

Education and attitudes towards marine conservation using whale watching platforms in Peru

¹ García-Cegarra & A., ² Pacheco, A. S.

¹ Doctorado Ciencias Aplicadas mención Sistemas Marinos Costeros, Universidad de Antofagasta, Chile. anamaria.garcia@uantof.cl

² Instituto de Ciencias Naturales Alexander von Humboldt, Universidad de Antofagasta, Chile.

Abstract

Since the ban of whaling in the 70s, whale-watching became an economically important activity around world. In addition to the economic benefits that whale-watching represent for coastal communities, the activity is promoted as a platform for education and conservation awareness of marine biodiversity. However, just a small handful of studies have evaluated this role on people taken this type of tourism around to world. In countries such as Peru where cetaceans species are still in jeopardy, whale-watching may play an important role promoting the protection of these mammalian species. Herein, we present the results of a study that aimed (1) to determine the degree of knowledge regarding cetaceans ecology and conservation status and (2) to evaluate where whale-watching tours serve as platforms for education and conservation awareness in people. We interviewed people taking whale-watching tours during humpback whales breeding season (winter-spring 2014) in northern Peru. A total of 323 persons were surveyed using closed-ended questionnaires and open-ended interviews before and after whale-watching tours. The results revealed an overall lack of knowledge concerning the presence of species of cetaceans in Peruvian waters, particularly those Peruvian participants. However, 98.4% of the persons indicated that they have learned about humpback whales conservation and marine biodiversity treatments after tours. Participants

were more willing to change its behavioral intentions towards cetacean's conservation and environment protection after whale-watching tours. Our results suggest that whale-watching platforms, when implemented with adequate interpreters, can serve as alternative source of environmental education and conservation awareness. This is important to consider in countries such as Peru where by-catch and direct hunting have considerably decimated cetaceans populations.