

Determining Motivations Behind Business Involvement in the Dolphin SMART  
Program

by

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## **Abstract**

The U.S. dolphin watching tourism industry is largely unregulated and thus encounters with tour boats can result in harassment to dolphins. The voluntary recognition and education program, Dolphin SMART, provides a solution to reduce harassment by incentivizing tour companies to adopt responsible advertising and viewing practices. The program encourages participation through two main messages: (1) involvement in Dolphin SMART will aid wild dolphin conservation; and (2) cause-marketing strategy involvement in Dolphin SMART will increase business for tour operators.

For this study, I identified drivers and barriers to participation in the program by conducting a qualitative analysis based on interviews with dolphin tour operators, their customers, and program partners. Additionally, I gauged the level of customer awareness and explored perceptions of the cause-marketing strategy's success from the operator and partner viewpoints.

The results indicate the main driver to participation is the desire to promote dolphin conservation, while the main barrier is operators' perception that involvement in Dolphin SMART provides no significant business advantage. I recommend various strategies program staff can undertake to increase exposure of the program and its recognized operators, provide further instruction on how operators can implement a cause-marketing strategy, and generally make participation in Dolphin SMART more economically beneficial for tour operators.

## I. Introduction

Over the last several decades the whale and dolphin watching industry has grown explosively (O'Connor et al. 2009). In 1999 the whale watching industry generated over \$1 billion USD annually in more than 80 countries (Hoyt 2001). By 2009, industry annual revenue had more than doubled to \$2.1 billion USD in 119 countries (O'Connor et al. 2009). This increase in ecotourism has heightened the exposure of dolphin populations to a variety of potentially adverse human activities. "Ecotourism is a big business. It can provide foreign exchange and economic reward for the preservation of natural systems and wildlife...it also threatens to destroy the resources on which it depends" (Berle 1990).

These potentially deleterious human activities include attempts to swim with or feed wild dolphins. Populations of dolphins in both Florida and Hawaii are particularly at risk from this type of ecotourism. In Hawaii, harassment caused by swim-with-dolphin programs is a major conservation concern for Hawaiian spinner dolphins (*Stenella longirostris longirostris*). Spinner dolphins rest during the day in shallow bays where they are exposed to numerous swim-with-dolphin programs (Norris et al. 1994). Dolphins exposed to boat traffic and human swimmers exhibit short-term behavioral modifications including altered behavior, temporary avoidance and changes in resting patterns (Courbis et al. 2008; Courbis and Timmel 2009; Ostman-Lind et al. 2004; Danil et al. 2005). Researchers are currently working to determine the extent to which these short-term behaviors affect measures of fitness, including reproductive rates and survival, and ultimately influence the abundance of this species (Courbis and Timmel 2009).

In some areas of Florida ecotour operators feed wild bottlenose dolphins (*Tursiops*

*truncatus*) to encourage interactions with customers (Spradlin et al. 1999; Samuels and Bejder 2004). Provisioned dolphins become habituated to receiving food and may lose the ability to forage or teach their calves necessary foraging skills (NMFS Report to Congress on Results of Feeding Wild Dolphins 1989-1994). Feeding also places the dolphins at risk of boat strikes and jeopardizes their health through the consumption of contaminated food or non-food items (NMFS Report to Congress on Results of Feeding Wild Dolphins 1989-1994). Vessel-based tourism may cause short-term behavioral changes in bottlenose dolphins, including altered surfacing patterns, increased swimming speeds, temporary habitat avoidance and decreased resting behavior (Nowacek et al. 2001; Allen and Read 2000; Constantine et al. 2004; Lusseau 2005; Janik and Thompson 1996; Lusseau 2006). These short-term “avoidance tactics” may result in long-term fitness consequences for individual animals and their populations. Chronic disturbance from ecotour boats can lead to habitat displacement, decline in reproductive success and abundance (Bejder et al. 2006; Lusseau et al. 2006; Lusseau and Bejder 2007).

A variety of regulatory and non-regulatory efforts have been made to reduce the incidence of dolphin harassment by ecotour operators, including permit systems, increased enforcement of existing regulations, a statutory redefinition of harassment under the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA), time-area closures and the development of voluntary Marine Mammal Viewing Guidelines. For a variety of reasons none of these measures has adequately regulated the burgeoning U.S. dolphin watching industry. Voluntary incentivized programs are a relatively new alternative that operate outside the realm of law enforcement, require no additional regulations, and offer a pragmatic solution to the dolphin harassment issue.

Dolphin SMART is an example of such a voluntary incentive program; it was established in 2007 in partnership with the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Ocean Service (NOS), Whale and Dolphin Conservation (WDC), and the Dolphin Ecology Project (DEP). Dolphin SMART is an incentive-based voluntary recognition and education program for commercial businesses conducting wild dolphin ecotours. The program's mission is to increase stewardship of wild dolphins in coastal waterways by encouraging businesses to practice responsible advertising and viewing of wild dolphins, while educating their customers about why such measures are important. The Dolphin SMART program was first established in the Florida Keys and has since expanded to Southwest Florida, Alabama, and Hawaii. The program encourages participation through two main messages: (1) involvement in Dolphin SMART will aid wild dolphin conservation; and (2) cause-marketing strategy involvement in Dolphin SMART will increase business for tour operators.

Dolphin SMART works to reduce harassment of dolphins on the water by requiring tour operators to adhere to NMFS policy on marine mammal harassment and the NMFS Marine Mammal Viewing Guidelines. In addition, operators agree to avoid separating mothers and calves, depart if dolphins show signs of disturbance, approach and depart at "no wake" speed, and not maneuver in a manner that may cause dolphins to change their behavior (Dolphin SMART Framework 2012). To ensure compliance, evaluations are conducted annually by trained third-party representatives, who attend a tour and assess adherence to the Dolphin SMART criteria.

The ability for tour operators to utilize a cause-marketing strategy to increase sales is a motivating factor to participate in the program. Cause marketing is defined as

“innovative ways in which companies and nonprofits integrate social and environmental issues into their brand DNA to generate bottom-line business and social benefits,” and it can significantly increase revenue and accrue social benefits to the company (2008 Cone Cause Evolution Study). The 2008 Cone Cause Evolution Study reported that more than three-quarters of Americans will switch from one brand to another of similar price and quality, if the other brand is associated with a good cause. By employing the cause-marketing strategy, a tour company stands to benefit economically from an alignment with Dolphin SMART. Dolphin SMART provides a company with opportunities to advertise its involvement in the program by employing Dolphin SMART flags and decals, issuing press releases, linking to the company from the Dolphin SMART website, representation at events and festivals, and promotion through the Proud Supporter program, which recognizes companies who do not conduct dolphin tours, but promote responsible viewing and increase awareness of the program.

Dolphin SMART depends on the voluntary involvement of ecotour operators, so it is important to understand what factors promote and hinder participation in the program. Motivation for tour operators to participate in the program include the incentive to improve their bottom line and to promote a cause in which they believe. However, a more nuanced understanding of this motivation will improve the ability of Dolphin SMART to recruit and retain ecotour companies. Additionally, because economic improvement is one of the main incentives to encourage participation, it is important to understand whether or not customers are actually aware of the program. If customers do not know about Dolphin SMART, they cannot respond to cause-marketing by choosing a participating operator over a non-participating operator. Customers’ awareness of

Dolphin SMART as a responsible and sustainable entity is a critical requirement for the success of this program.

The Dolphin SMART partners requested an analysis of the drivers and barriers to participation in the program and an assessment of customers' awareness and perceptions of Dolphin SMART. To evaluate these two objectives I posed three research questions:

- 1) What are the drivers and barriers to businesses' participation in the Dolphin SMART program?
- 2) Which message, conservation promotion or economic improvement, is given the higher priority by operators?
- 3) Are customers aware of Dolphin SMART and are they receptive to such a cause-marketing strategy?

I created a conceptual framework to clarify the concepts and identify key themes that would be explored in the study (Appendix A). The conceptual framework also served as the node structure for the data analysis using the qualitative software program, NVivo.

The four themes included: drivers, barriers, customer awareness, and cause-marketing strategy success.

- 1) Drivers: This theme explored the reasons tour operators joined and maintained membership in the program, including which message encouraged their membership or would do so in the future. I also explored which participation incentives were most useful to tour operators and the perceptions of the drivers to participate from the program partners.
- 2) Barriers: This theme included reasons tour operators have not joined or terminated their membership in the program. I also explored which participation incentives were found less useful and the perceptions of the barriers to participation from the program partners.
- 3) Customer awareness: This theme analyzed customers' perceptions of Dolphin SMART by asking whether they were aware of the program and if it would influence their decision to book with a Dolphin SMART operator in the future.
- 4) Cause-marketing strategy success: This theme explored the tour operators and partners' perceptions of the success of the cause-marketing strategy

This report will first outline the project's methods, then present the results and findings in accordance with the themes outlined in the conceptual framework, and lastly summarize the results and provide recommendations for the Dolphin SMART program.

## **II. Methods**

I employed a case study design (Yin 2009). Case studies are used to “investigate a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (Yin 2009).

Dolphin SMART is bound by both time and space and I was unable to control outside variables, so the case study was an appropriate tradition of inquiry. Additionally, because case studies are suitable for research seeking to answer “how” and “why” questions, the case study approach facilitated the exploration of the drivers and barriers to participation in the program. This particular study is an *embedded single-case* design because the project concerns the Dolphin SMART program as a whole, yet contains more than one unit of analysis including data collected from multiple tour operators, customers, and the program partners (Yin 2009).

I collected data through semi-structured interviews with Dolphin SMART operators and individuals working for other ecotour companies, their customers and the Dolphin SMART program partners. My study utilized qualitative research methods (rather than the more common quantitative methods) because the qualitative approach allowed for a more detailed and thorough understanding of the motivations and barriers to joining the program and because the population of operators eligible for this study in Southwest Florida and Key West is very small.

## Semi-structured Interviews

### *Tour Operators*

My study included tour operators in Southwest Florida, including St. Petersburg, Tampa, Sarasota, Clearwater, Fort Myers and Key West (Figure 1). I did not interview operators in Hawaii because the program there is in its initial phase. At the suggestion of the Dolphin SMART partners, operators in Alabama were not included so that I could prioritize ecotour operations in Florida.

Twenty-two out of twenty-five eligible dolphin tour operators were interviewed to determine their motivations and barriers to participation in the program. The operators were chosen based on the attendance logs from the most recent training sessions in 2009 and 2010 and currently

belong to the Dolphin SMART program, decided not to join the program, or have dropped out of the program. Only operators who attended a training session were interviewed because it would have been impossible to interpret motivations of operators who were unaware of the program.

The most recent training in Key West was conducted on December 7, 2009 and

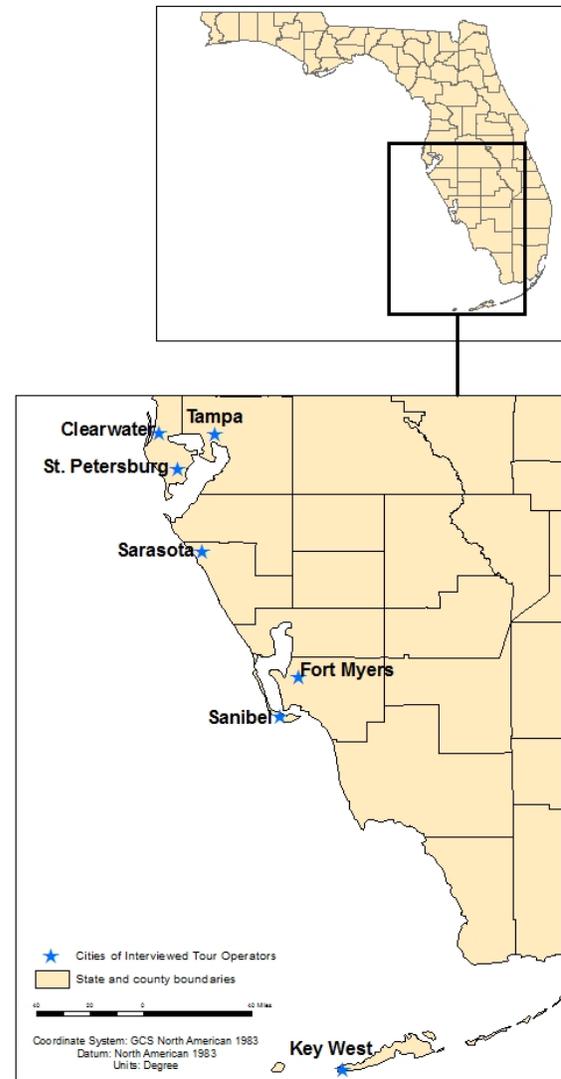


Figure 1 Locations of interviewed tour operators in Florida

training sessions occurred in Clearwater, Sarasota, and Ft. Myers from May 12 to May 17, 2010. Many businesses attending the training sessions were not eligible to participate in the Dolphin SMART program. In general, companies that attended the training, but were not eligible for the program include resort owners, kayak companies, and sailing and fishing charters. I interviewed 15 of 18 (83%) eligible operators that attended training in Southwest Florida, including all five in Key West and two operators there who had dropped out of the program.

