

IAATO Cetacean Watching Guidelines



General code of conduct around marine mammals - See a Blow - Go Slow

- Stay with the animal up to a maximum time of thirty minutes. If signs of disturbance or change in behaviour occur at any time during the stay with the animals, retreat slowly and quietly.
- Never herd (surround), separate or scatter a group of marine mammals, particularly mothers and young. Where appropriate, stay where they can see you. Never chase animals.
- When close to marine mammals keep voices low, don't whistle or shout.
- Keep radio volume down.
- Communicate with other boats to minimise disturbance to animals.
- Avoid sudden movements that might startle the animal.
- Never attempt to touch or feed animals.
- Playback of underwater sound of any kind should not occur. If hydrophones are used from small boats to listen to the underwater sounds it is preferable to have the engines of the small boats shut down.
- Stay on the OFFSHORE side of the whales when travelling close to the shore

General guidelines for viewing all marine mammals

- Do not chase or pursue animals.
- Animals may alter their behavior if they are disturbed. When in doubt, err on the side of caution, and give the animals time and space.
- Keep a watch for the following behavior, which could indicate that the animal is agitated and no longer interested in staying near the vessel. Where this behavior is noted, let the animal depart, and when safe, move away slowly:
 - Changes in travelling directions
 - Regular changes in direction or speed
 - Moving away from the area
 - Apparent general agitation
 - Hasty dives
- Breaching, tail lobbing and flipper slapping may be an indication that the whales are socializing and may not be aware of boats. Keep your distance.
- If a cetacean approaches a vessel to bow-ride, maintain a relatively constant course and speed, or reduce speed gradually. Do not enter a group of dolphins to encourage them to bow-ride.
- If a cetacean surfaces in the vicinity of your vessel, take all necessary precautions to avoid collisions, while avoiding sudden changes in speed or direction. This may include: slowing down, slowly coming to a stop, and/or steering away from the animal. Be aware of other boats and obstacles, e.g., shoreline to ensure the animal is never boxed in. Ensure that travel and exit routes for the animal are clear and that a "Tunnel" of small boats does not form.
- When watching animals in the water, it is suggested that a maximum of two ships or four small craft are watching at any one time.
- Boats watching animals together should be next to each other to ensure the animals have a large open avenue to depart through.
- Approach cetaceans from parallel to and slightly to the rear (in the 4 or 8 o'clock position), not from the front or directly behind the animal.
- Don't approach feeding baleen whales closer than 200 meters/600 feet. Attempt to stay downwind of the animal.
- If orcas (killer whales) approach kayakers and begin spy hopping behavior, ensure that safety small boats are close to the kayakers and consider transferring paddlers from kayakers to small boats.
- Marine mammals may approach vessels, and if they want to interact, it may stay with the vessel. This is when it is best for the vessel to drift passively; however, allowing a vessel to drift within acceptable distances to the animals could constitute an intentional approach.

Approaching whales in water - See a Blow - Go Slow

When approaching marine mammals in water (for all vessels – ships, Zodiacs, kayaks, etc.)

What to do if you sight a whale

Reduce speed and post a lookout. Be prepared to slow down to 5 knots if you reach the 400 meters/1200 feet distance. By this distance engines must be in idle or turned off and allow whales to pass.

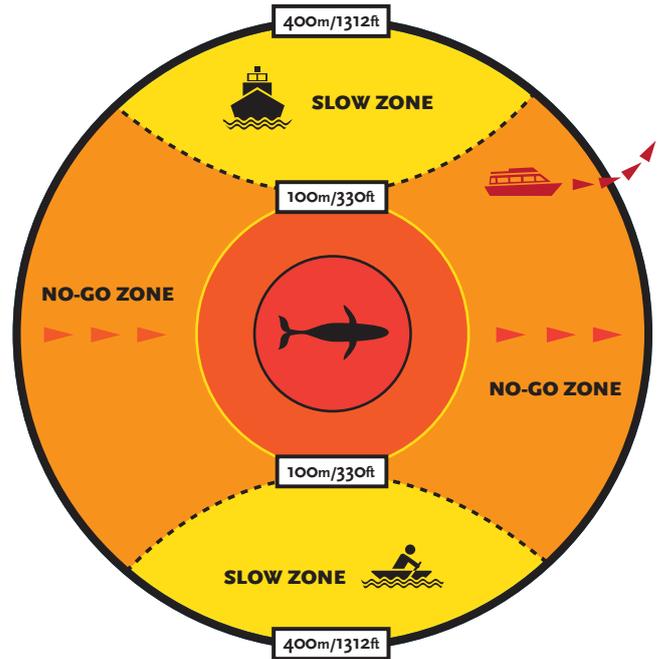
Zone 1 – 400 meters/1200 feet

- reduce speed to 5 knots

Zone 2 – 100 meters/300 feet

- maintain this distance (studies have shown kayaks can at times be more disturbing to whales because of their stealth-like, silent approach)

- If your vessel is not in compliance with the 100 meters/300 feet approach, place engine in neutral and allow the whale to pass.
- If you want to turn the engine off, first idle for a few minutes before turning off.
- Try avoiding abrupt changes in noise that may startle or disturb the animal, including excessive engine use, gear changes, maneuvering or backing up to the animal.
- Avoid the use of bow or stern lateral bow thrusters to maintain position as these can produce high pitched noise and intensive cavitations.



- Cetaceans are often very inquisitive and may approach close to vessels or watercraft. It is important that the cetacean is in control at all times.

Departure from whale watching in water

- Move off at a slow, no-wake speed to 100 meters/300 feet and avoid engaging propellers within the minimum approach distance.
- If possible when moving away, avoid moving in front of the animal and always move towards the rear. Do not chase or pursue departing animals.

