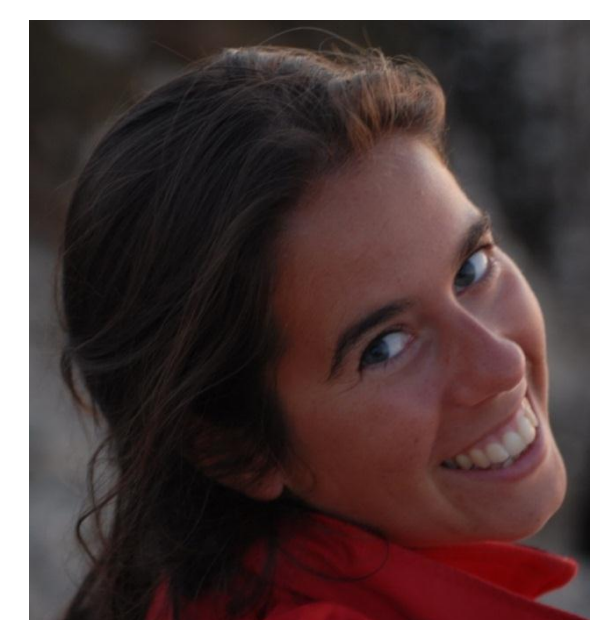


# Development of a Whale Watching Network in the South of Portugal

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## INTRODUCTION

The whale watching is a growing industry in the South of Portugal, and it is an important part of the maritime touristic activities in the area. This industry began around 2000 leading to the publication, in 2006, of a specific national law - Decreto-Lei n.º 9/2006.

There is a lack of cetacean's studies in the area. Information is based on stranding records (Sequeira *et al.*, 1992; Sequeira *et al.*, 1996) and localized surveys restricted in space (Castro, 2010).

Currently there are 15 whale watching companies with a legal permit to operate in the area. The compliance with the current legislation is not optimal; several companies are offering tours without the appropriate permit (**Fig. 1**).

The present work presents the creation of a volunteer whale watching network in the South of Portugal. Its main purpose is the implementation of management plans, aimed at urging companies to accept and comply with the regulations and to encourage law reinforcement, as well as to contribute to the improvement of the tourist service.

## METHODS

To guarantee the implementation of the network, free training sessions on wildlife tourism (with a special focus on cetaceans and codes of conduct) and business management specific to the whale watching activity has been provided to all the network member companies holding a valid permit (**Fig. 2**).



Figure 1. Group of bottlenose dolphins surrounded by several boats.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The whale watching activities have been increasing dramatically over the last years and continues to grow. It is urgent to reinforce the legislation and management of the whale watching activities in the South of Portugal to ensure a good environmental quality, as well as to guarantee a sustainable activity in the future.

More studies are needed, to provide more knowledge about the distribution and abundance of cetaceans in the area, in order to better manage their conservation.

Since the implementation of the network, researchers have been on board whale watching boats working directly with companies and more knowledge has been achieved. Companies belonging to the network improved their behaviour by following the codes of conduct.



Figure 2. Bottlenose dolphins with a whale watching boat from a company member of the network

## RESULTS

In 2010, six companies joined this network (**Fig. 3**). As a result, three communications were already presented at scientific meetings of the European Cetacean Society, the Society for Marine Mammology, among others. Most of the companies operate with two boats (53.3%), although the maximum number owned per company is three (13.3%) and the minimum one (33.3%). On average the capacity of each boat is 15 tourists.

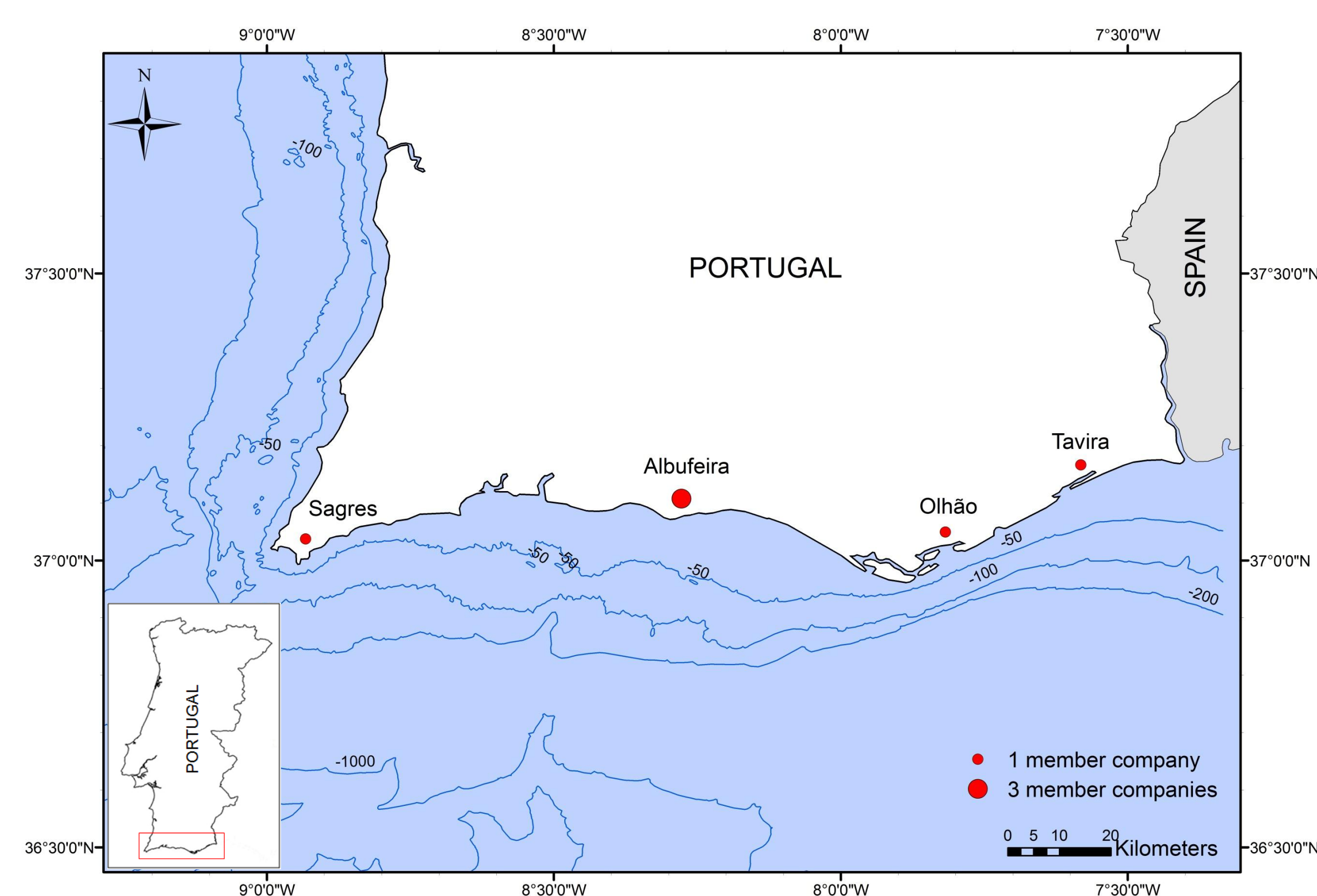


Fig. 3 Presence of the whale watching companies members of the network along the Algarve. Small points indicate locations with one company, and large point indicate location with three companies (Albufeira).

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This results could have been possible without the collaboration of all the whale watching companies.

