



**DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATIONS, MARINE AND NATURAL
RESOURCES**

Marine Notice No. 15 of 2005

*To the Operators / Skippers of all Passenger Boats, Angling Boats, Passenger
Vessels, Fishing Boats, and Recreational Craft.*

**GUIDELINES FOR CORRECT PROCEDURES WHEN ENCOUNTERING
WHALES AND DOLPHINS IN IRISH COASTAL WATERS**

Irish Coastal Waters provide a habitat for a broad range of whales and dolphins (Cetaceans); to date some 24 species have been recorded.

In 1991 the Irish Government declared all Irish Waters a whale and dolphin sanctuary.

Under current National Legislation - S.I No. 94 of 1997, Natural Habitat Regulations, Cetaceans are listed, and regulations prohibit the deliberate disturbance of these species.

Coinciding with the increased awareness of these mammals within our waters is an increased frequency of small craft coming into contact with them, and the emergence of " whale watching " as a tourist activity using licensed passenger vessels.

There are definite risks associated in engaging these mammals, particularly the larger whales. Generally they are present some distance offshore, in open waters, and late in the year when weather conditions are not always suitable for small craft.

As wild animals their actions may be unpredictable particularly if they feel their young are at risk, and considering their size are certainly capable of causing damage to small craft.

Passenger vessels offering whale and dolphin watching tours should ensure the crew

- are aware of correct procedures to follow when encountering cetaceans,
- ensure craft are suitably licensed to operate in sea areas where whales may be located. e.g. for a passenger boat with a P3 license plying limit of up to three miles offshore, P5 has a plying limit for sea area up 30 miles offshore.
- Liase with staff of the National Parks and Wildlife or Irish Whale and Dolphin Group for guidance prior to offering any such service to the public.

The following guidelines are intended to offer best practice to be followed in cases of any interaction between small craft and large mammals within Irish waters:

- When whales or dolphins are first encountered, craft should maintain a steady course.
- Boat speed should be maintained below 7 knots.
- Do not attempt to pursue whales or dolphins encountered.
- In the case of dolphins, they will very often approach craft and may engage in “bow riding”. Always allow dolphins approach a boat rather than attempt to go after them.
- Maintain a distance of at least 100m from whales.
- Maintain a distance of 200m between any other boats in the vicinity.
- Attempt to steer a course parallel to the direction whales or dolphins are taking.
- Do not corral whales or dolphins between boats.
- Special care must be taken when young calves are seen - do not come between a mother and her calf.
- Successive boats must follow the same course.
- Boats should not spend more than 30 minutes with whales or dolphins.
- DO NOT attempt to swim with them.

Craft that do encounter any species are encouraged to log all sightings and to advise the Irish Whale and Dolphin Group (IWDG) or officers of the National Parks and Wildlife Service, which is a division of the Department of Environment Heritage, and Local Government.

Director General
Maritime Safety Directorate
Department of Communications, Marine
and Natural Resources
Dublin 2.

14th June 2005.

For any technical assistance in relation to this Marine Notice please contact
The Marine Surveyors' Office, Leeson Lane Dublin 2 +353 1 678 3400
For information in relation to technical specification/type approval of radio equipment contact the Radio
Surveyors +353 1 678 2363/2364/2365/2367.
For general enquiries please contact the Maritime Safety Division at +353-1-678 3418
Any enquiries concerning Marine Notices should be addressed to:
Maritime Safety Directorate, Leeson Lane, Dublin 2
Email: marine.notices@dcmnr.gov.ie
Or visit us at: www.dcmnr.ie