

## International Programs

# Bermuda Signs Letter of Intent with Stellwagen Bank Sanctuary

In June 2011, NOAA's Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary and the Bermuda Government signed a Letter of Intent to pursue collaborative management efforts leading to the future establishment of a "sister sanctuary" partnership, with pledged cooperation on scientific and educational programs to better protect the endangered North Atlantic humpback whale population.

This Letter of Intent was developed under the auspices of the Sargasso Sea Alliance – an international effort led by the Government of Bermuda to protect the unique ecosystem of the Sargasso Sea and its iconic species. Humpback whales are long-distance migrants, but highly faithful to specific feeding and breeding areas. Long-term research shows that they spend the summer and fall in the rich feeding grounds of Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary, and then in late fall migrate some 1,500 miles south to the warmer waters of the Caribbean to mate and give birth to their young. Bermuda is located on their migration route, about 650 miles east of the North Carolina coast.

The addition of a marine mammal sanctuary covering all the waters of Bermuda's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), a roughly 450,000 square kilometer circle of jurisdictional ocean to the south of the Stellwagen Bank sanctuary, would be a significant contribution to the awareness and protection of this population of humpback whales. The relationship will further assist humpback whale conservation by providing new avenues for collaborative education, scientific research and resource management, including joint monitoring of protected species and development of outreach programs. These future endeavors will help build a model for international cooperation focused on protecting the species along its migratory pathway and within its critical habitats.

The Letter of Intent with Bermuda was created consistent with the objectives of the Convention for the Protection and Development of the Marine Environment of the Wider Caribbean (the Cartagena Convention) and its Protocol on Specially Protected Areas for Wildlife (SPAW), the United Nations Environment Program's Marine Mammal Action Plan (MMAP) for the Caribbean region, and the newly amended Bermuda Protected Species Act 2011, which recognizes the importance of , and provides the tools for, protecting critical humpback whale habitats and their migratory corridors.



SBNMS and Bermuda intend to work together in the following areas:

- Exchange of whale fluke (tail) photos for Stellwagen Bank/Bermuda humpback whale population studies and related citizen science programs;
- Exchange of technical information, scientific data and practical experiences in managing marine mammal protected areas, including staff exchanges and site visits;
- Development and assessment of methodologies for natural resource protection within marine mammal protected areas; and
- Development, coordination and evaluation of research and monitoring programs, outreach and education programs, and community engagement strategies for management of marine mammal protected areas.

**Bermuda Website:** <http://www.sargassoalliance.org>

**Press:** [http://stellwagen.noaa.gov/sister/pdfs/bermuda\\_press.pdf](http://stellwagen.noaa.gov/sister/pdfs/bermuda_press.pdf)

**LOI:** [http://stellwagen.noaa.gov/sister/pdfs/bermuda\\_loi.pdf](http://stellwagen.noaa.gov/sister/pdfs/bermuda_loi.pdf)

This effort will help improve knowledge about humpbacks in the Atlantic and the threats they face from both natural and man-made changes to their environment. NOAA anticipates the relationship will be crucial to the long-term conservation of the North Atlantic humpback whale population, as well as to the development of future cooperative agreements with other countries.