

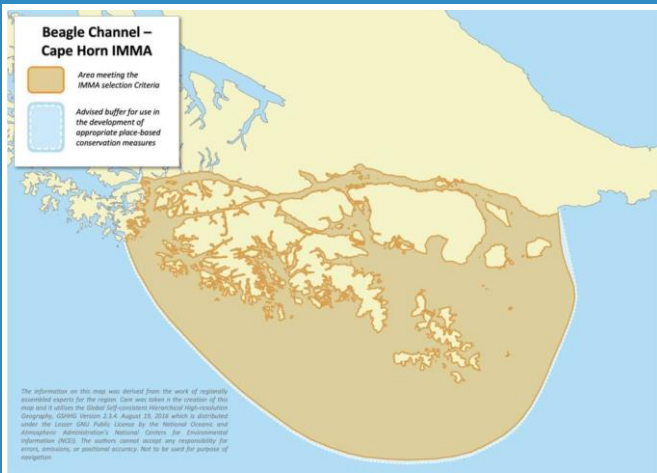
# Beagle Channel to Cape Horn IMMA

## Summary:

The Beagle Channel and Cape Horn IMMA includes a highly productive marine region off the southern tip of South America, where the Atlantic, Pacific and Southern Oceans meet. The area sustains at least eleven primary marine mammal species as well as eight supporting species. Among these, three species; Peale's dolphins (*Lagenorhynchus australis*), dusky dolphins (*L. obscurus*) and Burmeister's porpoises (*Phocoena spinipinnis*) and two pinnipeds; South American sea lions (*Otaria byronia*) and South American fur seals (*Arctocephalus australis*) are resident in the area year-round. Dusky dolphins in this area, represent the southernmost population of the species. Additionally, the area has been identified as a foraging ground for humpback whales (*Megaptera novaeangliae*).

## Description:

The archipelago of Tierra del Fuego (Fuegian Archipelago) is formed by a group of islands of different sizes, fjords and inner channels, including the Cape Horn archipelago. The largest island, the Isla Grande of Tierra del Fuego, is delimited by the Strait of Magellan to the north and the Beagle Channel to the south. The Beagle Channel is about 240 km long and 5 km wide at its narrowest point, and provides a connection between the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans (Isla et al., 1999; Gordillo et al., 2008). The Beagle Channel is a unique subpolar marine ecosystem, supporting high marine diversity because it acts as a spawning and nursery site for many species, including fish (e.g., *zoarcids*, *nototenids*), crustaceans (e.g., *Munida gregaria*), and other



## Area Size

26 572 km<sup>2</sup>

## Qualifying Species and Criteria

Peale's dolphin – *Lagenorhynchus australis*

Criterion B (2)

Dusky dolphin – *Lagenorhynchus obscurus*

Criterion B (2)

Burmeister's porpoise – *Phocoena spinipinnis*

Criterion B (1)

South American sea lion – *Otaria byronia*

Criterion B (2)

South American fur seal –

*Arctocephalus australis*

Criterion B (2)

Humpback whale – *Megaptera novaeangliae*

Criterion C (2)

## Marine Mammal Diversity

Criterion D (2)

*Lagenorhynchus australis*,

*Lagenorhynchus obscurus*, *Phocoena spinipinnis*,

*Otaria byronia*, *Arctocephalus australis*,

*Megaptera novaeangliae*, *Orcinus orca*,

*Balaenoptera borealis*, *Balaenoptera*

*bonaerensis*, *Balaenoptera acutorostrata*,

*Hydrurga leptonyx*

invertebrates (e.g., snails, limpets and chitons) (e.g., Rae & Calvo, 1995; Adami & Gordillo, 1999; Diez et al., 2009), which in turn provide resources to many top predators such as seabirds and marine mammals (e.g., Raya Rey & Schiavini, 2001; Goodall et al., 2008; Valenzuela, 2011). The depth of the Beagle Channel varies from a few meters to more than a several hundred meters (Giesecke et al., 2022). The productive period is limited to spring and summer (from October to mid-March, Almandoz et al., 2011) when the net uptake of CO<sub>2</sub> exceeds the community's collective respiration, creating a net sink of CO<sub>2</sub> (Torres et al., 2011).

