

1 Southern Chile

PROTECTION, PRODUCTION AND PEOPLE

A model for marine conservation integrates blue whales, salmon production and social equity



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“We are privileged to live in this environment, in absolute harmony between the marine ecosystems and our indigenous world view. Our ocean, land and air are sacred spaces and provide everything for our survival. They give us many things, like being able to go down to the beach and harvest nutritious fresh shellfish, without contamination. We have also started offering ecotourism activities, which shows others that caring for nature can generate income for the family.”

Sandra Antipani, indigenous leader from Chiloé Island, Southern Chile

The fjords and channels of Patagonia in southern Chile – known as the Chiloense Marine Ecoregion – are a unique environment of immense conservation importance. The region is home to many

species of marine mammals and birds, cold-water corals and highly productive fisheries. It also hosts one of the most important feeding areas for the largest animal ever to have existed: the blue whale. Almost wiped out by whaling, its survival depends on such critical areas being protected.

The Chiloense Marine Ecoregion provides its human population with myriad services: food and income for local fishermen, stunning scenery and wildlife that attract tourists, and spiritual and cultural values. It also supports fish production on a globally important scale, sheltering the larvae of several commercially important species, and providing 30 per cent of the world’s salmon production, 3 per cent of whitefish and 12 per cent of forage fish (FAO, 2014). But the overexploitation of these marine resources has reached dangerous levels; important habitats have already been lost, and the ecosystem and its services are under stress.

For more than a decade, WWF has worked with local communities and authorities on an integrated conservation strategy for the marine ecoregion. The approach is based on sound science, rigorous landscape and seascape planning, and close engagement with many stakeholders – including local and indigenous communities, government, producers, and the finance and retail sectors.

One goal is to establish a network of marine protected areas – extending along the coast and beyond Chile’s waters into the high seas. In early 2014, the coordinated efforts of WWF-Chile, the Blue Whale Centre, Austral University of Chile and the Melimoyu Foundation, led to the Chilean government to create the Tic Toc Marine Park – which includes crucial blue whale feeding and nursing grounds – and two other marine protected areas. Together, they cover more than 120,000 hectares. As well as offering protection to whales and dolphins, and giving fish stocks the chance to recover, these protected areas should increase the marine ecosystem’s resilience to climate change.

Outside protected areas, efforts are being made to reduce the impact of fisheries and aquaculture, particularly salmon production. Producers, buyers, scientists, environmental and social NGOs and others have worked together, in Chile and internationally, to develop the Aquaculture Stewardship Council (ASC) standard for responsible salmon farming. The ASC standard – the result of almost 10 years of dialogue – aims to minimize or eliminate negative environmental and social impacts of salmon farming. Conditions include strict controls on water quality, fish escapes, use of chemicals and antibiotics, and how best to manage natural predators such as seals and seabirds.

In 2013, companies representing 70 per cent of the world’s farmed salmon production – including seven Chilean companies – pledged to certify all of their farms to the ASC standard by 2020.

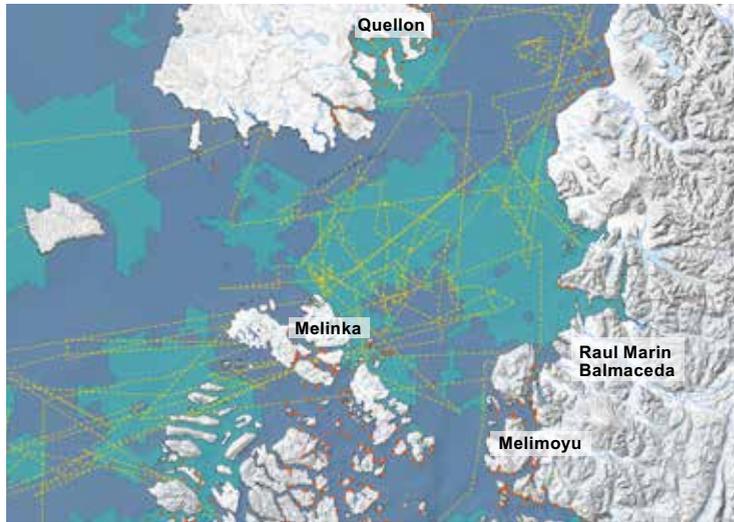


Figure 60: Satellite tracking data helps to map blue whale routes within the Chiloense Marine Ecoregion (WWF-Chile, 2014).

