NGOs to the tourism value chain and promote public-private partnerships with tourism operators. • Engage visitors to participate in sustainability measures as part of their experience in destination. • Incorporate stewardship while safeguarding indigenous principles and values • Focus on high-value, low-impact markets.
FRENCH POLYNESIA	• There are 118 islands in French Polynesia. • French Polynesia has more than 6000 sq km of coral reefs including barrier reefs and fringing reefs encircling the more than 80 atolls.	• Not sourced

COUNTRY	MARINE TOURISM RESOURCES	TOURISM STRATEGIES, POLICIES AND PLANS
	• French Polynesia is home to several species of dolphin, including the spinner dolphin, spotted dolphin and bottlenose dolphin. • French Polynesia is a whale sanctuary. • Common turtle species found here are green turtles, hawksbill sea turtles and loggerhead sea turtles.	
COOK ISLANDS	• South cook (9 islands): volcanos and atolls • North cook (6 islands) atoll islands • Muri Beach and other beaches at Rarotonga Island • Aitutaki is a triangular-shaped reef surrounding a bright turquoise lagoon containing 15 small motus (islets).	• **Cook Islands Sustainable Tourism Development Policy Framework and Goals** • This Sustainable Tourism Development Policy Framework (STDPF) presents policies and related indicators that can inform a future National Tourism Strategy for the Cook Islands. • The overarching vision for the STDPF is drawn from Cook Islands Tourism: Tourism advances the well-being of resident Cook Islanders in a way that is socially acceptable, economically viable and environmentally sustainable. The Policy Framework is influenced by and draws on the SPTO Regional Tourism Strategy, the Cook Island's National Sustainable Development Plan and current global best practice in sustainable indicator design • **Kaveinga Manava Turoto o te Ipukarea – Cook Islands Tourism Development Strategy (CITDS)** • The Cook Islands Tourism Development Strategy (CITDS) aims to provide a roadmap towards a more regenerative approach to tourism and destination development in the Cook Islands. • The vision states "Tourism advances the well-being of resident Cook Islanders in a way that is socially acceptable, economically viable and environmentally sustainable. • This regenerative approach emphasises leveraging the power of the wider visitor economy to improve the holistic well-being of the host community and environment across the '4 C's of well-being': community, culture, conservation, and commerce. • The strategy indicates there are 44 marine tours operating in the Cook Islands. • **Cook Islands Quality Assured Program/ Mana Tiaki Certification Program**

COUNTRY	MARINE TOURISM RESOURCES	TOURISM STRATEGIES, POLICIES AND PLANS
		• These programs affirm that accredited businesses offer a quality tourism product by meeting a set of minimum standards and guidelines. The Mana Tiaki Certification provides evidence that a business is not only a quality tourism product, but also committed to preserving the precious Cook Islands. Accreditation through this program is based on meeting a set of standards and guidelines.
PALAU	• Palau is an archipelago of over 576 islands in the western tropical Pacific Ocean. Its rich marine biota includes approximately 400 species of hard corals, 300 species of soft corals, 1400 species of reef fishes, and the world's most isolated colony of dugongs and Micronesia's only saltwater crocodiles. • The Palau National Marine Sanctuary established on 1 January 2020 is one of the world's largest protected areas of ocean, covering over 80% of Palau's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). This marine paradise extends across approximately 500,000 square kilometres. • Palau was the first in the world to declare its entire exclusive economic zone a sanctuary for sharks. • Palau is commonly referred to as one of the seven underwater wonders of the world. • Palau is famous for its pristine reefs, biodiversity, caverns, caves, drop offs, varieties of sharks, huge schools of fish, and exhilarating drift dives. • Palau is consistently rated among the top places for scuba diving in the world, with many sites renowned for their natural interest. • World war II relics	• Palau has adopted responsible tourism as a future-proofing framework • A range of measures to support responsible tourism have been introduced: • The Palau Pristine Paradise Environmental Fee (PPEF) was introduced in January 2018 – replacing the previous $50 exit fee – with airlines responsible for collecting the $100 fee from visitors flying to Palau. • The Plastic Bag Use Reduction Law bans retail distribution of plastic bags effective January 1, 2020 • The Responsible Tourism Education Act of 2018 requires businesses to educate visitors on tourism policies, encourages use of reusable alternatives to single use plastics or Styrofoam, and bans reef toxic sunscreen. • In December 2017, Palau became the first nation to make visitors consider the environmental and social impact they have on their destination through the introduction of the Palau Pledge. As part of the pledge, visitors are discouraged from collecting marine life souvenirs (such as shells and coral) or feeding sea life, avoiding treading upon or touching coral, respecting local customs and people, and refraining from littering. • Palau has regulations governing tour operators which address elements such as business professionalism and customer satisfaction, environmental and safety briefings, safety practices for snorkelling and diving, code of conduct to minimise environmental impact during tours, environmental responsibility, safety practices • Sunscreen regulations protect Palau pristine marine environment from the harmful effects of reef-toxic sunscreen.