I conducted most of the interviews in Southwest Florida in person from June to August 2012, with the exception of interviews with representatives from Dolphin Quest, Starlite Cruises, and Hubbard’s Marina, which were conducted over the phone. All of the Key West interviews were conducted over the phone. The interview guides were approved by the Dolphin SMART partners and the Duke Institutional Review Board (Appendix B). Consent was obtained for each interview either in writing or verbally (Appendix C). Operators were assured that they would not be mentioned by name and thus each was assigned an operator number (Table 1). I recorded each interview using a digital voice recorder and later transcribed the interview.

<b>Southwest Florida</b>	<b>Operator #</b>	<b>Key West</b>	<b>Operator #</b>
<b>DS Recognized</b>	1-6	<b>DS Recognized</b>	16
<b>Non-DS Recognized</b>	7-15	<b>Non-DS Recognized</b>	17-19
		<b>Dropped the program</b>	20-22

Table 1 Dolphin ecotour operators in Southwest Florida and Key West

### *Dolphin SMART Partners*

I interviewed eight representatives of Dolphin SMART partners from December 17 to December 20, 2012 (Table 2). The goal of these interviews was to gain the partners’ perspective on the motivations and barriers to joining the program and the overall

challenges they perceived to the successful implementation of the program. These interviews were arranged through email, conducted over the phone, recorded using a digital voice recorder, and transcribed. The list of questions for these partner interviews is given in Appendix D.

<b>Dolphin SMART Partners</b>	<b>Interview Date</b>
Jessica Powell - Southeast Region Dolphin SMART Program Coordinator	12/20/2012
Grant Craig - Southwest Dolphin SMART Program Coordinator	12/19/2012
Stacey Horstman - NMFS SERO Representative	12/17/2012
Cheryl Bonnes - NMFS SERO Marine Mammal Outreach Specialist	12/18/2012
Laura Engleby - Dolphin Ecology Project Representative	12/18/2012
Laura McCue - NMFS PIRO Representative	12/18/2012
Courtney Vail - Whale and Dolphin Conservation Representative	12/17/2012
Sarah Fangman - National Marine Sanctuaries Representative	12/17/2012

Table 2: Dolphin SMART program partners and dates interviewed

### *Customers*

I interviewed customers from June through August 2012 and January 1 through January 5, 2013. I interviewed customers at both Dolphin SMART and other companies in Clearwater, Sarasota, Tampa, St. Petersburg, and Sanibel using a convenience sampling method. In this approach the sample is drawn from that part of the population which is close to hand, or is readily available and convenient (Bernard 2006). The use of convenience sampling was necessary because customers disperse rapidly after leaving a tour boat. I approached customers disembarking from ecotour vessels and obtained their consent to ask several questions about their dolphin tour experiences. Specifically, I asked customers about their awareness of the program, the likelihood of booking with a Dolphin SMART operator in the future, and their reaction to choosing an operator committed to dolphin conservation if they had attended a Dolphin SMART tour. All interviews were recorded using a digital voice recorder and transcribed. The customer

interview guide can be found in Appendix E and the verbal consent wording can be seen in Appendix F. In Table 3, numbers of interviewed customers is presented by location.

<b><u>Dolphin SMART Operators</u></b>		
<b>Company</b>	<b>Customers (#)</b>	<b>Date</b>
Florida Aquarium	12	7/4/2012
Adventure Cruises	10	7/22/2012
Tarpon Bay Explorers	22	1/1/13-1/3/13
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>44</b>	
<b><u>Non-Dolphin SMART Operators</u></b>		
<b>Company</b>	<b>Customers (#)</b>	<b>Date</b>
Clearwater Marina	26	7/1/2012
Dolphin Landings	2	6/31/12
LaBarge Tropical Cruises	4	7/28/2012
Sarasota Bay Explorers	5	7/28/2012
Sanibel Thriller	16	1/1/13-1/3/13
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>53</b>	

Table 3: Number of customers interviewed from each company

## Data Analysis

I analyzed the transcriptions of the operator, partner, and customer interviews in NVivo 10, a qualitative data analysis software package which assists in organizing and analyzing unstructured or non-numerical data (QSR International 2013). The interview transcripts were imported as internal reference files and coded to themes. The coding process consists of creating nodes which serve as buckets for interview content pertaining to pre-specified topics. The conceptual framework of drivers, barriers, customer awareness, and cause-marketing success served as the basis for the node structure of the operator, partner, and customer interviews. However, as the data analysis progressed, the node structure evolved according to the data.

I analyzed the Southwest Florida operator interviews separately from the Key West operator interviews. The operators in Southwest Florida (with the exception of Clearwater) are geographically dispersed, but all operators in Key West view dolphins in

a 16 km<sup>2</sup> area. Dolphin SMART originated in Key West, but has lost four members since its inception. Given the difficulties in retaining operators in Key West, its geographic isolation from the Southwest Florida operators, and the unique viewing circumstances it presents, I analyzed these operators separately from those in Southwest Florida.

### *Positionality*

Positionality is a term used in qualitative research that describes the viewpoint from which the researcher approaches a research project. Factors that affect positionality may include personal background, education, and ethnicity. Given my background as a Coastal Environmental Management graduate student at Duke University, I was knowledgeable and concerned about the conservation issues regarding human-dolphin interactions prior to conducting the research. Additionally, my internship at the NMFS Southeast Regional Office of Protected Resources during the summer of 2012 helped familiarize me with the Dolphin SMART partners located within that office. Both my knowledge of the problem and familiarity with the partners influenced the approach to the research. I had an initial understanding of how Dolphin SMART could reduce harassment of wild dolphins, but a limited understanding of why operators would choose or not choose to join such a program. In my review of the program I strived for a neutral and unbiased point of view.

### *Research Challenges*

*Time Limitations.* My research design was constrained by time limitations during the summer of 2012 during which I attempted to collect interviews with both ecotour operators and customers.

Most interviews in St. Petersburg, Tampa, Clearwater, Sarasota, and Ft. Myers were conducted in person, but three had to be conducted over the phone because these operators could not make time on the weekends for interviews. Similarly, due to time and resource constraints, I was unable to travel to Key West to conduct the interviews in person, so all Key West interviews were conducted over the phone. Dolphin tour operators are typically small business owners with busy schedules, so repeated attempts to schedule interview appointments or schedule phone interviews were necessary, and two respondents did not have time to complete their entire interviews.

Additionally, gathering data from customers as they exited their tour boats proved difficult. Most customers were tourists and only had time for a few quick questions as they made their way to their cars. Once the boats unloaded, the customers dispersed quickly and it was difficult to interview more than three customers per tour.

*Sample Locations.* Finally, selection of the locations in which to interview customers was problematic. Customers in Clearwater, FL are 40 minutes away from the nearest Dolphin SMART operator. In future studies, it would be helpful to interview customers from a recognized and a non-recognized company that operate in close proximity to each other.

### **III. Results and Analysis**

#### **Southwest Florida Operators**

##### **Drivers**

The overarching driver for the six operators interviewed in Southwest Florida to participate in the program was the desire to conserve the dolphin populations and ensure

they are conducting their business in a sustainable manner. Two of the operators mentioned they understood that without protecting these animals, ultimately their businesses would no longer exist. The responses of Operator 1 and Operator 2 illustrate this opinion:

I understand that I make my living off of the environment and if I don't take care of it or at least promote the ideas of taking care of it I won't have that environment to do my business in (Operator 1).

It's an organization that obviously is promoting responsible viewing and behavior around dolphins and that's our primary business, making sure that there are dolphins so anything that promotes the wellbeing of the dolphins is what we're interested in (Operator 2).

Most operators stated that they joined Dolphin SMART to conserve dolphin populations and conduct their business in a sustainable manner, but some operators joined because they believed they were already conducting their tours in accordance with the Dolphin SMART guidelines. Others were influenced by the presentations in the trainings on the consequences of irresponsible viewing. For example, a concessionaire at a wildlife refuge noted the high standard set by the refuge to educate customers regarding conservation of marine ecosystems, so joining Dolphin SMART was a logical step because they already understood the threats to the dolphin populations and were employing responsible viewing practices. She explained the information at the training "wasn't really new to us" and that her participation in Dolphin SMART had not changed how she viewed dolphin conservation. Similarly, Operator 3 said he learned about the threats to dolphin conservation from a friend at Mote Marine Laboratory and found the information at the training on threats to dolphin conservation was "just an extension of a lot of stuff that I knew." When asked why he joined the program he responded "Just to educate, that's what I do on my trips so... [the Dolphin SMART] program just went right along with

what I do and had been doing for years.” Finally, Operator 4 explained involvement in Dolphin SMART allowed her company the opportunity to explain why the company views dolphins in the manner they do. She stated, “We have always followed the Marine Mammal Protection Act and we have always followed the guidelines even before we knew about Dolphin SMART, but this is a neat way to say we are accredited, this is a program we joined, and it’s a good way to convey to passengers and educate them on how to properly view dolphins.”

On the other hand, half of the Dolphin SMART recognized operators in Southwest Florida were unaware of the extent irresponsible viewing practices can harm dolphins. Each stated the Dolphin SMART training exposed them to these potential consequences and indicated that participation in the program had helped inform their understanding of wild dolphin conservation. For example, Operator 5 explained “I didn’t realize the extent that dolphins get injured by coming too close and interacting with human beings...I have always known it’s not good to feed wild dolphins, but when we saw some of the pictures of some of the things that actually happen to those dolphins it was really like, wow!” She commented the program has created “heightened awareness” regarding dolphin conservation and she is bothered by “some of the things that go on with other boats.” Specifically, Operator 1 said the lecture the law enforcement officer provided at the Dolphin SMART training was helpful because he was unaware of the regulations implementing the Marine Mammal Protection Act. He knew there were threats to the dolphins from tour boats, but was unaware of many specific threats until his involvement with the Dolphin SMART program. Operator 2 was particularly impressed by the presentation about dolphins in Key West and the idea these animals could leave an

area if they are being harassed. He explained the realization humans can drive dolphins away from an area helped him understand “how responsible we have to be.”

Half of the recognized tour operators in Southwest Florida saw involvement in Dolphin SMART as a logical extension of their current business practices and the rest learned the value of conducting sustainable viewing practices through the training process. All of these operators felt their participation in the program benefited dolphin conservation as a whole. Operator 6 summarized this sentiment when asked if she felt participating in the program benefits dolphin conservation:

Definitely, because the more people who get involved and the bigger recognition you have for that ethical behavior then the more people that understand the conservation aspect and its importance (Operator 6).

All operators felt strongly that the program benefits conservation, but most replies were followed up with the perceived barriers to successfully expanding the program, including competition from other operators and a lack of recognition from customers. These perceived barriers will be addressed in the following section.

Most recognized operators in Southwest Florida joined the program for conservation purposes, but the economic improvement due to cause-marketing was also mentioned frequently. Specifically, the three respondents who believed they were already adhering to Dolphin SMART’s guidelines explained the cause-marketing incentive would be an additional benefit. Operator 4 mentioned joining Dolphin SMART was a logical step for her business because it gave them a platform to explain their dolphin conservation efforts to the public, but also that the “cause marketing was kind of a big pull for us because it was a neat way to promote the tour company.” Operator 3 also stated when asked which message encouraged his participation in the program,

conservation or economic improvement, “Probably just the conservation of the dolphins more than the other. I thought it was really cool that I would get business but it was more about the dolphins because that’s what I have always done.”

