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## The WAOH! Route Pledge to Sustainability Championing Coastal & Marine Ecotourism in Europe

The **Coastal and Marine Tourism** sector is one of the pillars of the **Blue Economy** in **Europe** and a key driver of **wealth** and **employment**. However, this important sector is also facing significant **challenges** – lack of innovation and poor environmental practices being amongst some of the major issues that are currently threatening the **competitiveness** of European coastal destinations.

**Nautical sports, wildlife watching** and **outdoors** recreation activities stand in a unique position to contribute to address some of the urgent challenges affecting the industry. Tourism operators delivering **scuba diving, snorkelling, sea kayaking, surfing, coasteering** or **whale watching** experiences, amongst many other activities, are not only bringing **innovation** and **new skills** into the industry, but also driving **increasing visitor expenditure** at destination, contributing to a *quality* rather *quantity* approach to tourism development. Furthermore, they have the potential of nurturing **environmental conservation** and becoming an important contributor to the **health** and **Ocean literacy** of **European citizens**. This potential can be realized by aligning coastal and marine tourism with the principles of **ecotourism**:

***"Responsible travel to natural areas that preserves the environment, sustains the well-being of the local people, and involves interpretation and education".***

In Europe, the **Natura2000 network** stretches proudly along its thousands of kilometres of coastline, providing an extraordinary landscape for the practice of **nautical sports, wildlife watching adventures** and **outdoors** activities. The emergence of **ecotourism** as a global industry opens a huge window of opportunity to tap into its market potential, embracing the challenge of making Europe the #1 destination for **coastal and marine ecotourism** in the World. The **WILDSEA Atlantic Ocean Heritage Route (WAOH! Route)** seeks to address this opportunity, as a public-private cooperation effort across Atlantic destinations.

The **WAOH! Route** destination management organizations, participating tourism operators and participating stakeholders are committed to the long-term



implementation of a **shared vision** regarding the **sustainable development** of **coastal and marine ecotourism** along the Route – one that paves the way to **championing marine ecotourism in Europe**. We acknowledge that tourism has both *positive* and *negative* effects, and we strive to work collectively to maximize the former and mitigate the latter, advancing towards **economic, social and environmental excellence** at European coastal and marine tourism destinations.

Our **shared vision** revolves around **3 core principles**:

- Tourism must contribute to create **sustainable livelihoods**, generating employment and financial benefits for coastal communities, providing a clear demonstration of the economic value of responsible interaction with the marine environment.
- Local communities are key stakeholders of Tourism and must be involved in tourism processes, achieving an **Ocean Literate “pride”** on the local marine and maritime heritage.
- Tourism must contribute to **maintain, restore and preferably enhance coastal and marine ecosystems** and to enhance **Ocean literacy** amongst tourists and visitors.

To bring our vision to reality, the **WAOH! Route destinations** and its constituent **stakeholders** pledge to:

1. With the help of scientific institutions, **promote scientific research** at destination (in collaboration with tourism operators, local NGOs, citizen science programs, etc.), assessing the ecological requirements of local marine ecosystems and habitats, and the carrying capacity for the activities taking place in the marine environment. Such research will guide and feed the development of tourism regulations at destination.
2. Develop a joint **Action Plan** with local administration, tourism operators and other relevant stakeholders (fishing community, marinas, NGOs...) to address threats to the coastal environment.
3. Promote a **system** that regulates licenses and/or permits for those activities actively seeking **marine wildlife interactions** according to the best available research and local knowledge (e.g. observations from fishermen or local operators) and that includes regular assessment and re-application. There should be a clear process for any breaches, including consequences for the offenders, as well as mechanisms to encourage compliance.
4. Develop and review **guidelines or regulations for interactions between humans and marine wildlife** (might be improved from national regulation, if it already exists) and for more **general operations** (e.g. environmental impact of nautical activities, recycling on board vessels, using non-lead paint on boats, adequate change of oil, correct anchoring, etc.). Do this collaboratively with all relevant stakeholders, and adapted to seasons and specificity of destination.

5. **Regularly share best practices amongst operators** with variable experience, or organize training sessions.
6. **Ensure there is an active and on-going process to improve long-term sustainability** using recognised tools: for example, the *European Sustainable Tourism Indicator System*, or the *Global Sustainable Tourism Council's Criteria for Destinations*.
7. **Promote more general sustainability initiatives** benefitting the marine environment; for example:
  - Encourage reduction in energy use and adoption of renewable technologies.
  - Measure and reduce carbon emissions.
  - Improve marine and terrestrial biodiversity.
  - Reduce water pollution.
  - Reduce plastics, discarded fishing gear and other solid waste entering the waterways (reduce use, encourage recycling, promote community vents to clean beaches and rivers, etc.)
  - Train staff on sustainability.
  - Participate in patrol programmes or reporting procedure to protect critical habitat.
  - Prioritise local, sustainable produce and local restaurants to provide food for visitors.
8. **Inform the local community** about the Route and its initiatives through available local channels: radio, local news, public talks, events, citizen science initiatives, etc.
9. **Provide information to visitors** that conveys the natural, cultural, and historical importance of the coastal and maritime heritage of the area.
10. **Engage** - together with tourism operators - in community events promoting marine conservation and encouraging a sense of pride, heritage, history, sustainability and legacy, such as:
  - School outreach programmes.
  - Community beach clean-ups.
  - Citizen science projects.
  - Opportunities for local students to interact with the marine environment (going out whale-watching, snorkelling, studying the shore, etc.).
  - Award ceremonies for students.
  - Collaboration with local artists.
  - Organization of festivals or film nights.

- Use important moments in the calendar year to celebrate the marine environment and wildlife (arrival of basking sharks, nesting puffins, moulting seals...).

**11. Address accessibility** of citizens with reduced mobility or with any disabilities and **inclusion** of economic disadvantaged citizens in marine education and ecotourism initiatives.

**12. Facilitate the employment of local youth** in the sector, encouraging the involvement of local university students (biology, marine science, tourism, naval engineering, administration, etc.).

**13. Promote local businesses** related with marine/coastal experiences, both tourism operators and indirectly related services (transport, accommodation, local crafts, food suppliers, etc.).

**14. Prioritise the use of local, sustainable products and services** that benefit local employers, and the employment of local youth.


In order to procure wide support of this Pledge and ample dissemination of its spirit, the **WAOH! Route Partners** will invite governments, public administrations, public and private institutions, businesses and civil society organizations to endorse its objectives through its signature.

The endorsement of this **Pledge** is valid for 3 years, after which the signing parties must renovate their commitment to its implementation.

In Porto (Portugal), 14 November 2018


  
Donegal County Council

  
Turismo de Galicia

  
Travelecoology

  
World Cetacean Alliance

  
Câmara Municipal de Portimão

  
Fórum Oceano

  
Submon

  
Visit Cornwall

  
Câmara Municipal de Cascais

  
Câmara Municipal de Sesimbra