location map



Key

- Whale sightings
- - - Whale Routes
- Salmon farms
- Marine Protected Areas
- Protected Areas
- Marine Priority Conservation Areas

* Multiple use Marine Protected Area

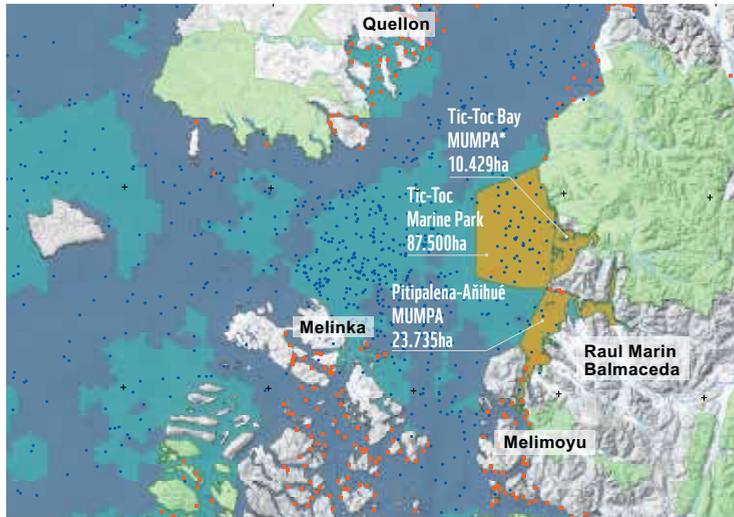


Figure 61: Recently declared marine protected areas protecting important habitats for blue whales (WWF- Chile, 2014).

This presents a real opportunity, but much work needs to be done to accelerate the uptake of better practices to achieve ASC certification.

Long-term conservation success depends on equitable and sustainable development for the region’s inhabitants, including indigenous people. With the new marine protected areas expected to generate increased ecotourism, WWF is working with communities to enable them to take advantage of emerging opportunities. This should improve people’s livelihoods, and increase the incentive to protect their natural and cultural heritage.

ASC certification will also require producers to operate in a socially responsible way, both as employers and neighbours.

“I believe that the salmon industry first needs to get to know the community where they operate – consider the perception of the people, their culture, the history and above all respect the ecosystem, the plants and animals that live there,” says Sandra Antipani, an indigenous leader from Chiloé island. “The idea of conservation of marine ecosystems and blue whales is in our indigenous consciousness.”



Preserve natural capital: WWF and partners are working to establish a network of marine protected areas covering at least 10 per cent of Chile’s coastal waters.



Produce better: Meeting the ASC standard will greatly reduce the impact of salmon aquaculture on marine ecosystems. A pilot project is assessing the impacts of ASC, based on 42 social, economic and environmental indicators.



Consume more wisely: Demand from consumers and retailers for more responsibly farmed salmon has helped encourage producers to commit to ASC certification.



Redirect financial flows: WWF encourages financial institutions to support sustainable commodity production, including certifications like ASC. In Chile, the Dutch bank Rabobank is working with WWF and Chilean salmon producers to improve sustainability performance. This will enable the producers to be more competitive and less vulnerable to environmental and social risks. This will also have a positive impact on the banking relationship and credit decisions.



Equitable resource governance: Local and indigenous communities in the area have become important allies for marine conservation and better social and environmental practices in the salmon industry.