The interviews with the recognized Dolphin SMART operators in Southwest Florida helped confirm the partners’ hypothesis that the main driver (and thus a message given priority when joining) was conservation promotion. Jessica Powell (NOAA Fisheries), noted:

What I think is really bringing people in is there are a few folks that really want to do the right thing for the dolphins and when they are not under heavy competition, when they are not having crazy captain turnover, when there is really not an issue with one operator misbehaving and making a lot of money, I think what you are attempting to bring in are the folks that truly care about the dolphins and truly get it and recognize that, yes, this could be a problem. What I feel like is happening is that we get the good apples already (Powell 2012).

## **Barriers**

Most recognized Dolphin SMART operators were motivated to join the program to promote conservation, but the primary barrier to non-Dolphin SMART recognized operators joining was the lack of a perceived business advantage to belonging in the program. Dolphin SMART partners explained the program is more successful retaining operators in Southwest Florida than in Key West because the competition is more geographically dispersed and operators are able to follow the Dolphin SMART viewing and advertising guidelines without the threat of their competitors engaging in irresponsible viewing to give their customers a “better” tour. The relative lack of competition may have encouraged more operators to join the program (six operators in Southwest Florida, compared to one in Key West), but the non-recognized operators I interviewed in Southwest Florida explained they did not join because they thought

involvement would either harm their business or not enhance it in any way.

Both Operator 7 and Operator 8 explained the sole reason they did not join the program was because they did not want to change their advertising to fit with Dolphin SMART's guidelines. Both acknowledged conserving the dolphin populations was important, but ultimately it was too much of a cost to change their advertising. Operator 8 believed her company already conducted responsible viewing practices, her staff of biologists works to educate customers about dolphins on the tour, and that Dolphin SMART should go after the more "abusive" operators. Operator 8 explained that the pictures she used in advertising, in which the boat and the dolphin are in the same frame, were obtained when the dolphins approached their vessel and were thus taken in a responsible manner. She explained that if her company had joined Dolphin SMART she would have had to remove half of their pictures on their website. Similarly, Operator 7 is affiliated with an agency that advertises swim-with-dolphin programs in Florida, Hawaii, Mexico, and the Caribbean. He said he felt he should not neglect his relationship with this agency but otherwise was willing to join the program and explained he practices the viewing guidelines that were presented in the training. I asked Operator 7 if joining Dolphin SMART would hurt his business given that competitive operators could view the dolphins more closely and he explained he would actually like the being the only Dolphin SMART recognized operator in his location. Although he did not perceive the viewing guidelines as a barrier to joining despite the competition in his location, the incentives to change his advertising were not sufficient to incur that risk.

Non-recognized operators also mentioned the viewing guidelines as barriers because they either compromised their customers' viewing experience or they did not

believe their viewing practices harmed the dolphins. Operator 9 owns six boats and while he said he understood “the program and what they’re trying to do and it’s admirable” his motorboat (which creates a wake “inviting the dolphins to jump in”) would not fit the “stringent” rules of the program and he did not want to fragment the company approach by joining the program if only some of his boats could comply. He felt his motorboat was not actually harassing the animals, it just “didn’t fit into the Dolphin SMART guidelines completely.” Whether or not he thought the motorboat was harassing dolphins, he did not want to abide by the Dolphin SMART viewing guidelines and ultimately thought “it was a good program, but I didn’t see there was a big impact on our business.” Operator 10 said his boat rarely creates a wake for the dolphins to play in, but occasionally it did and he felt it “wasn’t disturbing their natural behavior or harming them in any way.” He felt the Dolphin SMART program would be “more than happy with what we do with the exception that we did get dolphins jumping in the wake.” When asked what would encourage him to join he replied:

If we really thought it was good business sense to joining and that it was going to drive more people away [by not joining the program] we probably would’ve gone ahead and dealt with the secret shopper and trying to join and being a member and all that but we really didn’t think it would help us that much (Operator 10).

Finally, three non-recognized operators did not cite the viewing guidelines as a barrier to participation, but they did explain they would consider joining the program if it could improve their business. Operator 11 explained his business had always practiced the Dolphin SMART viewing guidelines so the conservation message would not be a motivating factor, but the business improvement would. Also, Operator 12 said he would have considered joining if “it would help him get business.” Finally, Operator 13 reported, “I hate to say it but we’re businessmen, we have to make money, but maybe it

would be a competitive advantage to say we're a part of the program and treat the dolphins appropriately and off the top of my head I could use that to my advantage.” Operator 13’s ideas about how to make Dolphin SMART work to his business’s advantage are exactly what is presented at the training sessions, but for some reason did not motivate him to join the program. The comments from non-recognized operators about how they wished joining Dolphin SMART could provide them more business illustrates how the message that cause-marketing can improve an operator’s business is being lost on those attending the trainings. To further confirm this point, all non-recognized operators agreed that cause-marketing strategies in general can be effective, but failed to make the connection of how they could utilize Dolphin SMART to improve their business.

Many Dolphin SMART partners mentioned the challenges with cause-marketing being perceived as a legitimate incentive. Despite efforts to communicate the cause-marketing message in training sessions, operators still fail to understand how involvement in the program will improve their business. The operators interviewed in Southwest Florida who became recognized members did so because they valued the conservation message, but those who did not join failed to see any business application, although some may have expressed concern for dolphin populations.

In addition to the overarching barrier of the lack of belief in the business improvement message, two other barriers were noteworthy. Operator 11 explained his business had always practiced the Dolphin SMART viewing guidelines and that “We have been in the business a long time and we have just as much understanding and capability to do it as anyone else.” He perceived the program as outsiders telling him how

to run his business, which is also a common barrier in Key West as will be discussed below. Operator 12 said he did not join because the program seemed “disorganized” and he thought the Dolphin SMART partners were supposed to reach out to him after the training and follow up as to whether he wanted to join.

The primary barrier operators face to remain members of the program is competition from non-recognized operators. Half of the recognized operators said they felt the viewing and advertising guidelines put them at a disadvantage because other operators did not have to obey the same guidelines. Operator 1 summarized this viewpoint regarding the viewing guidelines:

Sometimes I think as an operator some people could get discouraged to stick with the program because if you are getting clobbered by your competition ...because we can't see the dolphins jump in the wake, etc...I have two operators in my area that do it all the time and I know my people will be thinking to themselves why couldn't we have done that. And that's what prompts me to go in and talk about why we don't (Operator 1).

Similarly, Operator 2 explained he gets frustrated because he is trying to actively participate in the program and promote good behavior on the water when there are other boats that are “running around with no knowledge.” Regarding the advertising guidelines, Operator 5 mentioned the other companies advertising irresponsible viewing practices (i.e. dolphins wake riding, boats too close to the dolphins) put her business at a disadvantage though she does not necessarily want to advertise as they do. More specifically, two operators complained about having to take promotional videos off their websites because they did not fit the advertising guidelines. Despite these frustrations with the level of competition in the area and the perceived disadvantage of complying with Dolphin SMART's guidelines, ultimately these recognized operators in Southwest Florida participate in the program because they identify with the conservation message.

Other than competition, complaints regarding the program were minor and included issues with evaluation procedures and delays in recertification and communication. Dolphin SMART operators found the evaluation procedures frustrating, because if dolphins were not seen on the recertification trip, recertification for that year was delayed. Operator 6 acknowledged it was no one's fault that they did not see dolphins on a recertification tour, and she understood that it is difficult for the evaluators to make the three hour trip to her location, but expressed frustration because she felt her company was abiding by the guidelines, but the process to get recertified took several months longer than necessary. Operator 5 was impressed with how quickly she was recertified in 2010, but in 2011 her certification was delayed until June because the evaluators had not seen dolphins. Similarly, while Operator 2 was frustrated a video he created needed to be taken down from his website, it was the lack of a prompt response from Dolphin SMART about which he was more unhappy.

### **Participation Incentives – Southwest Florida Operators**

In addition to the benefits of conservation and economic improvement, Dolphin SMART also provides several participation incentives to encourage participation in the program:

- Dolphin SMART handbook, a binder including relevant information regarding dolphin behavior, conservation, and laws and guidelines
- Dolphin SMART Behavior Fact Sheet, a picture guide for guests that helps them identify different behaviors they may see
- Other outreach materials (brochures, kids' activity guides, stickers, fact sheets)
- Current year flag and decal with Dolphin SMART logo

- Representation at outreach events
- Advertising opportunities (press release upon initial recognition, business link on DS website, DS logo and advertising statement)
- Dolphin SMART Proud Supporters Program
- Overall providing an enhanced tour experience through distribution of outreach materials and education regarding knowledge of laws protecting wild dolphins and details about local dolphin populations and research

The participation incentives the recognized operators found most valuable were the outreach materials, the current year flag and decal, and the understanding their participation in the program contributed to an enhanced tour experience. The operators expressed how important the outreach materials were because they helped excite the children and educate them on dolphin conservation. In regard to the question of how valuable the outreach materials were, Operator 6 replied:

Those are all great because we give them out all the time and the more tangibles you can put in the consumers' hands to help them understand, the better, and I would say all those things are more important than anything else, the handouts, the stickers, the kids love them (Operator 6).

Operators also said the flag and decal were valuable. Both Operator 6 and Operator 1 mentioned customers ask them what the logo stands for and noted that it provides an opportunity for them to explain more about the program. Interestingly, none of the operators indicated Dolphin SMART plays a large role in their advertising strategies, but operators still said they liked having the flag and decal to promote their involvement in the program. Finally, all six recognized operators said they felt involvement in the program enhanced their tour experience, specifically by being able to educate their customers generally about dolphins and responsible viewing practices.

Non-recognized operators in Southwest Florida were also asked about the value

of participation incentives. Eight of the nine non-recognized operators felt the participation incentives would be a moderately to extremely valuable asset to their business. As most of the non-recognized operators thought the participation incentives would be useful, their lack of participation suggests that these operators have not joined because of other barriers or factors beyond the scope of this research.

Dolphin SMART recognized operators explained that some of the participation incentives were less useful than others. The operators found the Dolphin SMART Handbook and Behavior Fact Sheet very valuable when they started the program, but their utility waned quickly. For example, Operator 4 explained regarding the Dolphin SMART Handbook, “It was really good at the beginning, but I don’t think we have really used it since then.” As for the Dolphin SMART Behavior Fact sheet, most operators said they initially familiarized themselves with the various behaviors and then would educate their guests when they viewed them, as opposed to handing out individual fact sheets on tours. Operator 2 mentioned his boat carries up to 44 people so they “have to address people verbally rather than try to go around and give everyone a fact sheet. That wouldn’t work.” Operator 6 was very impressed with Dolphin SMART representation at a local conservation event and Operator 1 appreciated attempts to have his tour highlighted during the Society for Marine Mammalogy Biennial Conference in Tampa, but others were not aware of efforts to promote their companies. Three of the recognized operators either said they were not sure how much representation the program did at events or had not been to any such events. Finally, while Operator 3 expressed excitement over the Proud Supporters program because he understands any promotion for his business is a benefit, half of the operators said regarding the Proud Supporters program they either

“didn’t think it was in the forefront” or they “weren’t aware of it.”

## **Key West, Florida Operators**

### **Drivers**

In Key West only one ecotour operator currently participates in Dolphin SMART. His motivation to participate in the program is the same as those in Southwest Florida, namely to promote dolphin conservation. Operator 16 explained he is a fourth generation native of Key West and “wants to make sure that the population of dolphins that consists [sic] in and around Key West stay maintained and be kept safe” and through his company’s participation in Dolphin SMART he’s “hoping to be a part of preserving [the] island’s beauty and all the things that surround it and especially those things that are in the water.” He went as far to say that he did not think companies should need the business incentive to participate and, instead, that the conservation message should be sufficient:

That would be a great incentive to have to enhance our business and I’m sure to some degree it does but to be able to quantify and tell you that it does or does not, to me is irrelevant. The reason it is is because I think Dolphin SMART is the right thing for the animals. If people are looking at this program solely as a mechanism for their business and not caring about the actual experience with the animal then I think they are thinking about it all wrong (Operator 16).

