

## NEWS RELEASE

### Cutting-edge new South African Whale Centre set to be developed in Hermanus



*A humpback whale adult and calf - Source: Shutterstock*

HERMANUS – A new South African Whale Centre is planned to be constructed in the heart of Hermanus, whale capital of South Africa, which will house the Whale Unit of the University of Pretoria's (UP's) [Mammal Research Institute \(MRI\)](#).

The board of trustees of the [Old Harbour Museum](#), in partnership with a dedicated project development team and the UP MRI Whale Unit, recently announced plans to redevelop the Whale House Museum into the cutting-edge [South African Whale Centre \(SAWC\)](#). This state-of-the-art facility is set to become a global beacon for marine conservation and education.

The UP MRI Whale Unit, which was previously hosted in an off-campus field station of the MRI in Main Road, Hermanus, will form part of the SAWC upon completion.

The SAWC will also feature ground-breaking technology, including a 3D immersive dome experience, interactive exhibits, and augmented reality displays that will vividly illustrate whale behaviour and migration. Visitors will have the opportunity to engage in virtual whale encounters and explore the fascinating world of whale song, fostering a deeper appreciation for these majestic creatures.

### **Hub for international whale research**

In addition to its educational offerings, the centre will function as a hub for international whale research. Its partnership with the UP MRI Whale Unit will ensure that the SAWC remains at the forefront of scientific advancements, maximising its educational outreach with the latest research findings.

“The University of Pretoria has been a cornerstone of whale research in Hermanus for many years, and our partnership with the SAWC represents a significant step forward in our shared commitment to marine conservation,” said [Dr Els Vermeulen](#), head of the UP MRI Whale Unit. “This new centre will not only provide a world-class platform for research but also offer unparalleled educational opportunities, inspiring future generations of marine scientists and conservationists. We are excited to continue our long-standing collaboration and contribute our expertise to the SAWC, ensuring its success as a leading centre for whale research and education.”

Grahame Lindop, Conceptualisation Lead at the SAWC, said, “Our mission is to create a world-class facility that not only showcases the beauty of whales but also educates the public on marine conservation. We believe in the power of community, collaboration, and legacy to drive awareness and conservation efforts.”

### **History of the UP MRI Whale Unit**

The MRI Whale Unit was established in 1985 as a global, African research, conservation, and education facility that researches the ecology, population dynamics, and behaviour of the diverse cetaceans (whales, dolphins and porpoises) in the southern African sub-region and surrounding oceans. Its main objective is to provide knowledge that will promote cetacean conservation. “For 40 years, the UP MRI Whale Unit has been dedicated to understanding and protecting these incredible creatures,” added Dr Vermeulen. “The SAWC provides an exciting opportunity to build on this legacy, expanding our research capabilities and reaching a wider audience with our vital conservation message. We look forward to a future of impactful research, education, and collaboration at the SAWC.”

### **Looking ahead**

The project enjoys valuable support from the provincial departments of Cultural Affairs and sport, and finance and economic opportunities, which recognise the centre’s potential to boost tourism and economic growth in the region.

The South African Whale Centre team says it will focus on creating a world-class whale science and education centre in Hermanus, with the goal of inspiring every visitor to protect our oceans through education, conservation projects, and community engagement.

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## ABOUT THE UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA

The University of Pretoria (UP) is one of the largest contact and residential universities in South Africa, with its administration offices located on its Hatfield Campus in Pretoria. This 115-year-old institution is also one of the largest producers of research in South Africa.

Spread over seven campuses, it has nine faculties and a business school, the [Gordon Institute of Business Science](#) (GIBS). It is the only university in the country with a [Faculty of Veterinary Science](#), which is ranked the best in Africa. UP has 120 academic departments and 92 centres and institutes, accommodating more than 56 000 students and offering about 1 100 study programmes. It has the most academic staff with PhDs (70%), NRF-rated researchers (613).

The 2025 Times Higher Education subject rankings placed UP first in South Africa in the fields of [Accounting](#) and [Finance](#); [Architecture](#); [Electrical and Electronic Engineering](#); Law; Sport Science; and Veterinary Science. UP's Faculty of Law has been ranked as the top law school in Africa for a remarkable eighth consecutive year.

Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) ranked the University among the top five in Africa, as part of their [2024 World University Rankings \(WUR\)](#). UP was the only South African university featured in the [2023 World University Rankings for Innovation \(WURI\)](#), falling within in the 101-200 range of innovative universities.

For more information, please go to [www.up.ac.za](http://www.up.ac.za)