COUNTRY	MARINE TOURISM RESOURCES	TOURISM STRATEGIES, POLICIES AND PLANS
NEW CALEDONIA	• Unique archipelago protected by the world's largest lagoon – six parts of New Caledonia's lagoon are listed on the UNESCO World Heritage, home to some of the most incredible snorkelling spots in the world.	• Not sourced
PNG	• Huge diversity of dive sites, including barrier reefs, coral walls (drop off), coral gardens, patch reefs, fringing reefs, seagrass beds, coral atolls, and wreck dive sites (ships, aircraft and submarines) • This destination is renowned for its biodiversity – the Coral Triangle, where Papua New Guinea is located, is one of the most diverse marine ecosystems in the world.	• **Papua New Guinea Tourism Sector Development Plan 2022-2026** • The vision for PNG is to revive and grow a resilient, inclusive and sustainable tourism sector in Papua New Guinea. • Key goals of relevance: • To strengthen tourism regulations and standards with the aim of improving compliance, service and product quality, and maintaining a high level of hospitality standards. • Conserving PNGs national resources and environment for the collective benefit of all and future generations. • The plan notes that there has been a weak approach to prioritising establishing industry regulations, certification and licensing and accreditation. Targeting those areas by having proper regulations and standards will enable the sector to perform its functions effectively, and to service both the industry and the tourists with high standards of service and care in the long term
SAMOA	• Dolphins, whales, porpoises, and turtles are regular visitors to the surrounding waters and the reefs around the islands are home to some 900 fish species and over 200 varieties of coral.	• **Samoa Tourism Sector Plan 2022-2027** • The STSP presents the direction for the sustainable development and recovery of the tourism Sector over a five year period, aligned to national development goals. • The overarching goal for the Sector is for Samoa to be a better, more sustainable and resilient tourism destination with the aim of surviving and then thriving post COVID19 pandemic. • It is underpinned by six strategic outcomes with actions that will be implemented through a pragmatic approach in line with current issues and emerging challenges.

COUNTRY	MARINE TOURISM RESOURCES	TOURISM STRATEGIES, POLICIES AND PLANS
		• The plan indicates that Sector Stakeholder Roles and Responsibilities are to invest in awareness information for visitors that promotes care for the environment and communities & health and safety measures/insurance.
VANUATU	• Dugong, Shark Feeding	**Sustainable Tourism Policy 2019-2030** Vision: To protect and celebrate Vanuatu's unique environment, culture, kastom and people through sustainable and responsible tourism. Goals: To develop and manage a sustainable and responsible tourism industry Visitors connect with Vanuatu's environment, culture and its people Sustainable and responsible tourism products and services developed, supported and marketed to attract responsible high-value tourists Tourism that enhances, conserves and protects the environment and cultural resources of Vanuatu Sustainable and responsible tourism brings improved income and well-being for Vanuatu and its people. **Sustainable Tourism Strategy 2021 -2025 –** The Vanuatu Sustainable Tourism Strategy (2021-2025) which provides the actions needed to implement the Vanuatu Sustainable Tourism Policy (2019-2030). Theme 4 of the strategy is Sustainability: through Sustainable Tourism Certification, Investment and Ni Vanuatu Entrepreneurship.
AMERICAN SAMOA	• National Marine Sanctuary of American Samoa protects extensive coral reefs, including some of the oldest and largest Porites coral heads in the world, along with deep-water reefs, hydrothermal vent communities, and rare marine archaeological resources.	• Not sourced