He did acknowledge the difficulties in adhering to the program’s guidelines, especially when it came to advertising, but felt other operators’ complaints that Dolphin SMART was too “highly regulated” were inadequate. He explained companies that did not join were “short-sighted because no one is more regulated than [my company] and we are willing to accept that regulation because we think it’s the right thing to do and that people are taking the wrong approach to Dolphin SMART.” Thus ecotour operators in both

Southwest Florida and Key West are motivated to participate in the program because they identify with the conservation message.

## **Barriers**

As hypothesized by the Dolphin SMART partners, the main barrier to participation in the program is the lack of a perceived business advantage gained by adhering to the Dolphin SMART guidelines. More specifically, these complaints fall into three categories: the advertising guidelines; the perception that viewing guidelines compromised customers' viewing experiences; and a general belief that Dolphin SMART did not enhance business.

Operator 17 said, in regard to Dolphin SMART's advertising guidelines, that he understood the importance of eliminating guests' expectations of actions that could cause harassment, but he still believed the guidelines were too strict. Operator 18 said she did not join because it would have required her to change her brochures and the wording and links on her website and that the operators already have their business strategies to help attract customers. She also said multiple operators sought out her opinion as to why she did not join and she explained it was due to the advertising guidelines. Although Operator 20 ultimately left the program because she shifted her business away from dolphin tours, she stated she felt "the marketing tools were really strict" and "that deterred a lot of people from joining because it's extremely expensive for marketing materials" and many of these small businesses "barely make enough to get ahead." Operator 16 also ran into problems with the advertising guidelines when a promotional video he created needed to be edited to fit within the guidelines. He explained it was very expensive to get the

videographers back on the boat and edit the video, but they “went ahead and did it to stay a part of the program.”

Operator 21 failed his 2012 annual evaluation, and after further training was suggested, decided to drop the program. He explained he perceived the viewing guidelines as a hindrance to his customers’ viewing experience telling me “If a guy just paid \$400, we are gonna show him dolphins. I’m not running them over. I’m not getting close to them, but I’m not going to harm my business because of some arbitrary 100 yard number.” He mentioned he did not think customers knew about the program in part because no one specifically told him they came on his tour because of his involvement in the program. Not only did he have issues regarding the viewing guidelines, but overall did not believe the program could provide him any business incentives. He told me he “didn’t see any return financially and I know that sounds greedy, but I work really hard and if I’m going to invest in a program like this and that’s my time then I expect there to be some reassurance.” When asked what would encourage him to join, he bluntly replied, “the cause marketing, make me money and I’ll come back.”

Similarly, Operator 22 who failed his evaluations three times and was subsequently dropped from the program, explained the viewing guidelines harmed his business due to the competition from other non-recognized companies, telling me:

It’s physically impossible to tell a client that’s dropped \$191 for 2 passengers that ‘OK, you know what, the dolphin is all the way down there, but I’m not allowed to go any closer because I’m part of Dolphin SMART and then another company that’s not part of Dolphin SMART goes closer (Operator 22).

He mentioned he thought the program was “a great idea,” and he especially liked the outreach material, but “It’s just unfortunate that it’s all about the money in Key West.”

Lastly, operators explained they did not see how Dolphin SMART could improve

their business. Operator 20 stated that “It’s a business and time is money and for a small water sports company in Key West you have to pick and choose what you are going to do.” Although she said she liked the program and especially the people who worked for it, she felt as if she was “going the extra mile and to take the time out to go to these classes and to take people on the boat and to go through so much, I wasn’t getting anything back.” She said she would be open to joining if there was more marketing, publicity, and promotion of the program. Finally, Operator 19 told me she could not be in Dolphin SMART because she owned a private charter which would be problematic for the annual evaluations, but generally she said with the demands of being an owner/operator company, she did not see the benefit of belonging to Dolphin SMART. She also said she would “love to see the financial benefit through the advertising,” but felt customers were unaware of the program in which case aligning one’s company with Dolphin SMART would not increase business.

Only two non-recognized operators felt harassment of the dolphins was no longer an issue in Key West; most believe harassment is still an issue. However, these operators have not joined Dolphin SMART for business-related reasons. Operator 20 explained that “When it’s desperate times and the winds and conditions are high and the captain and the owners feel the pressure of showing dolphins, I do think at times it’s not regulated properly.” She also said she no longer promotes dolphin tours “for the main reason I feel sorry for them” and she feels “in the last 15 to 20 years [the dolphins] have really gotten their undue share, and are harassed a lot more just on a daily basis.” Operator 17 also explained several companies have three trips a day which causes the schedules to be “staggered and its ends up pretty much dolphins having boats around them for most of

the daylight hours on a lot of days.” However, despite the acknowledgement that harassment is still an issue, only one operator in Key West is a recognized Dolphin SMART member.

As noted above, two operators adamantly maintained that the harassment issue in Key West has been solved. Operator 19 noted that an alternative alliance established in 1997 was successful in getting the operators to work together to responsibly view the dolphins and that the operators in Key West “were already pretty much self-regulated by the time the time they instituted [Dolphin SMART].” Similarly, Operator 22 explained that all the operators “work 100 percent together with each other, one company finds the dolphins, and they’ll pass the dolphin onto the next company, making sure that we never have more than one boat at any given point with a dolphin. The boats themselves never harass the dolphins.”

Additional barriers among Key West operators include high captain turnover, overall dislike of outsiders instructing the operators how to run their businesses, and desire for enforcement from Dolphin SMART.

Specifically, Operator 22 explained captain turnover was a barrier to his involvement in the program. He said he could not be on every tour with his captains to make sure they obey the guidelines and if it was a matter between letting his captains go, whom he “spent a lot of time and effort training,” because they violated Dolphin SMART practices or not being a part of the program, he would opt for the latter. He also said he would not let his captains go because, even if they did fail the Dolphin SMART evaluation, in his opinion this does not constitute harassment. No other operators mentioned challenges with turnover of their own captains, but both Operators 17 and 19

mentioned captain turnover as a barrier for other operators. Operator 17 explained that some companies run multiple boats every day, which requires many captains. He felt many of these captains were inexperienced and “put out there as a captain without really knowing much about dolphins at all, about their behavior....when you should leave them alone, maybe when you should not try to get close to them.” Operator 19 speculated one company’s turnover rate was monthly if not weekly and that the owner “didn’t have time to educate them” which was partially the reason for the harassment she witnessed on the water. Also, she explained that in order to be a captain in Key West “you don’t have to have any real local knowledge” and you just have to “take a test with a crackerjack company that tells you what the answers are.” A high rate of captain turnover is a barrier to involvement if the operator is unwilling or unable to train his new captains.

Another theme in the responses was the general dislike of being told how to run their business by a “government program.” Operator 18 explained she felt “self-regulation is better than having the government involved” and that no one “wants to feel regulated by the government” when referring to the advertising guidelines. Operator 19 mentioned she did not think Dolphin SMART could ever work because “it is a government program and government programs don’t work.” Finally, Operator 20 told me that “boaters and mariners, people that run water sports, and charter businesses” value their freedom and felt it was wrong if companies who were not part of Dolphin SMART were looked down upon because they did not want to be “regulated” and have people coming on their boats and making sure they follow certain rules. Dolphin SMART is not a government program, but the National Marine Fisheries Service and National Marine Sanctuaries Program are two of the partners, so some operators perceive Dolphin

SMART's guidelines as the government instructing them how to run their business.

In a similar vein, Operator 19 stated that Dolphin SMART should penalize other operators harassing dolphins. She mentioned she had reported one operator for irresponsible behavior on two or three occasions and that in addition to the "monetary incentive" to participating in the program there should also be a "penalty" for illegal behavior. NMFS and National Marine Sanctuaries are government entities, so operators can wrongly perceive Dolphin SMART as part of a federal agency, and thus view the program's guidelines as unwelcome "regulations" or believe the program should have the capability to enforce harassment of dolphins.

Overall, the largest barriers to participation in the program in Key West are the advertising guidelines, the belief that viewing guidelines compromise the customer's tour experience, and a lack of perceived advantage to the operator's business. Captain turnover and the perception of Dolphin SMART as a government program also prevent involvement.

### **Participation Incentives – Key West Operators**

Operators in Southwest Florida generally agreed on the most valuable incentives, but operators in Key West exhibited no discernible pattern in this regard. Responses regarding each incentive were split evenly between useful and not useful. For example, when asked whether the flag and decal were useful Operator 22 responded "none whatsoever" but Operator 20 said she "liked the flag" and "it did look really cool on my boat with it being a catamaran." The only incentive the majority agreed would be moderately valuable to valuable was the Behavior Fact Sheet which was described as

“educational.” Worthy of note were the comments the operators made regarding representation at outreach events. Operator 21 thought that would be “slightly” useful but said he had “never seen anything like that” when he was in the program. Operator 20 also said she had not seen that when she was a member, but that did not necessarily mean they were not doing it now. Finally, Operator 19 thought representation at outreach events would be helpful, but overall perceived the program was not doing enough outreach and should take more advantage of the events in Key West.

### **Summary of Drivers and Barriers**

All current Dolphin SMART operators joined the program because they identified with the conservation message. Despite the perception of unfair competition with operators outside the program, these operators believe the program aids wild dolphin conservation - an incentive that is sufficient to participate in the program. About half of the operators believe they already followed Dolphin SMART practices and were knowledgeable of the threats regarding human-dolphin interaction while the other half were made aware at the Dolphin SMART training sessions.

The main barriers to participation in the program are (1) the perception that involvement in Dolphin SMART is a hindrance to business because of enforced compliance with advertising and viewing guidelines and (2) that membership does not increase business. In Key West the perception that Dolphin SMART does not benefit business may be compounded by increased competition among operators in this region.

## **Application to Dolphin SMART Hawaii**

As noted above, I did not interview operators in Hawaii because the program is in its initial phase and the partners do not wish to alienate tour operators who have not yet engaged with Dolphin SMART. At the partners' request I interviewed Laura McCue, the Dolphin SMART Program Coordinator in Hawaii, to gain her perceptions on the drivers and barriers to operator participation in Hawaii. Although the context in Hawaii is different from Florida, there are similar barriers in both regions.

Laura McCue pointed out several differences between Hawaii and Florida with respect to Dolphin SMART. In Florida, feeding wild dolphins and wake and bow riding are the major issues, but in Hawaii swim-with-dolphin programs pose the greatest threat to spinner dolphins. In addition, native Hawaiians are divided over whether swim-with-dolphin programs should be allowed to continue. Some Hawaiian families own the swim-with-dolphin tour businesses, but others believe such tourist activities disturb the dolphins and do not approve of the industry.

Laura explained the main barrier to joining Dolphin SMART in Hawaii is persuading the tour operators who conduct highly profitable swim-with programs that involvement in Dolphin SMART will not impose a cost to their operations. Swim-with programs do not occur in any other areas where Dolphin SMART has been established, so operators believe involvement in the program will either harm or not enhance their business. Laura said one operator told her "This is a really great program, but I'm not going to stop swimming with dolphins and join until everybody has to stop swimming with dolphins." Additionally, Laura reported the advertising guidelines also act as a barrier because operators may have to spend significant amounts of money to revise their

advertising materials so pictures of dolphins underwater are no longer displayed. The advertising guidelines and viewing guidelines are barriers in both Hawaii and Florida because they are perceived as business disadvantages. As in Florida, the challenge in Hawaii is how to ensure the operators recognize the economic benefit the program can provide to their business.

Lastly, it is important to note implementation of time-area closures in Hawaii to better regulate the dolphin tourism industry could benefit recruitment to Dolphin SMART. Time-area closures include closing the bays the National Marine Fisheries Service determines are primarily used by dolphins during their peak resting hours. Laura mentioned because the National Environmental Policy Act process (NEPA) has been under study for the past seven to eight years, operators do not believe the regulations will be enacted. However, the last remaining component of the Environmental Impact Statement, a cultural impact assessment of how the regulations would affect the native Hawaiian community, should be completed in the fall or winter of 2013, after which the time-area closures will presumably be implemented. By implementing the time-area closures, the swim-with-dolphin tour operators' businesses will be restricted allowing involvement in Dolphin SMART to become a more attractive opportunity.