On the southern side of the IMMA, Cape Horn is the southernmost headland of the Tierra del Fuego Archipelago, marking the southern boundary of the Drake Passage where the Pacific, Atlantic, and

Southern oceans meet. The highly biodiverse area supports a mix of species with both temperate and sub-Antarctic distributions, many of them endemic to the region (Fernandez et al., 2000; Miloslavich et al., 2011). The region contains critical habitats for marine mammals of global conservation concern and a number of Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas (IBA) (Falabella et al., 2009; Vila et al., 2016). The area has a large diversity of marine mammals as reported by Hucke-Gaete et al. (2022).

The Cape Horn National Park encompasses the entire Cape Horn Archipelago and comprises a series of islands and islets, including the main landmasses of Wollaston and Hermite islands. It was designated a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve in 2005, and is the world's southernmost national park.



Figure 1: A pair of Burmeister's porpoises (*Phocoena spinipinnis*) swimming in Beagle Channel. Photo credit: Mónica A. Torres

## Criterion B: Distribution and Abundance

### Sub-criterion B1: Small and Resident Populations

Burmeister's porpoises (*Phocoena spinipinnis*) inhabit both the coast of Tierra del Fuego and the Beagle Channel, where the year-round presence of a small local population has been recorded since 1995 (Goodall et al., 1995; Reyes Reyes et al., 2018). Most sightings have been recorded in the inner part of the Beagle Channel, from Bahía Lapataia to Punta Remolino (marine mammal group of the laboratory of Wildlife Ecology and Conservation (MM-LECOVIS) from CADIC-CONICET, unpublished data). Since 2018 a systematic photo-id project has been carried out (Asplanato et al., 2019) and to date more than 50 animals had been identified (some of them were re-sighted in different months) by marks in their dorsal fin and scars on their bodies (Asplanato, unpublished data).



Figure 2: Burmeister's porpoises (*Phocoena spinipinnis*) in Beagle Channel. Photo credit: Mónica A. Torres



Figure 3: Burmeister's porpoise (*Phocoena spinipinnis*) identified by scars on its body. Photo credit: Mónica A. Torres

## Sub-criterion B2: Aggregations

Historically, few sightings of dusky dolphins (*Lagenorhynchus obscurus*) were reported in the area of the Beagle Channel and Cape Horn (Goodall et al., 1997; Gibbons et al., 2002). Dellabianca et al. (2018) summarized the records from the last 5 decades in the Argentinian Beagle Channel, and gathered information on only 11 sightings in the area between the early 70s and the late 90s. However, from 2002 onward they were more regularly observed in the Beagle Channel and Cape Horn area (Dellabianca et al., 2018; Hucke-Gaete et al., 2022). Surveys conducted from 2009 onwards confirmed the presence of dusky dolphins during summer and fall months (November to April) and more recently, surveys during southern hemisphere winter months in 2017, and 2022 confirmed the presence of dusky dolphins in the months of May, June and August as well, indicating that the species is present in the IMMA year-round (MM-LECOVIS). Young calves have been observed in the area during late spring and summer months, suggesting that the dolphins are reproducing in the IMMA.



Figure 4: Dusky dolphins (*Lagenorhynchus obscurus*) riding the waves. Photo credit: Mónica A. Torres



Figure 5: Peale's dolphin (*Lagenorhynchus australis*) leaping out of the water in Cape Horn. Photo credit: Gabriela Scioscia