COUNTRY	MARINE TOURISM RESOURCES	TOURISM STRATEGIES, POLICIES AND PLANS
FEDERATED STATES OF MICRONESIA	• 607 small islands (65 are inhabited), situated in the Caroline Islands archipelago, with a land area of 700 square km across 2.6 million square km of ocean. • FSM is home to 4% of the world's coral reefs and 480 species of coral – representing 60% of all known species, the best pelagic fisheries in the world, and dense tropical forests—as well as ancient culture, traditions, and legends[73]	• Sustainable, eco-friendly tourism is a priority for the Government of the FSM. In the State of Environment Report 2018, the government advocates for a balance between tourism growth and environmental protection • Each state has its own government, legislature, language, and identity, creating a significant challenge for tourism development.
SOLOMON ISLANDS	• The Solomon region's marine ecosystems are some of the most diverse and intact on earth. They have been identified as part of the 'Coral Triangle', which is an area of the highest biodiversity of coral and fish species on the planet. • There are 30 species of mangrove, 10 species of seagrass, 494 species of coral, 1159 species of reef fish, 10 species of whales and dolphins, 10 species of sharks and 5 species of turtles. • One of the world's top diving destinations.	**Solomon Islands National Tourism Development Strategy 2015 – 2019** • The tourism sector in the Solomon Islands is small and undeveloped compared to many other Pacific countries. • Vision: Enhancing Economic Growth through Sustainable Tourism Development for a Better Solomon Islands • A focus on small scale tourism based on niche markets is required • Further development of Marine Protected Areas is considered to be a critical component of supporting marine product development, particularly diving, in the future as well as existing asset protection. • Designated land and marine based Protected Areas should also be incorporated into any future Provincial Tourism Plans.
NIUE	• A small island of volcanic origin; one of the largest coral islands in the world • Array of marine life includes turtles, dolphins, whales and a variety of fish	• **Niue National Strategic Plan 2016–2026**[74] • The plan states the tourism industry will continue to flourish and with ancillary activities will be the major contributor to the economy." The plan also prioritises sustainability and suggests "Niue's unique unspoiled and pristine coastal environment will be internationally recognised as a

[73] https://pacificpsdi.org/assets/Uploads/PSDI-TourismSnapshot-FSM.pdf

[74] https://www.pacificpsdi.org/assets/Uploads/PSDI-TourismSnapshot-NIU2.pdf

COUNTRY	MARINE TOURISM RESOURCES	TOURISM STRATEGIES, POLICIES AND PLANS
		beacon for its sustainable and responsible environmental practices and this is how the Niuean environment will be protected. • Niue Experience Development Strategy[75] aims to deliver environmental conservation improvements, develop new infrastructure sensitive to the island's land and seascape, and position Niue as an unspoiled and unique island environment. • Niue Responsible Tourism Policy[76] • The Niue Responsible Tourism Policy (Niue Tourism Office 2017) is designed to guide the operation of the tourism industry and support best practice environmental initiative.
TONGA	• Volcanic islands rising directly from the ocean floor, and seismically uplifted coral limestone islands overlaying an older volcanic base. • Marine life: sea turtles, manta rays, tuna, marlin and wahoo, whale sharks.	**Whale Watching and Swimming Act and Regulations** • Tonga's Whale Watching and Swimming Act 2009, and Whale Watching Regulation 2013 relate to the protection of humpback whales and other marine mammals targeted by the tourism industry. The Whale Watching Act offers a level of control over whale watching tourism. **Tonga Tourism Roadmap 2018-2023** • The Tonga Tourism Sector Roadmap 2018-2023 is Tonga's current tourism sector strategy. It outlines the vision that "tourism will be the key driver of Tonga's sustainable future economic growth, enhancing our unique culture and heritage, supporting environmental protection and increasing wealth for all Tongans." Growth targets are to be achieved through improved marketing, investment, product development, infrastructure, environmental management, human resource development, and sector coordination.
TUVALU	• Funafuti Conservation Area: five islets along the western side of the atoll; native broadleaf forest and coral sand beaches home to coconut crabs, nesting seabirds, and green turtles.	**Tuvalu Sustainable Tourism Policy 2022–2032** • Vision – By 2032, Tuvaluans will benefit from tourism that is environmentally sustainable, economically viable and socially acceptable to enhance te olaga filemu and wellbeing of Tuvaluans and Visitors. The policy guides the planning and development of tourism Tuvalu for the next 10 years.

[75] Ibid
[76] Ibid

COUNTRY	MARINE TOURISM RESOURCES	TOURISM STRATEGIES, POLICIES AND PLANS
		• Goal 1: Environment Sustainability and Resilience • Tourism protects and sustains the natural environment while recognising the imminent threat of climate change. • Goal 6: Sustainable Experiences and Products • Sustainable tourism experiences and products are created, developed, and promoted to attract responsible visitors.
GUAM	• Guam's nearshore environment includes fringing, patch, submerged, and barrier reefs, as well as offshore banks that total approximately 69 square km; an additional 110 square km of coral reef exist beyond the three-mile federal offshore limits. • Five marine preserves Pati Point Preserve, Tumon Bay Preserve, Piti Bomb Holes Preserve, Sasa Bay Preserve, and the Achang Reef Flat Preserve—that protect coral reef habitats and aquatic animals, as well as help restore reef fish stocks for future generations.	**Guam Tourism 2020 Plan** • Although the vision for Guam is to grow a sustainable tourism industry that generates economic opportunities and enhances the quality of life for all residents protecting and respecting the islands heritage, cultural and natural and making glam a better place to live work and visit, there are no strategies that reflect this beyond "remaining mindful of environmental sustainability while growing arrivals to Guam.
WALLIS AND FUTUNA	• Futuna and Alofi are mountainous volcanic islands surrounded by a fringing reef of 50 to 100 meters. • Wallis, or 'Uvea in the local language, is surrounded by a lagoon dotted with several uninhabited islets. • Hawksbill turtles, leopard rays, sharks, parrots, napoleon wrasse, eels of the underwater dunes, anemones, gorgonians and beautiful corals • Whales and dolphins	• Not sourced
KIRIBATI	• The oceanic territory of Kiribati is more than 4,000 times larger than its land territory. With an	• **Sustainable Tourism Kiribati Towards 2036**