Laura also mentioned the necessity to continue outreach and increasing exposure of the program which will be addressed in the following section.

### **Cause-Marketing Awareness**

It would be helpful to determine whether the cause-marketing strategy is truly successful, and that customers preferentially book with Dolphin SMART operators. Such

evidence could incentivize other companies to join or, if not, indicate changes should be made to the strategy.

A systematic investigation of whether the cause-marketing strategy is successful was not possible in my preliminary research. Instead, I interviewed customers to gauge their awareness of the program and explore perceptions of its success from the operator and the partner interviews.

### *Non-Dolphin SMART Recognized Customers*

None of the 50 customers interviewed on non-recognized tours were aware of the Dolphin SMART program. However, two-thirds of these customers said they would be more likely to choose a Dolphin SMART recognized tour over a non-Dolphin SMART recognized tour in the future. Some of the responses to the question of why they would choose a Dolphin SMART tour over a non-Dolphin SMART tour included:

- “Definitely Dolphin SMART because I like watching wildlife, but I don’t want to watch wildlife if it means they’re being put in danger.”
- “A Dolphin SMART tour, we love watching dolphins so we want our family to be able to enjoy them later on.”
- “I’d rather do something where they don’t bother the dolphins, if they go searching for them on purpose just to harass them, that’s not cool, but I understand the dolphins kind of like to swim in front of the boat. If it causes no harm to them and doesn’t disrupt their daily routine then it would be nice to see them, but I wouldn’t want to bother them on purpose just to let the tour see them.”
- “Just because protecting wildlife is very important and dolphins are fascinating. To know that somebody had made that effort to get certified, or whatever is involved, would be important.”
- “If it would be something that would involve conservation of those animals, yeah, I would probably be more likely to choose it.”

Additionally, several customers responded to the question of whether they would choose

a Dolphin SMART company over a non-Dolphin SMART company, that “if they were aware of the program” and “if it were advertised” they would choose it over a non-Dolphin SMART company.

Another 20% of customers said a company’s involvement in Dolphin SMART would have no impact on their booking decision, while the remaining 14% would need to know more information about the program in order to decide whether to book with a Dolphin SMART as opposed to non-Dolphin SMART tour.

### *Dolphin SMART Recognized Customers*

Most (81% or 34/42) customers of recognized operators were unaware of the program before touring. Nevertheless, all these 34 customers had a positive reaction upon realizing they had chosen a company committed to dolphin conservation. When prompted why their reaction was positive typical responses included:

- “I’m pleased about that, the dolphins should be in their natural habitat and deserve to be protected.”
- “Definitely positive because we live here and want to take care of the Bay.”
- “I was actually very impressed by it. I had never heard about it before. I’ve been on a few boat tours like that before and never heard anyone talk about Dolphin SMART so I thought that was a lot of interesting facts they gave.”
- “We thought it was a great idea, she was talking about the different advantages to it. We thought it was very educational.”
- “Inspirational because it’s protecting and looking after the dolphins for their welfare.”
- “Very pleased because we want all wildlife to be protected and conserved.”
- “Positive, because I love dolphins.”
- “I think it’s great because I always think it’s good to give back to the ecology and take care of the place where you live and show respect for your environment.”

Also, of the 81% who were unaware of the program, over three-fourths said if they had known about Dolphin SMART before booking the tour company they would have chosen it over a non-Dolphin SMART program primarily for similar conservation reasons as mentioned by the non-recognized customers. Another 12% of those initially unaware of the program said prior awareness would not have caused them to book that tour over another one. One customer commented “I probably wouldn’t pay attention to that and just go on the tour that was doing what I wanted to do.” Several other customers said they would choose a Dolphin SMART tour over a non-Dolphin SMART tour, but only if it was the same price and in a convenient location.

Of the eight customers who were aware of Dolphin SMART before touring, six were customers at the Florida Aquarium and two were customers at Adventure Cruises. Five of these customers (63%) learned about Dolphin SMART online, while the remaining customers either heard of the program from the Florida Aquarium employee who helped them book the tour, from previously attending a tour, or from a family member.

None of the eight customers who knew about Dolphin SMART said the involvement in the program had influenced their decision to book that specific tour, but in the future half of them said awareness of the program would influence who they booked with. It is important to note that this sample is extremely small and most of these people were visiting the Florida Aquarium which has a Dolphin SMART concessionaire and is a non-competitive market.

### *Lack of Customer Awareness*

Although the sample was small, none of the customers on non-recognized tours

knew about the program, which suggests that a lack of awareness could be a barrier to customers choosing Dolphin SMART recognized tours. Several customers noted “If I was aware of the program then yeah that would definitely sway my decision,” or “Well now that you’ve made me aware I probably would” and finally “Yeah, if I remembered what the program was about or if it was advertised that they were a Dolphin SMART company, then yes.”

Additional support for lack of awareness acting as a barrier is the overwhelmingly positive response people had to the concept of the program and their intent to choose a Dolphin SMART tour in the future. It is obviously impossible to determine whether their responses are indicative of future actions, but it seems the barrier is not persuading customers to identify with the dolphin conservation message, but to make them aware of their choices when booking dolphin tours.

#### *Operator perceptions of cause-marketing strategy*

Most prospective customers are unaware of Dolphin SMART, so I was interested in the perceptions of tour operators on this aspect of the program. Recognized tour operators have not measured the impact involvement in Dolphin SMART has had on their business, but I asked whether (1) operators believed participation in Dolphin SMART has affected the profitability of their business; and (2) if they believed customers chose their tour over others because of their involvement in Dolphin SMART.

Six of seven recognized operators responded that their involvement in the program was not increasing the profitability of their business. Operator 2 said “the best thing I could say is I hope so,” but Operator 1 also explained:

I don’t really have any way of judging it, but I don’t think my bottom line would

be affected either way...I think it would just be indifferent. I think there is a certain segment of people that would want to know this, once they understand what Dolphin SMART is then they feel better that they are on the tour, but they don't come there with the knowledge of what Dolphin SMART is (Operator 1).

Several other operators were more firm on their opinion that Dolphin SMART did not help improve their profitability. Operator 21 was the most outspoken about the cause-marketing and when asked why he dropped the program replied "No value in the marketing. That's the problem...It was good for the dolphins, but I didn't see how it was good for me." Operator 4 responded "I don't. Right off the bat...I would have to say that I don't think that it's impacted us as much as I thought it was going to." However, she mentioned because there is no operator competition in Tampa, if new tour companies did develop she thought customers would take note of her company's involvement with Dolphin SMART. Operator 5 felt participation had not affected the profitability of her company, but she still thought it "was a good organization" and she was "glad to be a part of it." Similarly, when asked if involvement in Dolphin SMART affected her profitability, Operator 6 touched on the challenges with awareness of the program:

I don't think it probably has. I don't think I've ever had anyone come in here and say they signed up because we are Dolphin SMART and maybe that will change as it gets bigger and more notoriety and that kind of thing where people would go on one Dolphin SMART operator tour and then look for other Dolphin SMART operators. I would hope maybe in the future. I mean we are still happy to do it, but I don't think it's really had any positive financial effect (Operator 6).

Only one recognized operator believed that some customers are aware of the program and "will make sure they are going to book with a Dolphin SMART tour provider," but the rest of the operators expressed thoughts similar to those of Operator 5 who said "Everybody seems to be hearing about Dolphin SMART for the first time when we give our little speech. I don't get the sense that they saw it online and that's why they

chose us.” Operator 1 simply responded “I think most don’t know.” Finally, Operator 2 commented Dolphin SMART was similar to a “secret organization that very few people know about” and “the only way the [cause-marketing strategy] will work is if people know it’s there.” He went on to explain Dolphin SMART should more actively promote the organization to increase awareness among customers. Similarly, one of the operators who dropped the program in Key West said he wished Dolphin SMART would advertise the program more on the internet through TripAdvisor or through print advertisements such as posters, fliers, signs, and brochures. He stated that Dolphin SMART was not “doing any marketing of their own program” and that “you don’t have to get to the operators you have to get to the tourists.”

The vast majority of operators do not believe their involvement in the program has increased their company’s profitability due to a general lack of awareness, which begs the question whether the operators themselves are utilizing the cause-marketing strategy to its fullest capacities. Dolphin SMART can teach the operators how to implement a cause-marketing strategy in the trainings, but operators must ultimately take the initiative to advertise their involvement in the program. When asked whether Dolphin SMART plays a role in the company’s advertising strategy one operator mentioned “not really” and another mentioned it will in the future, but currently they do not advertise much. Four other recognized operators mentioned the extent to which they advertise the program consists of the Dolphin SMART logo on their website and brochures or fliers. The remaining operator said his website has a link to a page dedicated to explaining the Dolphin SMART program and his company’s involvement in the program. My study does not address advertising of the Dolphin SMART program, but the fact most

recognized operators are only using the logo in their advertising indicates either the operators do not understand how that advertising could enhance their business or do not believe it would.

### *Partners' Perception of Cause-Marketing Strategy*

The cause-marketing strategy and challenges with awareness of the program were discussed in partner interviews. The partners acknowledged the importance of the cause-marketing aspect of the program for enticing operators that are motivated to improve their business. They generally believed the cause-marketing strategy works in theory, but there was speculation this aspect of the program did not help retain operators in Dolphin SMART. Some partners stated they believed the challenges to the success of the cause-marketing strategy included operators' aversion to changing their advertising and perception of that requirement as a business risk, the perception that Dolphin SMART lacks the advertising power to effectively promote the operators, and the operators' lack of knowledge regarding using cause-marketing to benefit their companies.

My finding that recognized operators would like to see more promotion and awareness of the program was useful because this was an aspect of the program that frequently came up in interviews with the partners. Increasing outreach, awareness, and advertising were frequently mentioned as incentives the partners think could improve the program. By increasing exposure to the program, not only would more customers be aware and have the opportunity to choose between a Dolphin SMART recognized and non-recognized tour, but operators would be increasingly influenced to join if Dolphin SMART were a well-known program in their community. While increasing exposure of the program is a broad goal, more specifically the partners mentioned increasing print

advertising such as distributing brochures to tourist establishments, increasing advertising on the internet such as a Facebook page, and also on-the-ground outreach such as increased representation at events and traveling to specific areas to recruit operators.

The partners acknowledged that increased awareness is a major goal for their program, but they also explained that a lack of funds is a major barrier to effectively promote the program. Stacey Horstman acknowledged that while the program has added employees “It’s still not enough because you really just need a couple of people who just focus on the program and can do the leg work in the new areas, do the build-up and continue to engage and keep the other areas going.” Similarly, Courtney Vail suggested a “Dolphin SMART coordinator is really needed in each region or each state to really truly develop the program to what it could be.” Finally, Laura Engleby pointed out that significant funds were put into ground outreach in Key West with little return.

As Dolphin SMART moves forward, it will be important to address the limitations of a modest budget for promoting and marketing the program.

#### **IV. Recommendations**

The interviews with Dolphin SMART recognized and non-recognized operators, the program’s partners and dolphin tour customers revealed drivers and barriers to participation in the program. My first set of recommendations are concerned with the drivers and the next section will present the barriers, including a discussion of whether each barrier is controllable by the partners, and, if so, suggestions for improvement.

## **Drivers**

### *Conservation Message*

For some operators, the barriers to participating in the program (see below) are outweighed by their desire to promote dolphin conservation. Three recognized operators were unaware of threats to dolphins until they participated in Dolphin SMART training sessions. All three operators joined the program to promote conservation, suggesting that this message is being communicated effectively to participants. Dolphin SMART should continue promoting this conservation message.

### *Participation Incentives*

In Southwest Florida the outreach materials were particularly well received and viewed as valuable educational tools for children, as were the flag and decals, because they provided talking points about the program. Most operators in Southwest Florida said they believed participation incentives were valuable, although this was not the case in Key West. I conclude that participation incentives should continue to be used to attract operators to join Dolphin SMART.

