

# IAATO Operational Procedures for Watching Whales<sup>1</sup>

The procedures apply to ALL vessels including ships, small boats<sup>2</sup>, kayaks, etc

## See a Blow - Go Slow

**Prescribed distances of approach/observation must be followed. Any closer interactions should be dictated by the animals.**

## Encountering whales

In the presence of whales, all vessels (ships/tenders/small boats) should slow down to no more than 10 knots. Be prepared to slow down to 5 knots if you reach the 400 meters/1300 feet distance. At 400 meters/1300 engines must be in idle if safe for the vessel to do so. Allow whales to pass. Do not position the vessel in the projected path of the whale.

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.

Every whale encounter is different; different individuals and different species may respond completely differently to the presence of vessels. Do not assume they will automatically respond to a vessel's presence.

Monitor animal behaviour throughout any encounter for signs of disturbance (see further information on behaviour changes in section 3.0 below);

If a cetacean approaches a vessel to bow or stern ride, maintain a constant course and speed, or reduce speed gradually. Do not enter a group of dolphins to encourage them to bow or stern ride.

Never chase or pursue animals.



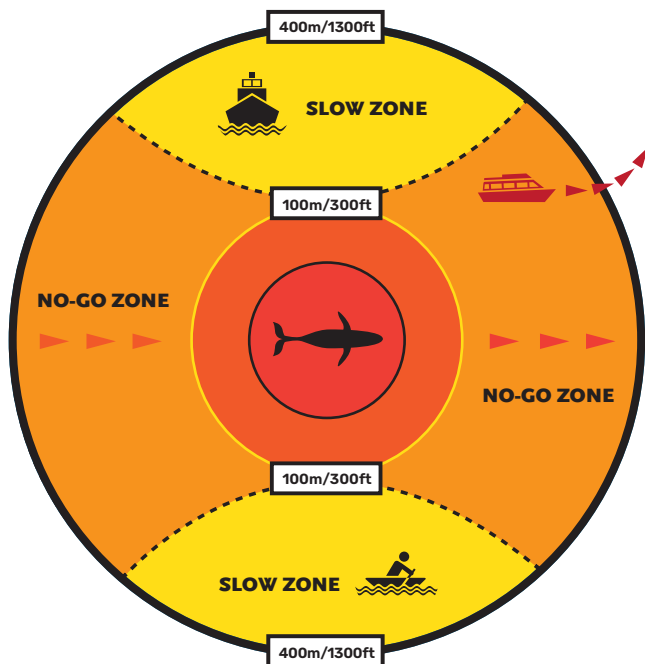
<sup>1</sup> Vessel operators should adhere to any additional national, international or IAATO speed limit requirements. Some areas have special protection measures in place during the year to help reduce disturbance and physical injury to whales. Be aware that IAATO wildlife watching and other Operational Procedures do not replace any domestic governmental laws. Some nations have guidelines or regulations stricter than IAATO's which may override IAATO procedures. Violation of national regulations may be punishable by fines, imprisonment and, in extreme cases, seizure of vessel.

<sup>2</sup> For the purposes of this document, 'small boats' are defined as zodiac-style Inflatable boats, such as rigid or semi-rigid hull Inflatable boats or any similar small landing craft used for shore interaction.

## Approaching whales (for ALL vessels including ships, small boats<sup>3</sup> kayaks, etc.)

Never approach cetaceans from the front or directly behind.

Approach to the side of the animal, at an angle. Do not position the vessel in the projected path of the animal.



### Zone 1 – 400 meters/1300 feet

No more than 5 knots AND go no faster than wake speed

Be aware of signs of feeding (e.g., sub-surface bubbles / flocks of birds). Don't approach feeding baleen whales closer than 200 meters/600 feet.

Don't approach mother: calf pairs closer than 200 meters/600 feet.

### Zone 2 – 100 meters/300 feet

All vessels, including small boats and human-powered water craft should maintain this distance (studies have shown kayaks can at times be more disturbing to whales because of their stealth-like, silent approach)

- Prescribed distances of approach/observation must be followed. Any closer interactions should only be dictated by the animals.
- If your vessel is not in compliance with the 100 meters/300 feet approach, place engine in neutral and allow the whale to pass. Small boats should avoid engaging propellers.
- Large vessels should avoid the use of bow or stern lateral bow thrusters to maintain position as these can produce high pitched noise and intensive cavitations.

## Watching whales and understanding behaviour to help avoid disturbance

Animals may alter their behaviour if they are disturbed. Be aware.

The following behaviours may indicate stress or disturbance:

- Sudden/erratic movements; Changes in travelling directions
- Regular changes in direction or speed
- Moving away from the area
- Apparent general agitation
- Hasty dives
- Trumpet blows (loud, sharp exhalations)

Breaching, tail lobbing/slapping and pectoral flipper slapping can mean whales are socializing or feeding and unlikely to detect (visually or audibly) the presence of vessels. Keep at least 400m/1300 feet away. These behaviours can also signal stress.

No matter the distance, if you notice a behaviour change, let the animal depart or move away from the animal slowly and cautiously (no faster than wake speed/no faster than 5 knots) when safe to do so.

Take particular care with orcas (killer whales), which, especially if hunting, may be more susceptible to disturbance than whales that feed on prey that do not react to vessels.

Stay in the ONSHORE (land) side of the whales when travelling close to the shore

Multiple vessels are more likely to disturb marine mammals.

Never herd (surround), separate or scatter a group of marine mammals, particularly mothers and their young.



<sup>3</sup> For the purposes of this document, 'small boats' are defined as zodiac-style Inflatable boats, such as rigid or semi-rigid hull Inflatable boats or any similar small landing craft used for shore interaction.

When watching animals in the water, it is suggested that a maximum of two ships or four small boats are watching at any one time. Vessels watching animals together should consider being next to each other to ensure the animals have a large open avenue to depart through.

Be aware of other vessels, animals and obstacles, e.g., the 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. Coordinate with others in the area who are watching wildlife.

Stay with the animal up to a maximum time of 30 minutes. If signs of disturbance occur at any time during the stay with the animals, retreat slowly and quietly.

Marine mammals may approach vessels and, if they want to interact, they may stay with the vessel. At this point it is best for the vessel to drift passively with consideration for wind and current to avoid drifting too close, and careful observation of other safety factors. However, drifting vessels, even within acceptable distances, should not drift into the whales path as this could constitute an intentional approach. It is important that the animal is in control of interactions closer than 100m at all times.

If orcas approach kayaks and begin spy hopping behavior (holding their heads out of the water in order to visually inspect the environment above the water line), ensure that safety boats are close to the kayaks. Consider transferring paddlers from kayaks to small boats if necessary.

All vessel operators should aim to keep vessel movements and engine activity consistent. Move slowly.

Avoid abrupt changes in noise that may startle or disturb the animal, including excessive engine use, gear changes, manoeuvring or backing away from the animal.

Small boats should not switch engines on and off. Keep voices and radio volumes low, don't whistle or shout or bang the side of the boat.

When operating in areas with whales or other wildlife, careful consideration should be given before using outside public announcement systems.

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 if safe to do so.

## Departure of vessels from watching whales

Move off at a slow, no-wake speed to 400 meters/1,300 feet distance. Do not speed up until you are more than 400m away from the animal(s) and are certain there are no additional whales in the vicinity of the direction you are travelling.

When moving away, avoid moving in front of the animal and always move towards the rear.

