



## **Whalesafe Project On Board Costa Cruises' Ships To Raise The Awareness Of Guests To The Conservation Of Sperm Whales**

October 27, 2015

**Specific edutainment activities for children on board and a special exhibition at the Savona Palacrociere dealing with the Pelagos Sanctuary**

*Genoa, 27 October 2015* - The **Whalesafe Project**, co-funded by the European Union's **Life+ Program** with the involvement of **partners including the Università degli Studi di Genova (Department of Physics and Department of Earth Sciences, Environment and Life), Costa Edutainment, Genoa Maritime Directorate, Savona Harbor Master's Office and Softeco** who have joined forces for the **conservation of the sperm whale (*Physeter macrocephalus*)**, has come on board **Costa Cruises'** ships.

The partnership is based on the determination to contribute to efforts to sensitize people to the importance of safeguarding the marine environment. A number of **different activities** are planned **both on board at the Savona Palacrociere cruise terminal, implemented thanks to the support of Costa Edutainment**, which is in charge of raising public awareness of the Whalesafe Project.

On the ships, the project work will be aimed at capturing the attention of children. The **Squok Club**, which is the organized leisure center for the youngest guests on board, will be arranging **fun educational activities on the subject of whales**; this way, kids will be able to play and at the same time learn to recognize the different species of whales that live in the Pelagos Sanctuary, a marine protected area of approximately 90,000 km<sup>2</sup> that was created in the Mediterranean in 2001 by virtue of an agreement between France, Italy and the Principality of Monaco. Whale sightings are common occurrences on cruises in this part of the Mediterranean. Under the guidance of shipboard personnel trained by experts from Genova Aquarium, children will learn how to recognize not only the different species but also individual whales by observing their dorsal fins, which is the same technique used by researchers from the Aquarium involved in the "Metropolitan Dolphins" project.

All Costa's Guests can familiarize themselves with the Whalesafe Project and find out more about its objectives and the means used by the project partners to protect sperm whales, by watching a **video on the subject that will be broadcast on one of the shipboard TV channels**.

Also, cruisers embarking or disembarking at the **Savona Palacrociere** will be able to see a **special exhibition inside the terminal dealing with the Pelagos Whale Sanctuary**. There will be explanations of the biology and evolution of the 8 species frequently found in the area – in addition to the sperm whale you can find the fin whale, Cuvier's beaked whale, Risso's dolphin, pilot whale, common dolphin, striped dolphin and bottlenose dolphin – as well as of the risks they are exposed to and the safeguards required to ensure their conservation. Visitors will also be given tips and suggestions on the correct approach to whale watching in the open sea, for example how to respect these mammals' space and their natural habitat.

To ensure the effectiveness of this communication campaign among the general public, since August Costa Edutainment has been conducting a survey in the form of a questionnaire designed to test the opinions of cruisers departing from Savona. Initial results based on a sample of 950 passengers show that virtually everybody agrees that shipping constitutes a potential threat to the conservation of the sperm whale and people are in favor of the adoption by shipping companies of a Protocol of Conduct in order to prevent whale strikes.

It has also emerged that hardly anybody has detailed knowledge of the Pelagos Sanctuary and the majority of respondents are not even aware of its existence, let alone where it is located. Hence the importance of the tools for sensitization implemented by the project.

Costa Cruises' participation in this project is a corollary of the Italian company's established position in the front line of activities to safeguard the marine environment. With specific regard to cetaceans, Costa has already adopted best practices to prevent collisions. Ship's Officers take part in a Whale Protection Training Program so they can make any necessary course and speed adjustments, and notify appropriate shoreside authorities.

### **The Whalesafe Project**

Presented in December 2014, this is a 3-year project with a budget of approximately **€1.8 million of which €920,000 is EU funding**

The main objective of the project is to set up a **system** in the area immediately outside the Port of Savona, consisting of **buoys** that can detect and track sperm whales, identify threats and prevent collisions and other risks by **issuing warning messages in real time to ships in the area**.

The sperm whale is a protected species listed in Annex IV of the Habitats Directive as being in need of strict protection; it is one of 8 species of cetacean found in the area of the Pelagos Sanctuary, which comprises virtually all of the Ligurian Sea.

The main threat to the conservation of these mammals is represented by shipping, which can lead to collisions and noise pollution, disturbance of their feeding activity, changes in sperm whale behavior, injuries and – in the worst cases – death of the whale.

In addition to the interference avoidance system, **a protocol of conduct** will be developed to reduce the risks of disturbance and whale strikes; this will be done in cooperation with the Savona Harbor Master's Office and the protocol will be adhered to by shipping companies operating in the vicinity.

Upon reception of a warning message, the ships present in the area will be invited to follow the protocol of conduct and the Coast Guard will enforce it.

Thanks to the active involvement of all the interested parties, it is anticipated that the project will play a vital role in efforts to ensure protection of sperm whales and sustainable coexistence of the species with human activities based on responsible use of the sea.

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