



PRESS INFORMATION JUNE 2009

International award for Sea Watch

Sea Watch - the UK-based marine research and education charity which every year organises the UK National Whale and Dolphin Watch - has won a major international award for education and outreach.

ASCOBANS is a regional intergovernmental Agreement concluded under the auspices of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Convention on Migratory Species, working to protect small whales, dolphins and porpoises in the Baltic, North and Irish Seas and the North-East Atlantic.

Dr Peter Evans, Director of Sea Watch, represents the European Cetacean Society as well as Sea Watch on the Advisory Committee of the ASCOBANS Agreement. The award has been made by the ASCOBANS Advisory Committee in recognition of the conservation education and outreach efforts by Dr Evans and Sea Watch. It is the first time the award has been presented to a UK organisation.

One of Sea Watch's awareness raising activities is the National Whale and Dolphin Watch, sponsored by the BG Group. It is now in its eighth year and will be held from July 18-26 this year. Every year many hundreds of people join trained observers looking over our seas to record marine mammals, whilst many more send in details of their own sightings.

The award will be presented to Dr Evans at the ASCOBANS Sixth Meeting of the Parties at the UN Campus in Bonn in September.

Robert Hepworth, ASCOBANS Acting Executive Secretary, said: "Promoting public awareness is an essential element of conservation work and an area in which partners to ASCOBANS have an especially important role to play. Only by disseminating information and promoting understanding can people be made aware of the marine mammals in their local waters. They can learn of their beauty and the threats cetaceans face. An interest in their conservation can thus be generated.

"Broad public support is crucial not only to generate the funds needed for conservation work but for putting pressure on governments to implement effective conservation measures. The public can also help science and conservation by reporting sightings and strandings.

“Sea Watch under the leadership of Peter Evans is an outstanding example of a small NGO with a big impact. The long-standing outreach and education efforts of this organisation have not only been highly successful, but also continue to inspire others in the Agreement area and beyond. We are proud to count Peter Evans among our most dedicated supporters and are very happy to be able to express our gratitude through the presentation of this award to a more than deserving winner!”

Dr Evans added: “This is a tribute to all the researchers, our sponsors, regional co-ordinators, volunteers and all those users of the sea who have helped to contribute information about the status and distribution of our magnificent marine mammal heritage.

“We are hoping that, once again, members of the public will brave our uncertain weather this summer to join the National Whale and Dolphin Watch to help us build up a picture of the marine mammals around our coast during the period.

“Our marine mammals face many challenges ranging from pollution and over fishing to ship strikes, noise disturbance and net entanglement, and there is much that we still need to know about their behaviour if conservation policies, such as those outlined in the Marine Bill currently going through Parliament, as well as the establishment and maintenance of marine Special Areas of Conservation under the EU Habitats Directive, are to be effective.

“In total 28 different species have been recorded in UK & Irish waters and we hope that between July 18-26 this year we will be able to record most of the 13 species that occur regularly in our seas, and perhaps some of the visiting species as well. “

Sea Watch also has a network of co-ordinators around the country who send in sightings of marine mammals throughout the year, allowing trends on species numbers and distributions to be tracked.

Its survey work includes research into the largest coastal bottlenose dolphin population in the UK, in Cardigan Bay, West Wales, where recent results are showing more complex social interactions between groups within the population, and more widespread travel patterns by identifiable dolphins north and south of the Bay than previously thought.

A Dolphin Adoption scheme (www.adoptadolphin.org.uk) has been developed recently to encourage children to develop a sense of responsibility for the guardianship of these dolphins, to learn more about them and marine environmental issues in general, and to help support research on them. Last December, BBC Wildlife magazine voted it the best animal adoption scheme in UK.

There have been two previous winners of the ASCOBANS Education and Outreach Award:

- 2005: The Hel Marine Station in Poland which was developed to meet the research needs of the whole scientific community of the country and which provides field support for all research groups in the region.

- 2007: Petra Deimer and the Society for the Protection of Marine Mammals (GSM) for their work highlighting the plight of the Baltic Harbour Porpoises which are near to extinction.

Anyone can take part in National Whale and Dolphin Watch. Visit the Sea Watch web site at www.seawatchfoundation.org.uk where details of land and sea based watches are posted, together with sightings forms.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION ABOUT SEA WATCH FOUNDATION AND NATIONAL WHALE AND DOLPHIN WATCH, OR FOR PICTURES PLEASE CONTACT: Wendy Nekar 01926 421679, w.nekar@ntlworld.com or Julie Albray on 01455 212230 or 0777 164 3337, julie@xpruk.com

National Whale and Dolphin Watch 2009 is sponsored by BG Group



NOTES TO EDITORS:

- ASCOBANS stands for the Agreement on the Conservation of Small Cetaceans of the Baltic, North East Atlantic, Irish and North Seas. The Treaty has been in force since 1994 with an extension of the Agreement Area to include the Irish Sea and North East Atlantic (linking up to the ACCOBAMS Agreement Area) coming into force in February 2008. The Treaty involves 10 countries: Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Lithuania, Netherlands, Poland, Sweden, United Kingdom. More information can be found at www.ascobans.org.
- Every year Sea Watch organises a National Whale and Dolphin Watch week, when members of the public can join experienced observers around the coastline to collect sightings. Since the event began in 2002, more than 3,500 sightings have been made in locations from the Channel Islands and the Scillies to the Shetland Isles, encompassing places as varied as Brighton, Plymouth, Anglesey, Aberdeen, Whitby and Hull.
- In total, 28 species of dolphins, whales and porpoises have been recorded in UK & Irish waters, 12 of these during a National Whale & Dolphin Watch.
- Dolphins face a number of threats including accidental capture in fishing nets, marine pollution, noise disturbance and depletion of fish stocks. They may also be affected by rising sea temperatures as a result of global climate change.
- Sea Watch is a registered marine conservation research charity working to improve the conservation of whales and dolphins in the seas around Britain and Ireland. It aims to involve, inform and educate members of the public and to raise awareness of threats faced by marine mammals.
- The Sea Watch www.adoptadolphin.org.uk was voted by BBC Wildlife magazine the best UK animal adoption scheme,

- BG Group plc (LSE: BG.L) is a world leader in natural gas, with a strategy focused on connecting competitively-priced resources to specific, high-value markets. Active in 27 countries on five continents, BG Group has a broad portfolio of exploration and production, Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG), transmission and distribution and power generation business interests. It combines a deep understanding of gas markets with a proven track record in finding and commercialising reserves. BG Group seeks to support social and economic development in the communities where it does business. This is the tenth year that BG Group has provided funding for Sea Watch and is proud to continue its support of the National Whale and Dolphin Watch. Website: www.bg-group.com