

Shannon Dolphin and Wildlife Foundation

Marketing Plan, 2000-2005

Name of Project: Shannon Dolphin and Wildlife Foundation

Definition of Product: The resource is the accessible and diverse wildlife, especially the resident population of bottlenose dolphins in the Shannon estuary, and opportunities for outdoor pursuits in the relatively undeveloped land and seascapes of West Clare. The product is providing opportunities and facilities for accessing and interpreting this resource. This can be considered in two distinct categories 1. boat based and 2. land based tourism.

Boat based tourism products are mainly the dolphin-watching trips available through 4 operators (1999) advertising dolphin-watching trips while land-based tourism includes a range of products from guided wildlife tours and related outdoor activities (pony-trekking, diving, thalassotherapy) and support facilities such as food, transport and accommodation. If 15,000-20,000 new visitors can be attracted into the region by these products this will generate an estimated £1-1.5 million into the local economy.

Image and brand name/logo: The image is of West Clare being a healthy and stimulating destination for family holidays and excursions with a range of opportunities and facilities for all ages and seasons. The dolphins have been identified as the unique product in the area and may be the basis for an image that is special to West Clare (Special Interest Marine Tourism in the West Clare Peninsula Report, 1999).

Product Development: Following the two categories described, product development can be considered as follows:

1. *Boat based tourism.* Boat operations have been steadily increasing with an estimated 300% increase in the number of visitors reported in 1999. Present boat capacity is large (maximum 5000 trips) but the season is extremely peaked with 78% of trips in July and August. The main objectives are to:

- i) develop an Accreditation Scheme through which the operators can be promoted as accreditation ensures good environmental practice.
- ii) extend and increase the season into April/May/June and September/October by targeting specialist tour operators, school groups and independent travelers.

2. *Land based tourism:* To develop potential of existing land sites by:

- i) producing an audit of resources
- ii) assess potential of land sites at:

Kilcredaun Head
Scattery Island
Bridges of Ross/Loop Head
Leck Point

This will be achieved by carrying out scan sampling through a tidal cycle from each site. Weekly sampling at Scattery Island and Leck Point and every two weeks at Bridges of Ross/Loop Head through May to September. Sampling at Kilcredaun Head will be concentrated in April/May and September/October.

In order to increase the benefit of the dolphins and wildlife to the area we aim to develop a high quality product with numerous add on opportunities to encourage visitors to stay in the area or design their holiday around West Clare. It is essential that the quality be pitched at an extremely high level from the start and is maintained there, if necessary, at the expense of visitor numbers. The target is to attract smaller numbers of high spend visitors rather than large numbers of day trippers as the resources and facilities in West Clare are not capable of absorbing the mass tourism encouraged in other regions.

Packaging and Marketing of product:

Packaging of the product is basic at present and effort needs to be put into:

1. how to promote product overseas and within Ireland. This can be achieved by:

i) commissioning stories on the dolphins in glossy magazines including information on what type of dolphins; how many; what is unique about them; how they exist, communicate, play; what is the structure / hierarchy of the group etc. All written in a style that interests the readers e.g. The Shannon Dolphins - a day in the life. At another level, the story of the dolphin could be told to interest nature lovers, marine researchers, academics etc. by producing fact sheets (desk-topped) on the Shannon Dolphins.

ii) Fungi, the Dingle dolphin has a large impact because he has a personality and people relate to him as a celebrity and feel they know him. In the case of the Shannon estuary we are talking about a school of dolphin's that have no personality - we talk of them almost as if they were a commodity. We will bring them alive for the public by developing 'characters' among them?, some are distinctive looking and have their own little traits / quirks. Using the photo-ID catalogue there are at least 60 we can name?

iii) We require some superb photos taken - over and under water. We could bring in a talented nature photographer - and provide them with a detailed brief. Ideally what we need are not good snap shops, but spectacular pics that would grace the front cover of brochures and National / International publications etc.

iv) A series of press releases are planned. They are designed to achieve certain coverage in certain places to whom to secure business for the area. The first was sent out on 14th April to inform the Foundation has been established. The second press release will coincide with the launch of the Accreditation Scheme on June 3/4th.

v) There will be on-going programme to attract media and tour operators into the area for briefings / tours.

