Introduction

Whale watching operations are commonly used as opportunistic platforms for cetacean research, providing the following advantages: (1) extensive data collection, (2) access to remote populations, (3) reduced research cost and (4) economic support. Engaging these two activities is considered “a good business decision” [1]. Cetacean research can increase the knowledge on the targeted species and contribute to reduce the impact of the commercial activity [2] through innovation.

Often, research doesn’t provide meaningful knowledge to improve the sector. Despite this collaboration is extended worldwide, few cases have assessed the synergy of both activities from the industry’s economic point of view and evaluate the service provided by the research activity.

Here we present the case of Whalesafari Andenes and MAREFA (NGO) that use a land-based survey station since 2011, to locate cetaceans before the commercial trips depart. The first paramount outcome of this innovation has been the discovery of new areas of sperm whale distribution, the main target of the local whale watching industry, that were encountered during the last 20 years in the Bleik Canyon. In this study the impact on the company’s economic and environmental sustainability is evaluated.

Study area, Materials and Methods

- Number of trips conducted per area has been analyzed for the period 2009 -2012, considering the ones discovered in 2011 (Andfjord and North).
- An estimation of cancelled trips according to days without trips and estimated affluence loss due to bad sea state was made.
- Lastly, average trip duration and fuel expenditure was estimated per year and vessel (Reine and Maan Dolphin).

Results

- Number of trips per year/area.
- Average fuel usage.
- Number of cancelled days and estimated cancelled trips/year.
- Estimated tourist loss.
- Conclusions
  - Cetacean research can increase the sustainability of a whale watching company by increasing income, and reducing costs and emissions.
  - Land-based cetacean research can be an innovative tool to improve the whale watching industry locally, for example, establishing a network of look-out points.
  - Whale watching and cetacean research can be synergic activities.

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References: