



IORA Whale & Dolphin Watching Workshop Colombo, Sri Lanka, 24-26 February 2016

The Australian Departments of Environment and Foreign Affairs and Trade and the Sri Lankan Ministry of Foreign Affairs, together with the IORA Secretariat, the Sri Lankan Institute of Policy Studies and Murdoch University's Cetacean Research Unit held a workshop entitled 'Building Sustainable Whale and Dolphin Watching Tourism in the Indian Ocean Region' from 24-26 February 2016 in Colombo, Sri Lanka.

The Sri Lankan Minister for Sustainable Development and Wildlife, the Hon. Mr Gamini Jayawickrama Perera M.P. welcomed the 17 participating Member States by underscoring the importance of sustainability and welcomed whale and dolphin watching tourism as a way to generate economic, social and ecological benefits.

Tourism is a main source of foreign exchange earnings for most IORA Member States and globally, marine **tourism generates more revenue than aquaculture and fisheries combined**. This is one of the fastest growing tourism sectors in the world, with over 13 million visitors estimated going on whale and dolphin watching tours in 119 countries, generating more than \$US2.1 million.

IORA Deputy Director, Ms Pia Simonsen, said "this fast growing Blue Economy industry can ensure coastal communities, countries and regions value, manage and use the ocean while safe guarding the habitats and ecosystems that provide food and livelihoods".

There was an identified need to share experience and expertise among Member States as whale and dolphin watching tourism is rapidly growing in the Indian Ocean. Some IORA countries have mature, large-scale whale and dolphin tourism products, while others are considering commencing operations.

Participants recognised that the behavioural ecology of whales and dolphins, as long-lived, slow and late reproducers and socially complex species, render them particularly vulnerable to human disturbance and can result in them experiencing detrimental effects from tourism operations, if not carefully managed. Cetaceans face threats such as ship strikes, competition with fisheries, bycatch, chemical and noise pollution, marine debris and climate change.

Participants recommended measures to further share expertise and experiences, particularly capacity building, establishment of a Whale and Dolphin Watching Tourism Network and strengthened scientific and academic collaboration.