vi) Dolphins as a subject are ideal for all sorts of school project work. Dolphin projects could be pushed out through the schools, with a prize of a tour to Clare for whole class. Would only do, if it could link back into an actual product in West Clare - reasons for students to visit e.g. A Dolphin Centre.

vii) Week-end Dolphin Master Classes. This to include lectures, tours etc. or an national/international seminars on dolphins with high profile guest speakers

viii) There is potential for business classes / training programmes that draw on some of the lessons dolphins teach us. For example: Kennedy West have a programme, where you journey through invisible mazes and are pushed through spiders webs. One book called "Strategy of the Dolphin" suggests that businesses have traditionally pursued two kinds of strategies - the strategy of the Carp and the strategy of the Shark - but that in the future the strategy of 'the dolphin' will be all prevailing. "Dolphins are considered to be inventive, sensitive, responsive and highly intelligent. They thrive in all waters alone or in large schools (teams). dolphins adapt quickly and precisely to make sure they get what they want - and they love new challenges". It could be easy for a creative training company to make the links between dolphins and what is needed to succeed in business.

2. how to get visitors in cars travelling through Kilrush to locations down Loop Head. There are two types of traveller passing through the area, a) the visitor who has pre-booked the following night accommodation and knows their destination and activities in transit (67%, Tourism Marketing Strategy for Co. Clare, 1997) and b) the flexible traveller who will stop at attractions whose accommodation will reflect activities.

The former category are likely to have decided on a large proportion of their activities before reaching Ireland or West Clare and will have to be influenced prior to deciding their holiday destination. This is a long term commitment but will bring the greatest benefits to the Irish economy. The latter category will prove more successful in the short term and Shannon Ferries Ltd. with an estimated 600,000 passengers per annum are the most likely source of increased visitors to West Clare. Already Shannon Ferries Ltd. inform passengers about the dolphins but this could be enhanced by provision of an information board at Tarbert, Co. Kerry

i) Signage can be used to highlight that Dolphin viewing points/dolphin Tours are close-by? The dolphin is a powerful, recognisable image that would be excellent on signage, using colourings similar to Lough Derg Signage. If we can get agreement to put up some signage, we can have commission designs for a 'Dolphin drive'.

3. how to develop facilities and attractions to cater for increased visitors. The Special Interest Marine Tourism in the West Clare Peninsula Report (1999) recommended a number of improvements to the infrastructure in West Clare including enhancing the dolphin-watching attractions through on-shore activities including a land-based dolphin visitor centre, re-establishing a sea-angling operation, constructing sensitively located nature-watching facilities at appropriate locations and establish a centrally located booking office that sells a wide range of tourism packages with West Clare. This will be investigated through regional development initiatives and by encouraging local entrepreneurs.

4. how to bring accommodation providers into product development. The initial phase will be to inform accommodation providers about the resources and facilities available. Representatives could be invited to see the product at the start of the season and would then be excellent ambassadors. The Burren Tourism and Environment Initiative may provide a very useful model on how to involve local accommodation providers.

i) To attract day visitors, then leaflets into nearby areas where visitors stay / frequent is best way of achieving this. With spectacular pics, it would be easy to utilise these in a simple effective DL size leaflet to promote the dolphins and dolphin tours. The upper part of the DL could be in the shape of a dolphin coming out of the water. This would set it apart from all other brochures in the literature racks. Dolphin Tours are not mass tourism, but the message must be moved out to even generate the business to keep the tours viable. With brochures, which includes promotion of the Accreditation Scheme, we can carefully target where you want to reach and can extend or reduce coverage as required.

5. developing internet presence for developing specialist holidays: consult with Internet providers about access and content. Every opportunity should be used to convey the conservation message through the Internet and other medias to enable a high quality product and visitor management.

Integration with other products: in order for the dolphins to contribute to tourism development in West Clare then strong links must be developed with other similar projects in the area. Copies of relevant documents and this Marketing Plan will be distributed to:

- i) Special Interest Marine Tourism Implementation Group
- ii) West Clare LEADER
- iii) West Clare Cluster Group
- iv) META

- i) Establish a good co-operative marketing group and encourage them to develop priced holiday packages that includes and excludes a dolphin tour. Have them have dolphins as part of their logo.