Peale's dolphins (*Lagenorhynchus australis*) are distributed from Cape Horn (59° S) to Valparaíso (33° S) in the Pacific Ocean (Aguayo, 1975; Goodall et al., 1997) and north along the coast of Argentina to Cabo dos Bahias (Brownell et al., 1999). Although the species seems to be very common in certain areas, the population estimate for Peale's dolphins in the wider Magellan region (including the Beagle Channel) was estimated to be 2,400 individuals (Gibbons et al., 2002). Studies conducted in waters of the Beagle Channel and the Atlantic coast by Dellabianca et al. (2016) showed that 98.5% of sightings of Peale's dolphin were recorded in waters < 200 m depth. Peale's dolphins have been regularly recorded in the IMMA since the early 70s (Goodall et al., 1997; Dellabianca et al., 2018). Ordoñez (2019) reported a population size of 132 dolphins along the east portion of the Beagle Channel and the southern Atlantic coast of Tierra del Fuego using density surface modelling of sighting data collected during eight scientific cruises on board research vessels between 2009 and 2018. A compilation of data obtained

systematically from different surveys and from different sources showed a preference of the Beagle Channel and the Cape Horn areas (Hucke-Gaete et al., 2022) highlighting these areas as priority areas for the species in the Southwestern Atlantic ocean (Dellabianca et al., 2016). The presence of calves has been reported from spring to autumn (Goodall et al., 1997; Ordoñez, 2019). Numerous studies have documented a strong association between Peale's dolphins' behavioral state and macroalgal forests (*Macrocystis pyrifera*) (Goodall et al., 1997; Lescrauwaet, 1997; De Haro & Iñiguez, 1997; Viddi & Lescrauwaet, 2005; Heinrich, 2006). Although limited, data suggest that their diet is composed of demersal fish and benthic invertebrates that live near or within these kelp forests (Schiavini et al., 1997). Ordoñez et al. (2020) demonstrated that these animals feed and search for prey (40.5% and 14.3% respectively of their total behavioral states) in a portion of the IMMA. The same study showed feeding and foraging activities to be strongly associated with kelp forest habitats.



Figure 6: South American fur seals (*Arctocephalus australis*) swimming in Beagle Channel. Photo credit: Carlos Olavarria

South American fur seals (*Arctocephalus australis*) and South American sea lions (*Otaria byronia*) are resident species in the IMMA, with both rookeries and feeding habitat encompassed by the IMMA. There are many rookeries for both species located on small islands and islets along the Beagle Channel (Crespo et al., 2015; Milano et al., 2020a, b). South American fur seals are present in rocky islets in the Beagle Channel from late February to mid-September at haul-out sites. The number of animals in these sites is highly variable. The maximum recorded number of individuals was 895 in March 1992, within an area of less than 2,000 m<sup>2</sup> (Crespo et al., 2015). More recently, the number of counted animals was less than 300 (unpublished data from Paso Viola, unpublished data). For South American sea lions, a total of 467 pups and non-pups were recorded for the islands and islets of the Argentine sector of the Beagle Channel in 2012 (Milano et al., 2020a).

Trophic studies identified the squat lobster *Munida gregaria* and the Fuegian sprat *Sprattus fuegensis* among the most important prey for both species (Paso Viola & Raya Rey, 2016). The IMMA hosts one South American sea lion rookery on Becasses Island in the Beagle Channel, classified as a breeding colony (with more than 20% of pups in the colony and the traditional structure of harems). In 2012, the estimated number of pups was 30, indicating a decrease in pup production compared to a previous aerial survey conducted in 1997 (Milano et al., 2020a).

### **Criterion C: Key Life Cycle Activities**

#### **Sub-Criterion C2: Feeding Areas**

The Fuegian Archipelago is an important feeding ground for humpback whales (*Megaptera novaeangliae*), mainly in the southwestern part of the Strait of Magellan (Gibbons et al., 2003; Acevedo et

al., 2011; Haro et al., 2016). During the last decade, more than 155 humpback whales were documented in the Beagle Channel between the months of December and June and many of them returned in

subsequent summer seasons. On many occasions, they were observed feeding on Fuegian sprat (*Sprattus fuegensis*) (Torres et al., 2019; Jorobadas del Beagle Photo-id Project, LECOVIS unpublished data).

