

MS Thesis
Department of Environmental Science and Policy
George Mason University

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Date and Time: April 23, 2019, 3:00 pm- 4:00 pm

Location: Center for Social Equity through Science Education conference room in Thompson 1402

Title: Support for Basking Shark Tourism in Donegal, Ireland

Thesis Director: Dr. Erin Peters-Burton

Committee: Dr. Chris Parsons, Dr. Cindy Smith

Abstract

Basking sharks visit Ireland seasonally, but are not currently featured heavily in advertising material, much of which often highlights wildlife. Furthermore, no studies have been done to determine support or opposition to basking shark conservation or interest in basking shark tourism in Ireland. In order to determine this, 173 residents and visitors to Buncrana, Ireland, were surveyed in the summer of 2018. Respondents were asked to rank their interest in shark tourism, their belief that others would pay to view basking sharks, along with knowledge questions and support for conservation. A Pearson's Chi Square was run on the questions, in order to determine significant correlations between support for conservation, interest in shark tourism, and belief in others' interest in shark tourism. Results indicate that knowledge of basking sharks is low, however, support for basking shark conservation and interest in basking shark tourism is high. Furthermore, individuals who support conservation were significantly more likely to believe that others would pay to view basking sharks. This study indicates that there may be a strong, if untapped, tourism market for basking shark viewing.