

Our Ocean Our Responsibility

Over the past few decades, human activity has severely damaged almost every aspect of the ocean we share.



Boat operators reminded of rules on protected marine mammals

MMO recommends WiSe scheme to boat owners and operators as it issues reminder that dolphins, porpoise and whales are protected species.

The Marine Management Organisation (MMO) is reminding boat owners and operators of registered passenger and charter vessels about the rules and best practice relating to marine wildlife.

As the warmer weather reaches English shores it brings with it increasing opportunities to observe dolphins, porpoises and whales. Whilst this is a fantastic opportunity for wildlife watchers and marine tourism, it is essential that the health and well-being of the animals is considered at all times.

Endangered species dolphins, porpoises and whales are protected by wildlife legislation including the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. Under the Act it is an offence to intentionally and/or recklessly disturb these animals, with offences of disturbance carrying a maximum penalty of six months imprisonment and/or an unlimited fine.

Disturbance by boats often causes stress and harm to dolphins, porpoises and whales, affecting their ability to feed, breed or nurture their young.

To ensure the safety and appropriate protection of these animals the MMO recommend that boat and vessel owners follow the Wildlife Safe (WiSe) scheme.

The scheme, which is a UK standard for commercial marine wildlife watching, includes a code of conduct and sets out best practice for wildlife watching.

The code includes that boats should:

- stay 100 metres away from the animals
- avoid groups of mothers and young completely
- switch engines into neutral if animals actively come over to boats

Animals must not be actively pursued when they move away, and where they bow ride alongside vessels, vessels should not increase their speed or change course. Animals must not be touched as this could be considered an offence.

The following measures are implemented in the United Kingdom:

If you see dolphins, porpoise or whales being disturbed, please contact your nearest MMO office or local police force wildlife crime officer on 101.

In Cornwall incidents can also be reported to the Cornwall Wildlife Trust on their 24 hour hotline 0345 201 2626 immediately. If possible photographs or video footage should also be taken of these concerns. These incidents will then be passed to the relevant enforcement authority.

Notes

- Dolphins, porpoise and whales are protected under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010, the Offshore Marine Conservation (Natural Habitats, & c.) Regulations 2007 and the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981
- In 2014 two boat skippers were successfully prosecuted by Devon and Cornwall Police for reckless disturbance of a pod of dolphins where one was found dead in Padstow, Cornwall
- The MMO is responsible for issuing wildlife licences to authorise what would otherwise be an offence under the nature conservation legislation. The MMO will only issue a licence in the English marine environment or the Welsh offshore environment where the activity meets certain purposes and where there is no satisfactory alternative
- The MMO is the statutory enforcement body for wildlife legislation that protects marine species in these waters
- More guidance on what is covered under nature conservation legislation is available from the MMO's website



Disturbance of dolphins is an offence under the Wildlife and Countryside act 1981.

Marine Management Organisation

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