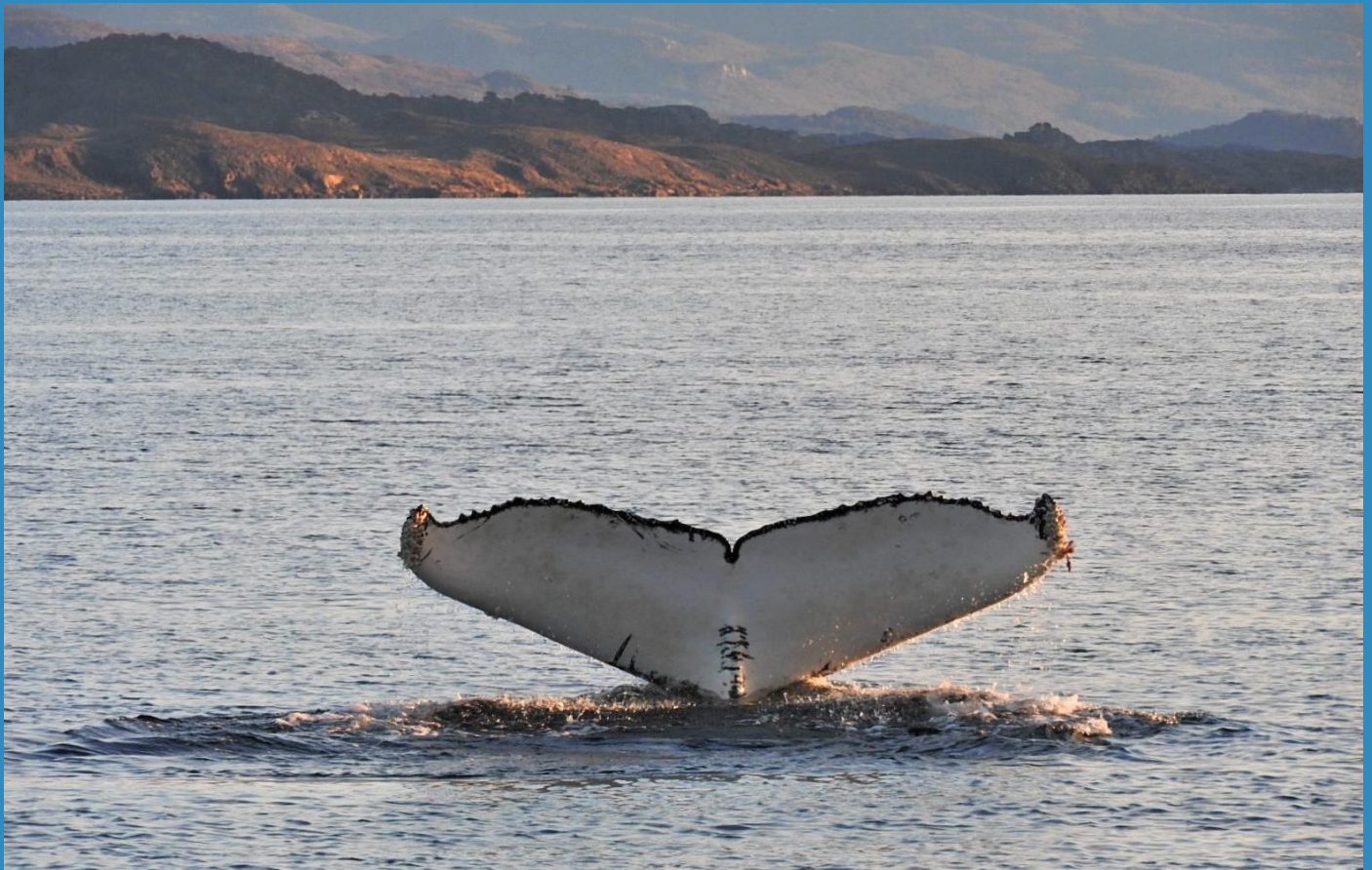


Figure 7: Humpback whale (*Megaptera novaeangliae*) fluke observed in Beagle Channel. Photo credit: Agustina Dellabianca

