



Antarctic Tour Operators Introduce Mandatory Measures to Prevent Whale Strikes

International Association of Antarctica Tour Operators (IAATO) acts to protect
whales in Antarctic waters

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Cape Town, South Africa:

Members of the International Association of Antarctica Tour Operators (IAATO) have unanimously voted in mandatory measures to prevent whale strikes in cetacean-rich Antarctic waters.

At its annual meeting, this year held in Cape Town, South Africa, IAATO members gave the green light to new measures that would instruct member operators to commit to either a 10kn speed restriction within a specific geo-fenced time-area on the Antarctic Peninsula or, for member operators who have a whale strike mitigation training program, an extra watchman on the bridge to monitor and record sightings within the geofenced time-area.

The compulsory measures will formally take effect on July 1 in readiness for the 2019/20 Antarctic travel season, which begins in October.

Incoming IAATO Executive Committee Chair, Mark van der Hulst said: "IAATO is a trusted and valued Antarctic stakeholder thanks to its demonstrated commitment to safe, environmentally responsible travel through decisions like the one we have reached this week regarding the protection of whales.

"It is both an Antarctic Treaty System and IAATO requirement that our activities as tour operators have no more than a minor or transitory impact on the Antarctic environment, and while the proposal was initially delivered as a request for operators to adopt one of the two mitigation measures, the strength of feeling in the room was such that members insisted on going one step further and making the new measures mandatory.

"We have a track record of stringent, proactive self-management and this decision is no exception. This is a proud moment for IAATO and hopefully a defining one for our industry."

Since the commercial whaling ban in 1982, nearly all humpback whale populations in the southern hemisphere are recovering, some at rates near their biological maximum. But with these increasingly



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IAATO is a member organization founded in 1991 to advocate and promote the practice of safe and environmentally responsible private-sector travel to the Antarctic.

whale-rich waters comes an increased risk of whale strikes in areas of high aggregation such as those used for feeding, breeding, raising offspring, socialising and migrating, which are essential for survival. By committing to the new mandatory measures, IAATO member vessels are supporting the return of this charismatic species.

During the 2018/19 Antarctic travel season, Happywhale, an initiative which tracks individual whales throughout the world's oceans, has recorded over 900 humpback whale sightings in Antarctica, 333 as known individuals, compared to just 700 sightings during the same period last year.

Ted Cheeseman, owner of IAATO member operator Cheesemans' Ecology Safaris, co-founder of Happywhale, and a driving force behind the proposal, said: "I'm extremely proud of IAATO for taking this bold step to reduce risk to whales, even while very little is known about the actual distribution of whales on the Antarctic peninsula.

"Here a group of competitors have chosen to limit operations in order to protect all whales in the area, because we feel it is the right thing to do. The next step from here is to support and undertake the science that will inform a future policy that best minimizes risk while maintaining operational freedom.

It is incredibly inspiring to see that Antarctic travelers are being treated to more and more whale sightings. Year-on-year the whales are rebuilding populations towards what was natural before the whaling era."

Every year, IAATO members set aside competitive interests to have open and candid discussions on safety, environmental protection and self-regulation. Decision-making is supported by recommendations developed by IAATO's many dedicated committees and working groups throughout the year. The meetings conclude annually with the voting in of new policies on best practice which supports IAATO's mission of promoting and advocating safe and environmentally responsible travel to Antarctica.

Ends -

Issued by the International Association of Antarctica Tour Operators.

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Notes for Editors:

- Images are available.
- In addition to its own bylaws and requirements for membership, IAATO requires its members to abide by the Antarctic Treaty System and other international regulations.



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About IAATO

IAATO is a member organization founded in 1991 to advocate and promote the practice of safe and environmentally responsible private-sector travel to the Antarctic. IAATO Members work together to develop, adopt and implement operational standards that mitigate potential environmental impacts. These standards have proved to be successful including but are not limited to: Antarctic site-specific guidelines, site selection criteria, passenger to staff ratios, limiting numbers of passengers ashore, boot washing guidelines and the prevention of the transmission of alien organisms, wilderness etiquette, ship scheduling and vessel communication procedures, emergency medical evacuation procedures, emergency contingency plans, reporting procedures, marine wildlife watching guidelines, station visitation policies and much more. IAATO has a global network of over 100 members.

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