



# Ministry of Tourism

## Kingdom of Tonga

*Press release*

16 July 2020

### **14 Certified Restricted Skipper Master Class 6 Recipients**

Qualifying Trained Staff in the Whale Watching & Swimming Sector

A certificate presentation ceremony was held at Lata'anga, Ministry of Tourism on Wednesday 15th June to mark the end of a 2-week Whale Watching Guide training which consisted of 5 components of Whale Watching & Swimming Regulations 2013, First Aid at Sea, Marine Biology of the Whales, Interpretative Guiding and Swimming component. 14 trainees successfully completed the course and were presented with a certificate by Guest of Honor, the Minister for Tourism, Hon. 'Akosita Havili Lavulavu.

The Minister addressed the Participants and thanked them for taking the initiative to partake in the training. Hon. Lavulavu stressed the importance of whale watching and swimming with whales in the Kingdom for its noteworthy contribution to the Tongan economy and tourism sector. Whale hunting was banned by HM King Taufa'ahau Tupou IV in 1978, and the popularity of whale watching can be attributed to His Majesty's vision of its importance to the tourism industry. Protection of these majestic mammals have seen the migration of whales between Antarctica and the South Pacific Ocean from June to October attracting an estimated 10,000+ visitors to the Kingdom each year.

The CEO of the Ministry of Tourism, Mr. Sione Finau Moala-Mafi wishes to remind the Public that their safety is paramount as well as the importance of protecting and respecting the whales to remain a sustainable activity. Whale watching operators are required to complete this training to fulfill the mandate for a license to operate by the Industry Empowerment Division. The Ministry of Tourism is committed to coordinate this training to enable the local Tongans to involve and participate, with affordable training fees which in turn would minimized the income leakage in bringing overseas employees and reducing infringements of putting unqualified staff on board and to provide qualify trained staff to be employed by the whale watching operators. The training is funded by the Ministry of Tourism with in-kind sponsorship of trainers and training materials from MEIDECC and TMPI. We are pleased to see these certified skippers complete this training and hope that they will operate according to the WWS Regulations and for the people of Tonga to fully benefit from the Whale Watching and Swimming sector.







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