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Hawaii International Conference on Marine Mammal Protected Areas Highlights Importance of Global Networking

The discovery of 6000 rare dolphins in South Asia and new Pacific Islands marine wildlife viewing guidelines are among the announcements made this week at the First International Conference on Marine Mammal Protected Areas on the island of Maui. More than 200 delegates from 40 countries around the globe are gathered in Hawaii for the conference hosted by the Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and NOAA Fisheries Office of International Affairs.

“An immediate outcome from this conference is the recognition that managers of marine mammal protected areas have more in common than we realized,” said Naomi McIntosh, Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary superintendent.

“There are more than 500 existing or proposed Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) for marine mammals in some 90 countries,” McIntosh said, “yet this is the first dedicated gathering of marine mammal and MPA experts and practitioners.”

The conference provides an international forum for Marine Protected Area managers, scientists and educators to share common challenges and solutions in the protection of marine mammals.

At Monday’s opening session, Maui Mayor Charmaine Tavares said that the conference is “an opportunity to share some best practices, share challenges... and hopefully together find some solutions for what we might be facing on a daily basis.”

Jack Dunnigan, NOAA Assistant Administrator for National Ocean Service and Donna Petrachenko, Australian Department of Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts also delivered welcoming remarks. Dan Basta, Director of NOAA Office of National Marine Sanctuaries presented Tuesday’s keynote address.

Delegates represent marine protected areas of every description, from small or remote locations to sophisticated globally recognized sites. A number of delegates to the International Whaling Commission (IWC) are in attendance, including those representing France, Mexico, New Zealand, Australia, U.S., Argentina, Brazil and Norway. The IWC is an intergovernmental organization that helps govern whaling practices, funds whale research, publishes results of scientific research and promotes studies.

Other organizations represented at the ICMMPA include the International Union for Conservation of Nature, International Whaling Commission, Marine Mammal Commission, U.S. National Park Service, Pelagos Sanctuary, Whale

and Dolphin Conservation Society, and Agreement on the Conservation of Cetaceans of the Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea and contiguous Atlantic Area, among others.

On Tuesday, the Wildlife Conservation Society announced at the conference the discovery of a huge population of rare Irrawaddy dolphins living in freshwater regions of Bangladesh. On Monday, the International Fund for Animal Welfare announced the first regional guidelines for responsible whale and dolphin watching across the Pacific Islands, developed by 35 representatives from 13 Pacific Island governments. Details are found on www.icmmpa.org.

For the remainder of the week, the conference will hold training sessions and workshops leading to recommendations for improved marine mammal management, networking and approach to emerging threats.

NOTE TO REPORTERS/EDITORS: A virtual “media room” is available on www.icmmpa.org, featuring daily proceedings, press releases, photos, fact sheets, speaker biographies, web links and contact information for interviews.

Media-quality photos and videos may be downloaded from the site.

ICMMPA: www.icmmpa.org

HIHWNMS: www.hawaiihumpbackwhale.noaa.gov

NOAA Fisheries Office of International Affairs: <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/ia/index.htm>