## **Barriers**

### *Captain Turnover*

Captain turnover, specifically in Key West, is not controllable by the Dolphin SMART partners. The owner of each individual company is responsible for educating his or her captains regarding responsible viewing practices. Presumably, if an operator believes that participation in the program will benefit his or her business, they will ensure their captains are trained appropriately.

### *Delays in recertification process and general communication*

Recognized operators expressed frustration with delays in recertification and poor communication concerning online advertising videos. The annual evaluation is critical to ensure that viewing guidelines of the Dolphin SMART program are being upheld. However, if dolphins are not seen on an annual evaluation tour, the operator is put at a disadvantage because there is a delay in becoming recertified. Perhaps if dolphins are not seen on an evaluation tour and the company has been a member of Dolphin SMART for a pre-selected time period and had failed no prior evaluations, the company could still receive new flags and decals. This creates a risk that a recognized company could violate Dolphin SMART guidelines, but it would prevent alienating companies that are committed to upholding the Dolphin SMART guidelines.

Two recognized operators were frustrated with the fact the program disapproved of videos they had created for their websites, but the delay in communicating these problems was also mentioned. If issues arise with recognized operators advertising inappropriate materials or any other barrier to their recertification, these need to be communicated promptly, together with a timeline for how long it will take to resolve the problem.

### *Negative perception of “governmental” interference*

In training sessions Dolphin SMART is described as a “voluntary, education” program several times, but this fact cannot be emphasized too frequently. Governmental agencies are program partners, so operators reasonably associate government regulation with the Dolphin SMART guidelines. Perhaps it would be possible to emphasize that Dolphin SMART is a preferable alternative to future regulation, so that operators will be

persuaded that the program is truly voluntary. Similarly, Dolphin SMART should explicitly emphasize that it does not (and will not) have any enforcement capabilities. It is difficult to address the antipathy that some operators have regarding advice in how to run their businesses, but Dolphin SMART should work to ensure the incentives to participate are sufficient to overcome this perception.

#### *Instructions for follow up after training*

The partners assured me the instructions for how to pursue involvement in Dolphin SMART after a training session are extremely clear. However, one operator mentioned his confusion regarding this subject. Perhaps it would be useful to repeat this information several times in the training.

#### *Issues with advertising guidelines*

Operators in both Southwest Florida and Key West were deterred from joining the program due to its advertising guidelines. Recognized operators also expressed frustration with not being able to use specific promotional material such as videos and pictures that were costly to produce. Despite the barrier the advertising guidelines present to some operators, they are in place to reduce the public's expectations of harmful human interactions with wild dolphins and ultimately promote a sustainable tourism industry. While these advertising guidelines remain a critical part to the program's mission of promoting responsible wild dolphin viewing, as Dolphin SMART moves forward it should consider ways to adapt these guidelines so they are not as prohibitive, but still maintain the integrity of the program. The partners have already exhibited this adaptability by allowing underwater footage of dolphins to be used in advertising as long

as the video was taken from GoPro cameras submerged on a pole from the side of the boat.

### *Issues with viewing guidelines*

Multiple operators expressed frustration with the viewing guidelines because the competition can get closer to the dolphins and they are perceived as generally restrictive of the customer's viewing experience. These viewing guidelines are the backbone of the program and ultimately reduce harassment on the water, so they cannot be modified to eliminate this barrier. However, by providing sufficient incentives to participate, both conservation and business-oriented, Dolphin SMART can persuade operators of the benefits to following the guidelines.

### *Perception that involvement does not improve business*

Perhaps the major barrier to participation in the program is the perception that involvement will not enhance the company's business. My recommendations to address this barrier are (1) work to increase exposure of the program and its recognized operators (2) provide further instruction on how operators can implement a cause-marketing strategy and (3) conduct an unbiased evaluation of the success of the cause-marketing strategy or at the least conduct a quantitative analysis of how important a conservation-oriented dolphin tour is to customers.

#### *(1) Increase exposure of the program and its recognized operators*

The Proud Supporters program has created a platform from which to advertise the program to a large audience, which is a valuable asset to the program. However, given the cost of advertising and the limited budget of the program it is critical to identify any and all opportunities to promote the program and its recognized operators to customers as

inexpensively as possible. Print ads are extremely expensive and many tourists begin planning their vacations online, so the internet offers a good alternative for promotion of the program and its recognized operators. The following list includes free or low-cost strategies that will help expose the program and its participants. Further advice should be sought from experts with business expertise to increase exposure of the program and improve the cause-marketing strategy.

1. **Utilize search engine optimization (SEO).** SEO is the process of taking steps to assure a website is placed higher in search engine results than a competitor's website. SEO can be complicated and companies often hire professionals to help edit the website's content and coding, but there are simple ways to use SEO and these could be promoted to operators as a marketing incentive to participate in Dolphin SMART. Specifically, the use of Google Places automatically improves a company's listing online. Google Places is a free platform that seeks to provide location-based search results and consists of simply registering with Google Places and creating a profile with the company's address, phone number, hours of operation, description of company, photos, and videos. After registering with Google Places the local business will come up higher in the search results, and also when the customer's mouse browses over the company's listing all the additional information about the company will appear. Google Places can also provide analytics regarding search engine data including "impressions" or how many times a business is listed as a local search result, "actions" or how many times people show interest in a business listing, click for more info on maps, driving directions, or info on the website, and a breakdown of the top search

queries that bring up one's business which indicates which keywords are performing best. Additionally, websites can be optimized by choosing key words that will show up in customer searches. For example, instead of only having "dolphin watching" on one of the operator's websites, it is important to include keywords like "dolphin tours" or "dolphin viewing". As a part of Google Adwords, Google's online advertising program, the company has created a Google Keyword Tool which is a very simple website that will generate keywords that are frequently searched by users. As a business incentive to joining the program Dolphin SMART could offer to explain how these marketing tools could be used to the company's advantage. Additionally, Dolphin SMART could work to optimize the Dolphin SMART homepage. By including keywords that potential customers would use to search for dolphin tours such as "Dolphin tours, Florida," "Dolphin tours, St. Petersburg" etc., the Dolphin SMART website could also start showing up higher in searches other than a search for Dolphin SMART. Overall, exploring search engine optimization to promote the Dolphin SMART home page would help increase its exposure to potential dolphin tour customers and also provide a marketing incentive to the operators contemplating joining the program.

2. **Develop Mobile App to promote recognized operators.** For her master's project, Duke University student Demi Fox created a mobile app entitled the "The Nai'a Guide" which seeks to educate the public regarding harmful human interaction with spinner dolphins in Hawaii. A specific section in the app is dedicated to Dolphin SMART and highlights each of the recognized operators. By promoting the recognized operators in the app, tourists are presented with options

to choose responsible tour businesses when seeking out dolphin viewing experiences. Emphasizing that recognized operators will be advertised in a nationwide mobile phone app presents another marketing incentive to participate in the program. There is additional funding left over after creating the app specific to Hawaii and the collaborating Duke University professor, Dr. Dave Johnston, has suggested Demi and I collaborate to create one specific to Florida. The app would be similar to “The Naia Guide” and provide information on bottlenose dolphins, negative consequences of irresponsible tourism, and promotion of the recognized Dolphin SMART operators.

3. **Utilize social media including Facebook and Twitter.** Maintenance of a Facebook page or Twitter account would be a time investment, but social media is becoming an increasingly important part of any business or organization’s marketing strategy. These are sources that allow free exposure of the program, so these marketing tools should be pursued. A Facebook page could work to promote awareness of responsible viewing of wild dolphins and also the recognized tour operators’ companies. A Twitter account is slightly less intuitive, but given the connections of the Dolphin SMART partners to the marine mammal community, offers a base to promote the program among circles of colleagues which can then disseminate the information more widely.
4. **Collaborate with universities.** Promoting Dolphin SMART and its operators not only requires money, but also time, so it would benefit the program to seek out opportunities for collaboration with university students. One option would be to become involved with Duke University’s Masters of Environmental Management

client-centered group master's projects. The current project was an individual master's project, but client-centered projects are more structured and consist of a team of three to five students, supervised by a faculty member, working on a specified project for a client. The Masters of Environment Management (MEM) program at Duke has a joint MEM/MBA program with students possessing business expertise that need challenging projects for their master's projects. Dolphin SMART could consider developing a client-centered master's project regarding enhancing the advertising/exposure/marketing strategy of the program. By working with Duke students on the client-centered group master's projects, the program could obtain a significant amount of work on a project of their choice, conducted by students with business backgrounds.

Additionally, Dolphin SMART could consider taking on unpaid college interns to design and manage the program's social media campaign. Currently, businesses are hiring employees specifically to manage their social media because of the importance it plays in advertising. Given the demand for this level of expertise, working on managing social media for a legitimate organization like Dolphin SMART would be an attractive opportunity for college students looking to improve their skills and gain real-world experience.

5. **Consider approaching philanthropic businesses for pro bono assistance.** Pro bono services, or the donation of professional work, are common in the legal profession and increasingly being used to assist social change organizations develop anything from marketing strategies to strategic plans to budgets. Because pro bono work requires no cost and minimal time investment, seeking out these

services could provide the program with useful advice regarding how to advertise and conduct outreach at minimal cost. The partners could either seek out businesses within the community to donate their assistance or work with organizations such as the Taproot Foundation, a non-profit that has provided over 100 million dollars in pro bono services to date for organizations working to improve society, focusing on issues such as the environment, health, and education.

6. **Create a charitable foundation that could raise donations to help fund the Dolphin SMART program.** Dolphin SMART cannot fundraise as dictated by 5 C.F.R. Part 2635, so the program relies on grants. However, additional funding opportunities for Dolphin SMART would support efforts to increase outreach and exposure of the program. Creating a charitable foundation or non-profit would allow Dolphin SMART to raise donations to help fund the program's outreach goals. The Proud Supporters program has already identified a significant number of businesses who are committed to promoting Dolphin SMART's mission. Given these businesses are dedicated to the cause, they may also be open to facilitating fundraising opportunities for Dolphin SMART. For example, events could be hosted at the Florida Aquarium with guest speakers knowledgeable about dolphins or on-the-water events directed at families which could be facilitated by the recognized operators. The establishment of a non-profit organization would be time consuming, but the support network already exists and funding is perceived as a barrier to increasing exposure of the program, so I believe this option is worth exploring.

*(2) Provide instruction to operators to more effectively implement a cause-marketing strategy*

**1. Provide marketing “tool kit”.** The current training sessions explain how operators can utilize cause-marketing, specifically by conducting the educational briefing and using the logo and advertising statement in their promotional materials. However, operators are not advertising their involvement in Dolphin SMART to any significant degree, so better instruction for how to implement a successful cause-marketing strategy would be beneficial. Several partners made this recommendation because they, too, believe there is a disconnect between the information presented in the trainings and the operators’ implementation of cause-marketing. Creating a toolkit providing examples and instructions for how to more concretely advertise and promote involvement in Dolphin SMART could help bridge this gap. The tool kit could include sample webpages, brochures or fliers to help operators gain an understanding of how advertising Dolphin SMART can make their company stand out as responsible and conservation-oriented. It would also be helpful to provide case studies of successful cause-marketing campaigns and examples of their advertising. Finally, as suggested by the partners, there could also be instructions on how to promote involvement in Dolphin SMART using social media, i.e. Facebook and Twitter. Creating this “marketing toolkit” would require effort, but once established it could be an important resource to move the operators from merely understanding cause-marketing to actively pursuing the strategy in their own companies.

- 2. Bring in guest speakers to explain value of cause-marketing.** The partners also suggested inviting business professionals to the trainings who can explain how cause-marketing, if utilized to its fullest capacities, can directly impact business revenue. The training sessions convey this message, but operators may view information coming from a business person as more credible. Additionally, guest speakers can provide concrete suggestions and examples of how to go about implementing a cause-marketing strategy involving Dolphin SMART. The cost of this recommendation is a barrier. However, rather than seeking out a professional and paying him/her, by networking within the community and reaching out to the many contacts the program has already made, it may be possible to identify an individual who would donate his or her time and efforts to help the organization.
- 3. Work with one recognized operator to provide an example of a successful cause-marketing strategy.** The partners also mentioned the need for “success stories” regarding the cause-marketing strategy. Conducting an analysis of the cause-marketing strategy’s success is discussed in the next recommendation, however, the partners could also additionally work closely with one recognized operator who was receptive to implementing a cause-marketing strategy and create an example to which other operators can then look when developing their own advertising campaign.

