ABSTRACT

The principal contention of this study is that within the sustainability paradigm, there are factors which can be characterized as agents of strength (factors with a reinforcing effect on sustainability) or vulnerability (factors that inhibit sustainability or are indicators of a non-sustainable system). This paper aimed to ascertain the agents of strength and vulnerability within the commercial whale-watching industry in the lower Bay of Fundy, New Brunswick.

A research framework was developed based on the literature on the whale-watching industry and wildlife-based tourism. The framework was used to assess the management, environmental and economic sustainability dimensions of the whale-watching industry in the aforementioned region based on data gathered from personal interviews with tour operators and self-administered questionnaires from the whale-watching customers.

Several factors were found to be positively reinforcing the industry, including: the consistency of the whale encounters and the high level of customer satisfaction. On the other hand, a number of variables were also identified as potential areas of vulnerability, such as: the present downturn in tourist visitation to the region and the need for an improved, consolidated marketing program.