

Levy not law will save the whales

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(PhysOrg.com) -- Conservationists would save more whales from the harpoon if the whale-watching public and industry were willing to pay a levy that could be used to persuade those countries currently engaged in whaling to stop, says Queensland University of Technology green economist Associate Professor Clevo Wilson.

Professor Clevo Wilson, from Queensland University of Technology's (QUT) School of Economics and Finance said employment and income issues of the whaling nations must be tied to measures to halt whaling.

"Traditional communities in whaling countries fear that their livelihoods and their way of life would disappear if they were to stop killing [whales](#)," Professor Wilson said.

"Hence, the pressure on whaling governments to continue the practice. But the opposite is true for countries that oppose whaling and run whale-watching industries where live whales are the valuable resource."

Professor Wilson said whale-watching was an increasingly popular and profitable ecotourism industry worldwide.

"The whale-watching industry has grown from 9,000,000 whale watchers across 87 countries in 1998 to 13 million whale watchers in 119 countries in 2008. Whale watching generates more than US\$2 billion dollars in expenditure annually," he said.

"In Australia, whale-watcher numbers have more than doubled from .73 million to more than 1.6 million between 1998 and 2008. Hervey Bay's whale-watching tourism alone earns approximately \$50 million a year.

"The protection of whales has seen the number of humpback whales migrating past Australia's east coast increased and more whale watching operations start up.

"It is cheaper to run a whale-watching business now because the whales are more plentiful and so they don't have to sail so far out and tourists have a better chance of seeing whales than ever before."

Professor Wilson said threatening to take the Japanese to the World Court was a weak instrument.

"Whales are a 'common property' resource outside a country's maritime boundaries. This is why going to courts won't resolve the issue," he said.

"On the other hand, if the countries for whom [whales](#) are worth more alive than dead charged a small levy of say \$5 per whale-watching tourist, whale-watching countries could compensate those for whom a dead whale is worth more than a live one."

Professor Wilson said paying people to move out of whale hunting was easier to do than taking them to court.

"If we were to compensate those who would lose their livelihoods from an end to whaling we might have a better chance of putting an end to all forms of whaling."

Provided by Queensland University of Technology

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