COUNTRY	MARINE TOURISM RESOURCES	TOURISM STRATEGIES, POLICIES AND PLANS
	exclusive economic zone (EEZ) of 3.55 million km^2, Kiribati is a large ocean state. • Kiribati contains many marine ecosystems, from globally significant coral reefs to mangroves, seagrass areas, seamounts and deep-sea trenches supporting more than 500 fish species, including sharks and rays, as well as whales, dolphins and sea turtles. • Kiribati's marine environment, including its beaches and historical sites, is ideal for game fishing, diving, snorkelling, seabird watching and surfing.	• The Kiribati Sustainable Tourism Development Policy Framework (KSTDPF) frames Kiribati's sustainable tourism goals with the aim to achieve a suitable balance between the environmental, economic, and socio-cultural impacts of tourism to guarantee the long-term sustainability of tourism in Kiribati. • The KSTDPF is based on the following seven (7) sustainable tourism goals: • Goal 1: Tourism must protect natural environment. • Goal 2: Tourism to preserve cultural and historical heritage. • Goal 3: Tourism will promote community & social well-being. • Goal 4: Tourism guarantees visitor satisfaction, health, and safety. • Goal 5: Tourism will contribute to national economic prosperity. • Goal 6: Tourism should Inspire Green Entrepreneurship • Goal 7: Tourism will influence effective leadership. • Key related actions in the framework under Goal 1 include: • Establishing a tourism waste disposal and recycling program. • Applying Environment Impact Assessments to all new tourism development. • Encourage a water used and conservation system for all tourism business operations based on the Kiribati National Water Resources Policy. • Supporting the conservation of marine life and resources within areas of operation. • Protecting vulnerable birds and wildlife. • Using current polices and legislations such as the Kiribati National Fisheries Policy, Coastal Fisheries Regulation and the Coastal Fisheries Roadmap, tourism operators (private or community) will commit to adhere to all marine protection and conservation measures. • A working group made up of representatives of PIPA, Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources Development (MFMRD), Ministry of Justice (MOJ)Marine conservationists, Island councils and

COUNTRY	MARINE TOURISM RESOURCES	TOURISM STRATEGIES, POLICIES AND PLANS
		tourism operators will develop a tourism marine conservation best practice and carrying capacity guidelines and to monitor compliance to these guidelines. • Key related actions in the framework under Goal 6 include: • Incorporate a Sustainable Tourism Kiribati label into the Mauri Mark Accreditation Program • Develop a Kiribati Green Tourism Business Toolkit.
TIMOR LESTE	• Abundant marine life with colourful hard and soft corals as well as a vivid array of reef fish. • Open water species such as tuna and mackerel are encountered along with reef and whale sharks, manta rays, turtles and the more elusive dugongs. • Twenty-five species of whales and dolphins frequent these waters — among the highest records of cetaceans in the world. • Marine habitats are among the most unique on the planet with many rare and near extinct aquatic species identified.	**Timor-Leste National Tourism Policy** • An overarching policy with broad principles set out for the development of the country's tourism sector in the period up to 2030. It sets a framework for placing tourism at the core of national socio-economic expansion and calls on all stakeholders to coordinate, collaborate and partner in order to earn foreign exchange, create jobs and alleviate poverty. • Timor-Leste tourism aims to be recognised for valuing and protecting the natural environment and its unique cultural heritage. However, with the pressures of development and a weak regulatory framework, these environments are at risk. While policies are in place to preserve the natural environment, there are gaps in implementation and enforcement. • Enacting legislation that affords full protection for the natural and built environment that ensures sustainable development and supports community based tourism ventures is a goal for Timor Leste. • Marine tourism is considered a high growth potential market – marine protected areas are in the early stages of development. • The government is aiming to conserve and preserve the natural environment and where possible create and enforce marine protected areas and place sustainable and community-based ecotourism at the forefront of the tourism offer.

Appendix C – Existing Marine Tourism Guidelines by Species (see Separate Document)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