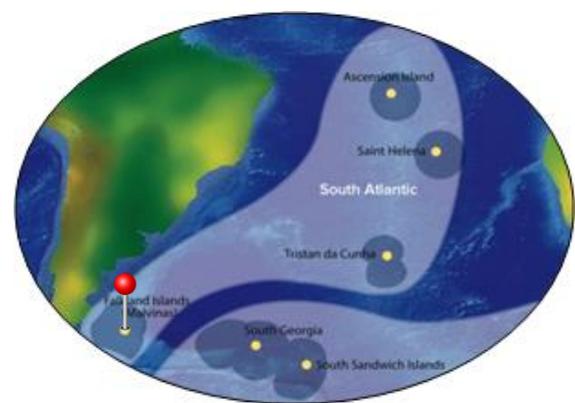




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Developing a Site-based Conservation Approach for Sei Whales, *Balaenoptera borealis*, at Berkeley Sound

Targeted territory: Falkland Islands
Total project budget: 97,065 Euros
BEST 2.0 grant awarded: 97,065 Euros
Duration: August 2016 – July 2017 (12 months)
Lead organisation: Falklands Conservation



Background:

Sei whale (*Balaenoptera borealis*) populations were severely depleted by about 80% during the commercial whaling industry of the mid-twentieth century, with most of the decline occurring in the Southern Hemisphere. Classified as 'Endangered' on the IUCN Red List, the present status of the South Atlantic population is still relatively unknown and no specific studies have been undertaken at the Falklands.

As a migratory species, sei whales are regularly sighted in coastal waters of the Falklands during the summer, and although their distribution is often variable from year to year, there are known 'hotspots',



including Berkeley Sound, a partially enclosed water body (150km²) close to the capital of the Falklands. Berkeley Sound is the busiest shipping harbour at the Falklands, with peak activity occurring during the commercial fishing season. An emerging hydrocarbons industry provides possibility of inshore vessel-to-vessel oil transfer, further increasing shipping activity in the Sound. With local anecdotal evidence suggesting sei whale numbers may be increasing and with this predicted rise in commercial marine activities there is real potential for serious negative impacts on sei whales within the Sound and

therefore a need to better knowledge to manage these increasing pressures.

Description of the project:

The project will undertake surveys of sei whales in Berkeley Sound to record their distribution and abundance using visual surveys from structured boat-based transects and shore-based observations, as well as opportunistic boat-based platforms and some aerial surveys.

A range of communications materials will be developed to address the current lack of awareness of the socioeconomic role of whales at the Falklands and the lack of accessible information and best practice guidance for maritime users, including those offering whale-watching tourism.

Recommendations will be developed to inform the future management of activities within Berkeley Sound to mitigate the potential for negative impacts on sei whales.

The project will work closely with local stakeholders, including representatives from the Falkland Islands Government Departments for Fisheries, Environmental Planning and the fishing and hydrocarbon industries.



Intended results:

- Increased understanding of the ecology of sei whales and their interactions and behaviour with users of Berkeley Sound.
- Increased awareness amongst the project steering group members, other stakeholders and members of the general public of sei whale ecology and the potential impacts on the species.
- Decision makers are better informed about sei whales, their conservation status and the potential challenges from increased maritime infrastructure and traffic.

CONTACT

Dr Andrew Stanworth
Falklands Conservation
co@conservation.org.fk