*(3) Conduct an unbiased evaluation of the success of the cause-marketing strategy*

It is imperative to obtain evidence that employing a cause-marketing strategy will benefit the participating operators economically. Currently, the program relies on

foundational research supporting cause-marketing, but lacks evidence the Dolphin SMART recognized tour operators benefit from alignment with the program. One option would be to work with a newly recognized operator and analyze his earnings before and after implementing a cause-marketing strategy involving Dolphin SMART. Barriers to this case study approach would be the long length of time needed to ascertain this strategy's success, and the inability to control outside variables such as market changes, state of the economy, local weather patterns, etc. would prevent collection of valid data. Alternatively, another option would be to conduct a quantitative analysis of customer preferences to determine whether the cause-marketing strategy will be successful when applied to the dolphin ecotour business. Given this quantitative analysis will take considerable time and effort, I believe it would be an ideal project for another Duke Masters of Environmental Management student, but preferably one who is in the Environmental Economics and Policy concentration.

## **V. Conclusion/Additional Questions Raised**

The main driver to participation in Dolphin SMART is the conservation message itself. The greatest barrier is the lack of perceived business advantage. With a general understanding of what is motivating participation in the program, Dolphin SMART partners can refine the incentives to participate and work to increase recruitment of additional operators. Future research could include gaining a more refined understanding of customer awareness and perceptions about the program. As mentioned above, it would be useful to conduct a quantitative analysis of either the success of the cause-marketing strategy or customer preferences regarding dolphin tours. Another research technique to

help refine ways Dolphin Smart can maximize recruitment is the use of focus groups with tour operators. Given there is a general understanding operators would like to see a greater economic advantage to affiliating with Dolphin SMART, focus groups could help provide feedback on which marketing techniques and incentives (e.g., mobile app, marketing tool kit, outreach events, etc.) operators would find most valuable. Acquiring this feedback would also prevent Dolphin SMART from devoting resources to projects operators consider less attractive.

## **VI. Acknowledgements**

I would like to express my sincere thanks to all the individuals who helped make this project possible and helped me along the way. First and foremost, thank you to the Dolphin SMART partners for making this opportunity available to me, lending time for the interviews and for providing guidance throughout the process. Also, thank you to Dr. Andy Read, Dr. Pamela George, and Noelle Wyman for their invaluable guidance on the project. Finally, I would like to acknowledge the dolphin tour operators for their time and input on the Dolphin SMART program. I hope the findings will help move Dolphin SMART forward as it continually works toward the admirable goal of reducing dolphin harassment in the coastal waters of the United States.

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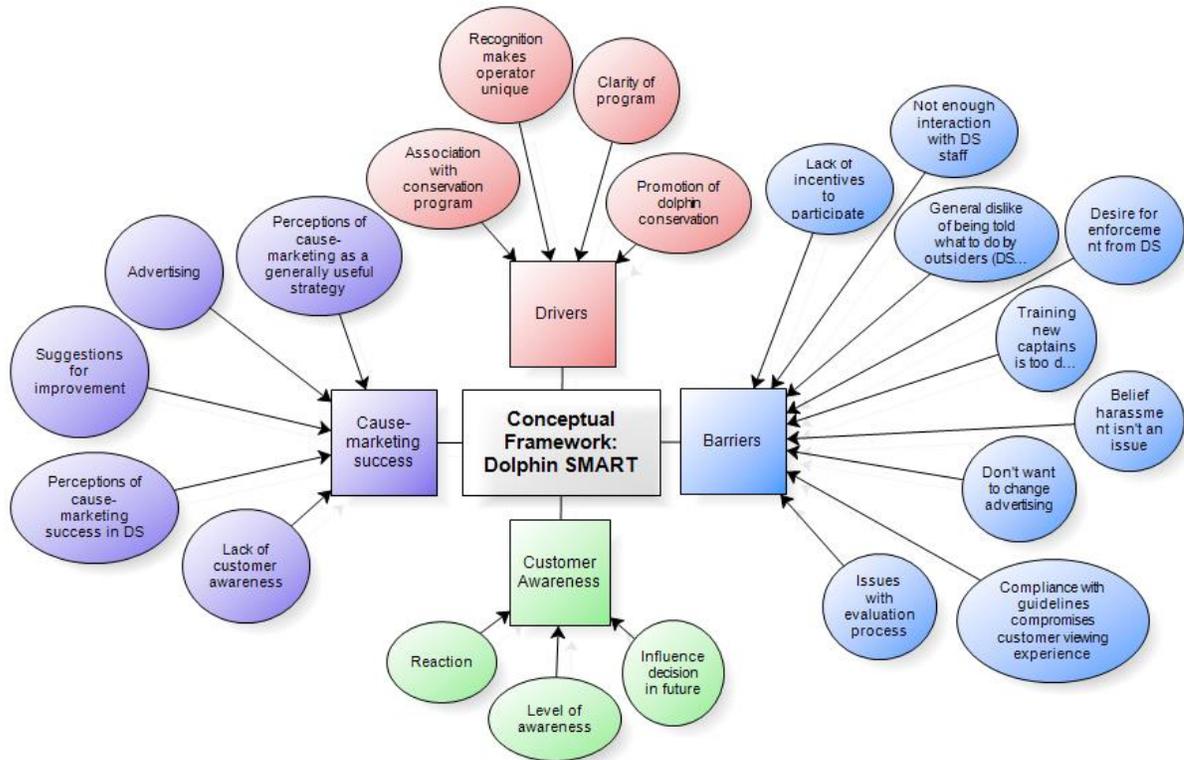
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## VIII. Appendices

### Appendix A – Conceptual Framework of Data



## **Appendix B - Operator Interview Guides**

### **Southwest Florida Interview Guides**

#### **DS Recognized Tour Operators**

Thank you for taking the time to chat with me today and share your experiences about participating in the Dolphin SMART program.

1. To get started would you mind telling me a little bit about your tour company?
  - a. How long have you been conducting tours (change depending on company)?
  - b. How did you become involved in this business?
2. When did your company become involved in Dolphin SMART?
3. What was the most important reason you became involved in DS? Any other reasons?
4. In the DS training workshops presentations are given about 1) how joining DS can promote business through cause marketing 2) and how DS aids in wild dolphin conservation.
  - a. Did one of these messages encourage your participation in the program over the other, and if so which one and why?
5. In terms of the business aspect:
  - a. How do you feel participation in DS has affected the profitability of your business?
  - b. Do you believe customers choose your tour company over others because of your involvement in DS?
  - c. Does DS play a role in your advertising strategy? Why or why not? If so, how important a role?
6. Switching to conservation: what was your previous understanding about threats to wild dolphin populations before enrollment in the DS program?
  - a. Has your participation in the DS program changed how you view wild dolphin conservation?
  - b. Do you feel participating in the DS program benefits dolphin conservation: why/why not?
7. What is the primary reason you continue to renew your DS participation?

8. DS provides recognized businesses with participation incentives I'm going to list the main incentives and can you tell me whether you have found each of them:
- Extremely valuable
  - Moderately valuable
  - A little valuable
  - Not at all valuable
1. DS Behavior Fact Sheet
  2. DS Participant Handbook
  3. Other outreach materials (i.e. brochures, kids activity guides, stickers, fact sheets)
  4. Current year flag and decal
  5. Representation at outreach events
  6. Advertising opportunities: i.e. press release upon initial recognition, business link on DS website, DS logo and advertising statement
  7. Enhanced tour experience
  8. Dolphin SMART Proud Supporters promoting the program and participants
    - a. Are there other incentives you wish the DS program could provide? If so what?
9. In your opinion, what is the primary reason other local companies do not become DS recognized? Any other reasons? (If unsure prompt with - Ex. unawareness of the program's existence, too time consuming to become recognized, not enough incentive to join, do not believe in the program's mission?)
10. Overall, on a scale of 1-5 how satisfied have you been with the program thus far? A one meaning very dissatisfied, 2 dissatisfied, 3 neutral, 4 satisfied, and 5 very satisfied.
- a. Are there any positive experiences you could share?
  - b. Are there any negative experiences you can share?
11. I'd like to gather a few more facts about your company:
- a. Could you tell me the highest level of education you have completed?
    - i. Graduate school
    - ii. College
    - iii. Some college
    - iv. High school
    - v. Some high school
  - b. Also,
    - i. Number of employees
    - ii. Customers per year
    - iii. Number of vessels

- iv. If willing: Annual revenue, or if not revenue, how much do they charge per person?
  1. > \$30,000
  2. \$30,000-\$60,000
  3. <\$60,000

### **Non-DS Recognized Tour Operators**

Thank you for taking the time to chat with me today and share your opinions about Dolphin SMART.

1. To get started would you mind telling me a little bit about your tour company?
  - a. How long have you been conducting tours (change depending on company)?
  - b. How did you become involved in this business?
2. What do you know about the DS program and its mission? Have you attended a training?
3. Can you tell me the primary reason you have not joined? Any other reasons?
  - a. What would encourage you to join DS?
4. DS provides material incentives to their participants. I'm going to list the main incentives and can you tell me whether you believe they would be:
  - Extremely valuable
  - Moderately valuable
  - A little valuable
  - Not at all valuable
  1. DS Behavior Fact Sheet (A picture guide for guests that helps them identify different behaviors they may see)
  2. DS Participant Handbook (this includes relevant information regarding dolphin behavior, conservation, and laws and guidelines)
  3. Other outreach materials (i.e. brochures, kids activity guides, stickers, fact sheets)
  4. Current year flag and decal
  5. Representation at outreach events
  6. Advertising opportunities: i.e. press release upon initial recognition, business link on DS website, DS logo and advertising statement
  - a. Are there other incentives you wish the DS program could provide? If so what?

5. In order to encourage business participation in the program, DS focuses on two causes: 1) business participation incentives and benefits and 2) an understanding that the company's participation is aiding wild dolphin conservation and how.
  - a. In the future if you were to join, which of these reasons would be a motivating factor? Why?
6. Studies show that by aligning one's company with a cause (e.g. pink ribbon labels indicate a portion of the profits support breast cancer awareness), customers are more likely to gravitate to it – Do you agree with this?
7. What impact do you think the DS recognition has on customers' decision to book with a specific business?
8. I'd like to gather a few more facts about your company:
  - a. Could you describe the education level of the decision-makers at your company?
    - i. Graduate school
    - ii. College
    - iii. Some college
    - iv. High school
    - v. Some high school
  - b. Also,
    - i. Number of employees
    - ii. Customers per year
    - iii. Number of vessels
    - iv. Annual revenue or if not revenue, how much do they charge per person?
      1. > \$30,000
      2. \$30,000-\$60,000
      3. <\$60,000

**Key West Interview Guides:**

**DS Recognized Tour Operators**

Thank you for taking the time to chat with me today and share your experiences about participating in the Dolphin SMART program.

1. To get started would you mind telling me a little bit about your tour company?
  - a. How long have you been conducting tours (change depending on company)?
  - b. How did you become involved in this business?
2. When did your company become involved in Dolphin SMART?

3. What was the most important reason you became involved in DS? Any other reasons?

4. In the DS training workshops presentations are given about 1) how joining DS can promote business through cause marketing 2) and how DS aids in wild dolphin conservation.

a. Did one of these messages encourage your participation in the program over the other, and if so which one and why?

5. In terms of the business aspect:

a. How do you feel participation in DS has affected the profitability of your business?

b. Do you believe customers choose your tour company over others because of your involvement in DS?

c. Does DS play a role in your advertising strategy? Why or why not? If so, how important a role?

6. Switching to conservation: what was your previous understanding about threats to wild dolphin populations before enrollment in the DS program?

a. Has your participation in the DS program changed how you view wild dolphin conservation?

b. Do you feel participating in the DS program benefits dolphin conservation: why/why not?

7. What is the primary reason you continue to renew your DS participation?

a. Have you encountered any problems renewing your participation in the program?

