

## **Speech by Peter Evans**

### **Winner of the Third ASCOBANS Outreach and Education Award**

**on the first day of the 6<sup>th</sup> Meeting of Parties to ASCOBANS  
16-18 September 2009**

Thank you very much indeed. I am very honoured to receive this Award.

As Peter Reijnders just said, these things are not done by one person. Education and outreach always involve a lot of people, so obviously this award belongs as much to those that I've worked with as to me. Over the 35 or more years that I've been involved with cetaceans, I've had the privilege to work with so many dedicated people - including those from my own organisation, Sea Watch in the UK, and members of the European Cetacean Society distributed throughout Europe and beyond. I represent here these two organizations.

The European Cetacean Society was founded in the mid-1980s by a group of four people from different European countries on the basis of our combined concerns for the harbour porpoise. We were lobbying the North Sea Conference along with other international bodies. Originally we were going to have a European Harbour Porpoise Society, but decided we should expand it at least to include all cetaceans – now we involve all marine mammals, even seals, and have a society with about 500 members. Most people that work on marine mammals in Europe are indeed members. We have annual conferences & specialist workshops, and together we are trying to push forward the agenda of research and conservation for all cetaceans in Europe.

My own organisation, the Sea Watch Foundation, has its roots nearly 40 years ago, when I first got involved with cetaceans. I remember attending an FAO meeting in 1976 in Bergen, which I think was the first awakening for marine mammal conservation on a global scale. It was a great privilege for me as a young student to go there. An awful lot has happened in those years since then. Inspired by that, I formed a group in the UK which tried to bring together the public and scientists to further knowledge and understanding of cetaceans and conservation issues in our country.

Conflicts between humans and cetaceans tend to result from a lack of understanding of potential impacts. Often these can be resolved through greater awareness and appreciation of the issues themselves, and that is where education and outreach can play a significant part. This applies to every country here, particularly when it involves the appropriate target groups, winning them over and making them understand the issues involved.

I work in a university environment but also run an NGO. It is interesting to see how society views the two groups. University personnel are viewed as rather respectable, bespectacled persons, surrounded by a lot of books; whereas environmental NGOs are viewed as hairy eco-warriors who are out there demonstrating their concerns whilst calling for prompt action. I think those two views are really a little bit false and I'd like to say a few words in support of the other NGOs that are gathered here. They often work very long hours for free or for very little money and they tend to have the focus and specialist knowledge that is needed to address specific topics; indeed I think that ASCOBANS would be the poorer without them. This is something that we should take into consideration and not view them as second class citizens, but realize

that we must be interdependent on their efforts. At times they may be a thorn in the sides of governments, but their efforts are generally (maybe not always) well meaning, and the challenge should be for NGOs and governments to see their ultimate aims as the same, even if their routes there may not be. I think it is really important that we can all work together in partnership and we should find means to do that, because our goals are the same.

After almost 20 years I think ASCOBANS has now reached maturity. I agree very much with some of the concerns that Peter Reijnders has just expressed in his speech. With recent moves within Europe to view the conservation of the marine environment in a more joined-up way, e.g. through the development of the European Marine Strategy Framework Directive and attention to marine spatial planning, I believe that education and outreach involving **all** strands of society has become even more important.

We cannot say that we have achieved our conservation objectives if the animals that we are trying to conserve themselves haven't noticed the benefits of our efforts. We have to think about that – personally, I don't think that they will have noticed any benefits. We should also recognize that as an Agreement that is concerned with small cetaceans, although we have applied a lot of our focus upon the harbour porpoise, it is the most widely distributed and actually the most common species in the Agreement Area, whilst there are other species to which we should also be paying attention. And there are other threats besides bycatch, albeit a very important threat in itself. We mustn't lose sight of those other threats even if they are more difficult to spot, and going back to what I said earlier: we must make sure that what we do will actually be noticed by the animals we're concerned about.

Thanks very much again for the Award!