



Representatives of the WAOH! Route destinations gather in Porto to advance and champion marine ecotourism in Europe

- Business and public representatives from Cascais, Cornwall, Donegal, Galicia, Portimão and Sesimbra will gather in Porto in the framework of the Business2Sea Forum to advance the development of the WILDSEA Atlantic Ocean Heritage (WAOH!) Route and to take a pledge in support of sustainable marine ecotourism in Europe.
- The “WAOH! Route” is the first, European, Sustainable Diving Route connecting world-class diving sites from the extreme south in Portugal & Spain to the far north, encompassing Ireland & UK, which embody common European shared values & heritage. The Route will promote Europe’s 5000 km of Atlantic coastline as a unique, transnational tourism itinerary and destination for divers & eco-tourists alike.

Porto (Portugal), November 2018.- Representatives of the **WILDSEA Atlantic Ocean Heritage Route** (“WAOH! Route”) from Portugal, Spain, Ireland and the UK will gather in Porto on November 14th, 2018 to celebrate the Route’s first **International Stakeholder Workshop**. The Workshop, which will take place in the framework of the **Fórum do Mar/Business2Sea** organized by **Fórum Oceano**, will gather 30 business and public representatives of the Route’s landmark destinations to advance the development of the Route, including tourism boards, municipalities, diving centres, marine ecotourism operators, travel agents, and NGOs.

The **WAOH! Route** is the first, **European, Sustainable Diving Route** connecting world-class diving sites from the extreme south in Portugal and Spain to the far north, encompassing Ireland and the UK. Building on the experience and results of Project “WILDSEA Europe” (<http://www.wildsea.eu>), the WAOH Route will connect world-class “flagship” diving sites and destinations that will encourage, create and unite synergy between water sports and Europe’s unique, Atlantic marine heritage of landscapes, wildlife and habitats in combination with a range of maritime cultural heritage.

During the Workshop, participants will work together to build the foundations of the WAOH! Route, as well as discussing the underlying transnational tourism products that will support its commercial development. Other topics of discussion will include identifying common challenges that need to be addressed to ensure that all participants along the **WAOH! Route** are able to contribute to the common

objective of positioning Atlantic destinations as world-class destinations for divers and eco-tourists alike. Knowledge sharing sessions will be consequently held in Spring 2019 in all the Route’s destinations to jointly address such challenges.

Participants will also take this opportunity to launch the WAOH! Route’s **Pledge to Sustainability**, a shared vision regarding the **sustainable development of coastal and marine ecotourism** that seeks to inspire and provide guidance to destination management organizations, tourism operators and other stakeholders to **champion marine ecotourism in Europe**. This **shared vision** revolves around **3 core principles**:

- Tourism must contribute to create **sustainable livelihoods**, generating employment and financial benefits for coastal communities, providing a clear demonstration of the economic value of responsible interaction with the marine environment.
- Local communities are key stakeholders of Tourism and must be involved in tourism processes, achieving an **Ocean Literate “pride”** on the local marine and maritime heritage.
- Tourism must contribute to **maintain, restore and preferably enhance coastal and marine ecosystems** and to enhance **Ocean literacy** amongst tourists and visitors.

Julia Vera, Managing Director of **Travelecoology** and Director of the WAOH! Route Project said: *“Ecotourism has become a global industry and will soon represent 5% of the world tourism market. Bringing our coastal destinations to combine nautical sports with the principles of ecotourism opens an extraordinary window of opportunity to make marine ecotourism the renewable energy of our coastal tourism destinations. The WAOH! Route is a catalyser towards that goal”.*

The WAOH! Route project is a joint initiative of European tourism operators, public administrations and NGOs, co-funded by the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF) of the European Union through the Executive Agency for Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (EASME). The Project will run from **January 1st, 2018** to **December 30th, 2019** and is led by Partners from 4 European countries (Spain, UK, Ireland & Portugal):

- Travelecoology (Project Coordinator, ES) – www.travelecoology.com
- Donegal County Council (IE) - www.donegalcdb.ie
- Forum Oceano (PT) – www.forumoceano.pt
- Turismo de Galicia (ES) – www.turismo.gal
- Visit Cornwall (UK) - <https://www.visitcornwall.com>
- SUBMON (ES) – www.submon.org
- World Cetacean Alliance (UK) – www.worldcetaceanalliance.org

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