8. DS provides recognized businesses with participation incentives I'm going to list the main incentives and can you tell me whether you have found each of them:

- Extremely valuable
- Moderately valuable
- A little valuable
- Not at all valuable

1. DS Behavior Fact Sheet

2. DS Participant Handbook

3. Other outreach materials (i.e. brochures, kids activity guides, stickers, fact sheets)

4. Current year flag and decal

5. Representation at outreach events

6. Advertising opportunities: i.e. press release upon initial recognition, business link on

DS website, DS logo and advertising statement

7. Enhanced tour experience

8. Dolphin SMART Proud Supporters promoting the program and participants

a. Are there other incentives you wish the DS program could provide? If so what?

9. In your opinion, what is the primary reason other local companies do not become DS recognized? Any other reasons? (If unsure prompt with - Ex. unawareness of the program's existence, too time consuming to become recognized, not enough incentive to join, do not believe in the program's mission?)

a. Four other companies have dropped out of the program. Why do you think that is?

10. Overall, on a scale of 1-5 how satisfied have you been with the program thus far? A one meaning very dissatisfied, 2 dissatisfied, 3 neutral, 4 satisfied, and 5 very satisfied.

a. Are there any positive experiences you could share?

b. Are there any negative experiences you can share?

11. I'd like to gather a few more facts about your company:

a. Could you tell me the highest level of education you have completed?

- i. Graduate school
- ii. College
- iii. Some college
- iv. High school
- v. Some high school

b. Also,

- i. Number of employees
- ii. Customers per year
- iii. Number of vessels
- iv. If willing: Annual revenue, or if not revenue, how much do they charge per person?
  - 1. > \$30,000
  - 2. \$30,000-\$60,000
  - 3. <\$60,000

### **Non-DS Recognized Tour Operators**

Thank you for taking the time to chat with me today and share your opinions about Dolphin SMART.

1. To get started would you mind telling me a little bit about your tour company?

a. How long have you been conducting tours (change depending on company)?

- b. How did you become involved in this business?
2. What do you know about the DS program and its mission?
- a. The program is built on two principles: 1) helping to improve the tour operator's business through cause-marketing and 2) promoting dolphin conservation. Do you see a value in either of these principles?
3. Have you attended a DS training? Were you involved in any of the original scoping or stakeholder meetings?
4. Originally, the DS program was formed in Key West in response to the concern operators were harassing the dolphins. Do you still feel this is an issue in Key West? Is there still "bad acting" on the water?
- a. If problem has decreased: What do you attribute this decrease to? Do you attribute this decrease to the earlier town-hall meetings regarding DS?
5. DS has had difficulty maintaining operators in the program in Key West. Why do you think this is?
- a. Do you feel operators believe the program is not needed? (only ask if not mentioned)
- b. What do you see as the specific challenges to a program like DS maintaining operators in Key West?
6. Can you tell me the primary reason you have not joined? **OR** Can you tell me why you dropped the program?
7. What, if anything, would encourage you to join DS?
- a. How could DS improve the program to get operators like you on board?
- b. What could DS do to overcome the challenges you mentioned earlier? (echo the challenges they listed in #5b)
8. If DS were recreated, what kind of program do you envision supporting dolphin tour businesses, but preventing practices that could potentially harm and create stress for the dolphin population? In other words how would you "redo" DS?
9. In order to encourage business participation in the program, DS focuses on two attributes: 1) the ability of operators to use a cause-marketing approach such as using the DS logo in your advertising 2) an understanding that the company's participation is aiding wild dolphin conservation and how.

a. In the future if you were to join, which of these reasons would be a motivating factor? Why?

10. Studies show that by aligning one's company with a cause (e.g. pink ribbon labels indicate a portion of the profits support breast cancer awareness), customers are more likely to gravitate to it – Do you agree with this?

11. In Key West the only currently recognized DS company is The Fury. What impact do you think the DS recognition has on customers' decision to book with their company?

12. DS provides material incentives to their participants. I'm going to list the main incentives and can you tell me whether you believe they would be:

- Extremely valuable
- Moderately valuable
- A little valuable
- Not at all valuable

1. DS Behavior Fact Sheet (A picture guide for guests that helps them identify different behaviors they may see)
2. DS Participant Handbook (this includes relevant information regarding dolphin behavior, conservation, and laws and guidelines)
3. Other outreach materials (i.e. brochures, kids activity guides, stickers, fact sheets)
4. Current year flag and decal
5. Representation at outreach events
6. Advertising opportunities: i.e. press release upon initial recognition, business link on DS website, DS logo and advertising statement

a. Are there other incentives you wish the DS program could provide? If so what?

Florida Keys Dolphin Alliance:

- How do you encourage companies to join? Do you have trainings?
- What about those companies that don't really care about conservation?
- Do you feel that the alliance accomplishes the same goals as DS?

13. I'd like to gather a few more facts about your company:

a. Could you describe the education level of the decision-makers at your company?

- i. Graduate school
- ii. College
- iii. Some college
- iv. High school
- v. Some high school

b. Also,

- i. Number of employees
- ii. Customers per year

- iii. Number of vessels
- iv. Annual revenue or if not revenue, how much do they charge per person?
  - 1. > \$30,000
  - 2. \$30,000-\$60,000
  - 3. <\$60,000

### **Appendix C - Consent Form: Tour Operators**

Thank you for agreeing to interview with me today for my Masters Project as part of my Environmental Management degree at Duke University.

With your responses, I will be able provide recommendations to the Dolphin SMART program sponsors (National Marine Sanctuaries Program, Dolphin Ecology Project, Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society, and NOAA Fisheries Service) so they can more effectively manage the program.

If you agree to participate, I will ask you a series of questions about your involvement with the Dolphin SMART program. This will take about 15 minutes of your time. I will also request your permission to record our interview so that I can later transcribe it for analysis. This recording will not be shared or distributed in any way and will be deleted after transcription.

There is no compensation for participating in this study.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. Only I will have access to your responses linked to your name. Your responses may be viewed by interested parties as a component of my Masters Project, but you and your company's name will remain anonymous.

If you wish to no longer participate, you may stop the interview at any time. Data collected before your decision to discontinue will only be used with your permission. If you have any questions or concerns I can be reached at 314-623-4131 or [Julia.goss@duke.edu](mailto:Julia.goss@duke.edu).

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Name of Participant

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Signature of Participant

---

Date

## Appendix D- Partner Interview Guides

### All partners except Laura McCue:

1. First could you clarify your role in the Dolphin SMART program?
2. What do you see as the ultimate goal for the Dolphin SMART program?
  - a. Could you be a little more specific in terms of short and long term goals, specifically those with measurable outcomes?
3. What are the future steps that you and the partners will take to move the program toward those goal?
4. What do you think are the motivations and the barriers to operators joining?
5. Which message do you believe the operators are keying into more, cause-marketing strategy or the conservation message?
6. Do you think the program incentives are sufficient to recruit and retain operators?
  - a. What other incentives do you think could improve this program?
7. Talk to me about the budget – how much does it constrict you?
  - a. If you had the funds, what ideas would you most like to pursue?
8. Do you think the cause-marketing strategy is working?
  - a. What could improve it?
9. Why do you think areas like Key West and Clearwater may not have been as successful at getting operators to join?
  - a. Why do you think these areas may not have been as successful at maintaining the operators that did join?
10. Are areas like Key West and Clearwater outliers or the norm?
11. Do you think Dolphin SMART needs to change to accommodate areas like those? (Or are you not as concerned as long as operators in general are joining?)
12. In areas such as Tampa, there is only one dolphin tour business (Florida Aquarium), therefore customers do not have a choice to book with a DS tour over a non-DS tour. Theoretically speaking the cause-marketing strategy will not be successful in these regions. Is the cause-marketing strategy emphasized equally

as an incentive in both areas where there is no choice between operators and areas where there are many?

13. What are your overall impressions about the program thus far?

**Partners Interview Guide: Laura McCue, Hawaii**

1. What do you see as the ultimate goal for the Dolphin SMART program?
  - a. Could you be a little more specific in terms of short and long term goals for the program in HA, specifically those with measurable outcomes?
2. What are the future steps that you will take to move the program toward those goals?
3. I'll narrow this down with some follow up questions, but first what are the biggest differences between Florida and Hawaii when it comes to implementing DS?
4. I've talked to Grant about his outreach strategies in Florida, could you describe how you recruit operators?
5. What do you think are the motivations and the barriers to operators joining in HA?
6. What differences do you see in the motivations and barriers in HA compared to FL?
7. Has the HA program changed at all to adapt to these differences?
8. Focusing on the swim-with-dolphin programs: Could you talk to me about how the swim-with operators react to your attempts to encourage them to join DS?
9. Which message do you believe the operators in HA are keying into more, cause-marketing strategy or the conservation message?
10. Do you think the program incentives are sufficient to recruit and retain operators?
  - a. What other incentives do you think could improve this program?
  - b. What incentives do you think would be necessary to recruit the swim-with operators?
11. Talk to me about the budget – how much does it constrict you?
  - a. If you had the funds, what ideas would you most like to pursue?

12. Looking at the program as a whole, do you think the cause-marketing strategy is effective in recruiting operators? Do you think it is effective in Hawaii?
  - a. What could improve it?
13. In FL why do you think areas like Key West and Clearwater may not have been as successful at getting operators to join or maintain ones that did? Do you see any similarities in regions of HA?
14. Are areas like Key West and Clearwater outliers or the norm? Or similar areas in Hawaii?
15. Do you think Dolphin SMART needs to change to accommodate areas like these? Or are you not as concerned as long as operators in general are joining?
16. In areas such as Tampa, there is only one dolphin tour business (Florida Aquarium), therefore customers do not have a choice to book with a DS tour over a non-DS tour. Theoretically speaking the cause-marketing strategy will not be successful in these regions. Is the cause-marketing strategy emphasized equally as an incentive in both areas where there is no choice between operators and areas where there are many?
17. What are your overall feelings about the program thus far?

## **Appendix E - Customer Interview Guides**

### **Customers of DS Recognized Operators**

1. What was your primary reason for wanting to go on a dolphin tour? (fun, adventure, education) Any other reasons?
2. Were you aware when you booked with X tour company it was involved in the Dolphin SMART program?
3. If yes: When did you learn of their participation with the program? How did you learn about their participation?
4. Did the company's participation with DS influence your decision to book a tour with them? If so, why? If not, why not?
  - a. Will a company's participation in DS affect your choice of tour businesses in the future? Why or why not?
5. If no to 2:
  - a. Had you heard about Dolphin SMART before your tour?
  - b. What reaction did you have upon realizing you had chosen a company committed to dolphin conservation? – positive, negative, neutral? Why?
  - c. If you had known about DS before booking the tour company would you have chosen it over a non-DS company? Why or why not?
6. Did you learn anything new about wild dolphins, dolphin viewing or conservation on the DS tour?

### **Customers of Non-DS Recognized Operators**

Thank you for taking the time to chat with me today and share your experiences about your dolphin tour with X company.

1. What was your primary reason for wanting to go on a dolphin tour? (fun, adventure, education) Any other reasons?
2. Why did you choose this particular business?
3. Are you aware of the Dolphin SMART program? (Explain if unaware).
4. If you were to book another dolphin tour in the future, which would you be more likely to choose: a DS recognized company or a non-DS recognized company? Why? Or does it impact your decision at all? Why/Why not

## **Appendix F - Oral Consent Form: Customers**

Hi, could I interview you for my Masters Project as part of my Environmental Management degree at Duke University? If you agree to participate, I will ask you a few questions about your dolphin tour and will not be gathering any personal information such as your name. This will take about 5 minutes of your time.

I am working with the Dolphin SMART program to determine why dolphin viewing businesses do or do not participate in the Dolphin SMART program.

With your responses, I will be able provide recommendations to the Dolphin SMART program sponsors (National Marine Sanctuaries Program, Dolphin Ecology Project, Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society, and NOAA Fisheries Service) so they can more effectively manage the program.

There is no compensation for participating in this study.

Your responses may be viewed by interested parties as a component of my Masters Project.

You may stop the interview at any time. Data collected before your decision to discontinue will only be used with your permission. If you have any questions or concerns I can be reached at 314-623-4131 or [Julia.goss@duke.edu](mailto:Julia.goss@duke.edu).