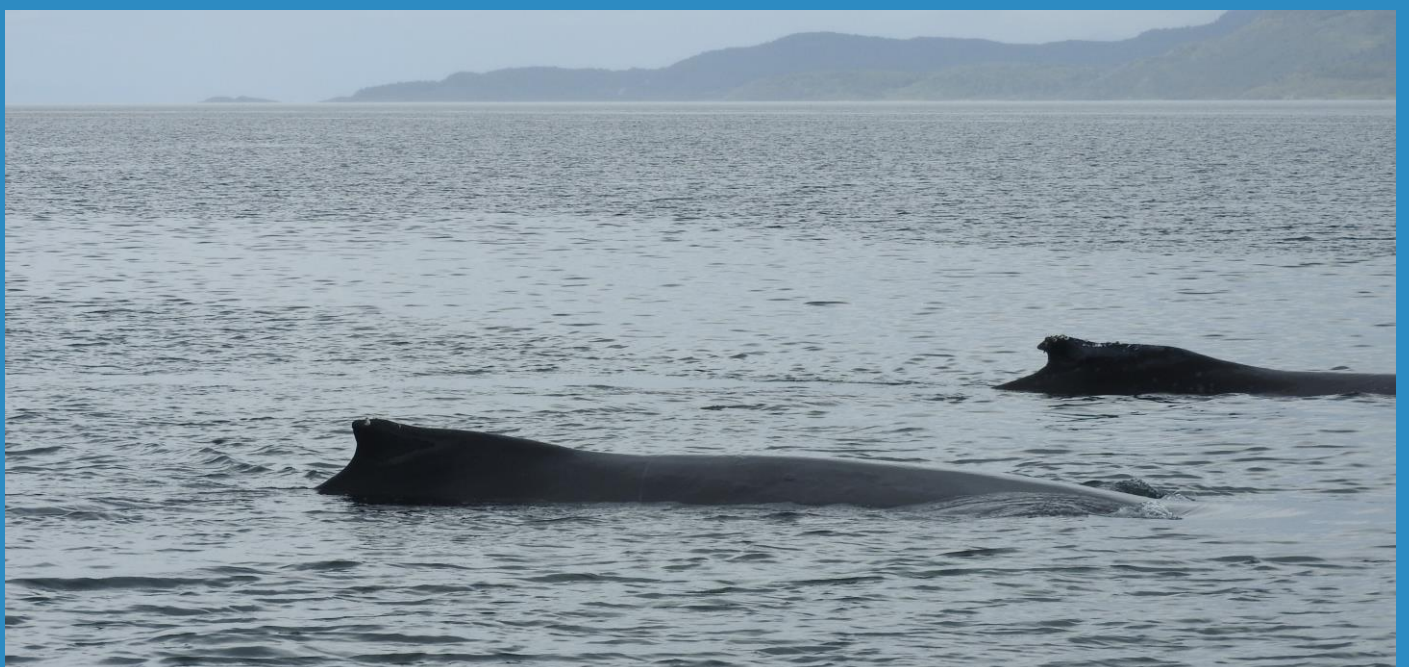


Figure 8: Humpback whales (*Megaptera novaeangliae*) observed in Beagle Channel. Photo credit: Agustina Dellabianca



Figure 9: Sei whale (*Balaenoptera borealis*) sighted in Beagle Channel. Photo credit: Carlos Olavarria

## Criterion D: Special Attributes

### Sub-Criterion D2: Diversity

The IMMA fulfills the sub-criterion D2 since at least 11 species of marine mammals are regularly found in the area. In addition to the species that have been documented as year-round residents, feeding and breeding in the area, sei whales (*Balaenoptera borealis*), Antarctic and common minke whales (*Balaenoptera bonaerensis* and *B. acutorostrata*) and killer whales (*Orcinus orca*) have marked seasonal occurrences during summer and autumn-winter months (Capella et al., 1999; Goodall et al., 2008; Dellabianca & Torres, 2015, 2016, 2017; Torres et al., 2016; Dellabianca et al., 2023; LECOVIS unpublished data). The leopard seal (*Hydrurga leptonyx*) has also been recorded in the area (Aguayo-Lobo et al., 2011; Ferrer, 2018) and in the last ten years the number of sightings in the Beagle Channel has increased considerably (Paso Viola, unpublished data).

## Supporting Information

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