

WATCHING WHALES AND DOLPHINS SAFELY

Watching whales and dolphins in their natural environment is an exciting and rewarding experience. It is important to remember that our actions can disturb these wonderful animals. This is why the Australian Government has worked with state and territory governments, non-government organisations and the whale watching industry to develop the Australian National Guidelines for Whale and Dolphin Watching.

WHAT TO DO IF YOU SEE WHALES AND DOLPHINS

DO NOT DISTURB!

What is the basic rule when near whales and dolphins? Remain quiet and do not try to feed or touch them.

- Be alert and watch for whales and dolphins at all times.
- When in a vessel, do not approach closer than 100m to any whale or 50m to any dolphin.

- The caution zone for vessels is the area within 300m of a whale and 150m of a dolphin. No more than three vessels are allowed within the caution zone at any one time and vessels should operate at no wake speeds within this zone.
- Approach whales and dolphins from parallel to and slightly to the rear – not from directly behind or head-on.
- When leaving whales or dolphins, move off at a slow (no wake) speed to the outer limit of the caution zone (300m) from the closest animal before gradually increasing speed.
- Keep a lookout and avoid disturbance to mother whales or dolphins and their calves. Mother and calf will

be close together and the calves are sometimes difficult to see.

- If there is a sudden change in whale or dolphin behaviour, move away immediately at a slow steady pace.
- Whales and dolphins sometimes form social groupings and may approach your vessel – if this happens place the engine in neutral and let the animal(s) come to you; or slow down and continue on course; or steer a straight course away from them.
- Do not get into the water if you see a whale or dolphin. If you're already in the water do not disturb, chase or block the path of a whale or dolphin and if possible, return to your vessel or the shore.

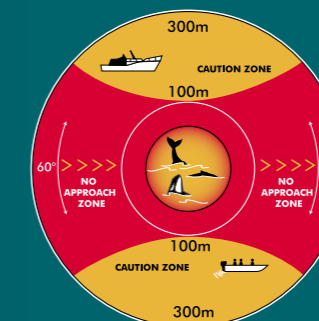


Figure 1. Approach distances for whales

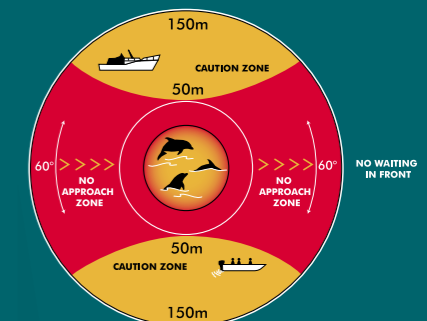


Figure 2. Approach distances for dolphins

Note - approach distances for permitted vessels may be regulated under state and territory laws and may differ from those given above.

WHALES AND DOLPHINS ARE PROTECTED BY LAW

Whales and dolphins are protected in all Australian waters.

In Commonwealth waters they are protected under the Australian Government's *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* which established the Australian Whale Sanctuary. The Sanctuary extends to 200 nautical miles from Australia's coast and territorial islands. Under the EPBC Act it is an offence to kill, injure, take, chase, harass or herd any of these wild animals.

In state and territory waters whales and dolphins are protected by the laws of each state and territory government.



BLUE WHALES



Description Blue/grey or slate blue. Head has a distinctive broad based pointed arch shape.

Surfacing/diving



Fins/flukes Small dorsal fin, long, pointed pectoral fins.



Blow



Other characteristics May travel in pairs, often alone.

Where you might see them
Open ocean, rarely seen near coast. Southern waters, western Bass strait and offshore from Perth and south-western coast.

Size Largest whale species (to 30m).

MINKE WHALES



Description Sharply V-shaped head, throat grooves present. Black/dark grey back, wavy boundary to white underside.

Surfacing/diving



Fins/flukes Curved dorsal fin, short pectoral fins.



Blow



Other characteristics Blow and dorsal fin often appear simultaneously.

Where you might see them
Generally offshore in Australian waters during winter migration.

Size Medium (to 11m).

KILLER WHALES



Surfacing/diving



Fins/flukes Males have very tall (2m) dorsal fin.



Blow



Other characteristics Highly social, form lifelong family groups, occasionally seen singly or in small groups.

Where you might see them
All waters from polar to tropical, all seasons.

Size Medium (to 10m).

Description Distinctive black and white pattern.

SOUTHERN RIGHT WHALES



Description Black body with white callosities (bumps) on head.

Surfacing/diving



Fins/flukes No dorsal fin, short paddle-like pectoral fins.



Blow



Other characteristics May raise flukes on diving.

Where you might see them
Inshore waters particularly along southern coastline between May and October. Also seen on the south-eastern and south-western coastlines. Have been known to enter Sydney harbour.

Size Large, stocky whale (to 17m).

HUMPBACK WHALES



Surfacing/diving



Fins/flukes Long pectoral fins (about 1/3 body length).



Blow



Other characteristics Humpbacks are a most spectacular whale – often doing full body breaches, rolls and tail slaps.

Where you might see them
Inshore along length of east and west coasts between May and December.

Size Large (to 16m).

Description Dark grey back. White underside, fins and flukes.

BEHAVIOUR YOU MAY SEE



FLUKE
– the whale lifts its tail before diving, usually after arching its back.



BLOW (SPOUT)
– the whale breathes out as it surfaces, blowing a cloud of vapour through its blowhole.



TAIL SLAP
– the whale slaps its flukes on the surface.



TAIL LOB
– the whale waves its flukes in the air.



SPY HOP
– the whale lifts its head out of the water.



BREACH
– the whale leaps out of the water, often turning to land on its back, side or front.



PEC SLAP
– the whale slaps its pectoral fins on the water.



BOW RIDE
– the dolphin rides the wave in the front (or occasionally the rear) of a boat.

BOTTLENOSE DOLPHINS



Where you might see them
All waters from tropical to temperate, all seasons.

Size Small (to 3m).

Description Dark grey upper body with light grey underneath, robust head with a short and stubby bottle shaped beak for which the species is named.

Other characteristics Highly social, can occur in very large groups.

COMMON DOLPHINS



Where you might see them
All waters, open ocean and inshore, all seasons.

Size Small (to 2.6m).

Description Dark grey upper body, white belly, distinctive dark stripes sweeping down body, some tan – ochre/yellow on flanks.

Other characteristics Often seen bow-riding, and usually in large groups.

FURTHER INFORMATION

For a copy of the Australian National Guidelines for Whale and Dolphin Watching and more information about whales and dolphins, go to www.saveourwhales.gov.au or contact the Australian Government Department of the Environment and Water Resources Community Information Unit - email ciu@environment.gov.au or call 1800 803 772.