Calling the Wind – Blue Whales, Cetaceans & Marine Ecotourism Development in Timor-Leste

Presented by:
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Abstract

Previous studies in Timor-Leste have identified the significant economic potential for marine ecotourism, particularly whale and dolphin watching. In this seminar, we outline our latest efforts in developing a whale and dolphin ecotourism industry - working collaboratively with key project partners (government, local fishing communities, dive tour operators, eco-volunteers, development partners) - including cetacean monitoring, ecotourism training, and promotion and marketing. We report on our preliminary findings of cetacean diversity from a combination of ongoing dedicated surveys and incidental sightings (2016-2018) and also traditional ecological knowledge mapping.

We confirm the region as a global cetacean biodiversity hotspot, with at least 24 species recorded residing in or passing through Timor-Leste’s waters. And confirm an annual migration of pygmy blue whales (Austral-Indonesian population) — strongly linked to the prevailing seasonal monsoonal climate and wind-driven, seasonal upwellings. We suggest that Timor-Leste arguably provides some of the best and most accessible, whale-watching in the world, particularly for this species. While cetacean tourism holds major economic potential, particularly for impoverished, coastal fishing communities - baseline cetacean monitoring, regulations and training in cetacean management and ecotourism and integrated coastal management, is urgently needed to reduce current major threats, and ensure sustainable growth of this industry.

Biography

Karen Edyvane (PhD, UAdel) is a marine scientist with extensive experience (>30 years) in coastal science, planning and management. Since her move to Darwin in 2006, her research interests have primarily focused on northern Australia and the Arafura and Timor Seas region – with a focus on coastal and marine ecosystems, sustainability, ecosystem management and environmental governance. For the past 10 years she has been working in Timor-Leste, as a researcher and international development consultant on a range of marine biodiversity, sustainability and livelihood development projects. She is currently a Visiting Professor at the National University of Timor-Leste, a University Professorial Fellow with Charles Darwin University and an Honorary Research Fellow with the Australian National University.

Thursday, 12 September 2019, 4.00pm

‘The Library’ NARU Campus, 23 Ellengowan Drive, Brinkin

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