

Watching marine mammals

ADELAIDE DOLPHIN SANCTUARY



Marine mammals form a diverse group of approximately 120 species that are primarily ocean-dwelling or depend on the ocean for food. They include cetaceans (whales, dolphins and porpoises), and pinnipeds (seals and sea lions). Many of these marine mammals are prevalent along the coastal and inland waters of South Australia.

Several species of whales can be observed in the coastal waters of South Australia as they make their seasonal migration to more temperate coastal waters for calving and breeding.

Dolphins are commonly seen alone or in pods travelling and feeding along the South Australian coastline.

Mangrove, seagrass, tidal flats/creeks and estuarine areas provide important feeding habitat for dolphins.

Seals and sea lions are found along the South Australian coast although they spend most of their time at sea or on offshore islands. These marine mammals will rest on rocky shores and beaches after foraging for food.

How to observe marine mammals

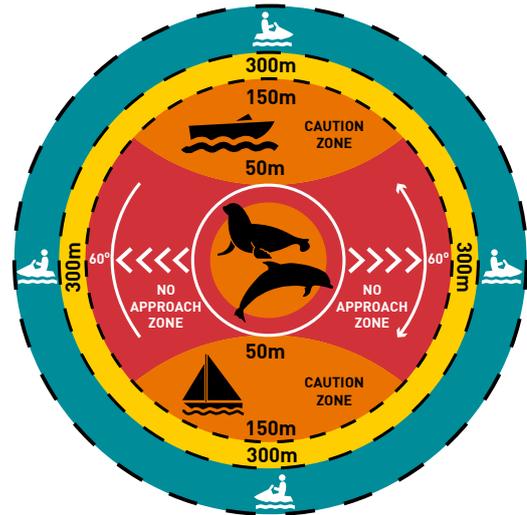
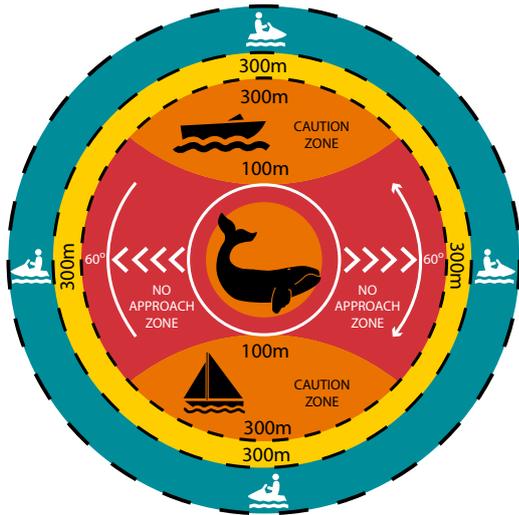
Marine mammals are unique and play an important role in our marine ecosystem. Whales, dolphins and seals are wild animals; not accustomed to people and sensitive to human interaction. Inappropriate human interaction can result in a number of impacts to marine mammals including distress, injury and desertion of young. People who observe marine mammals inappropriately are also putting themselves at risk of serious or

fatal injury. Therefore it is vital that these animals are only observed from a distance and the public comply with the law as contained in the *National Parks and Wildlife (Protected Animals – Marine Mammals) Regulations 2010*.

Maintaining appropriate distance

Vessel strikes are a threat to marine mammals around the world. Risks may be highest where vessels move at high speeds. Collisions with vessels can injure or kill dolphins. Young, sick or stressed animals may be more vulnerable to vessel strikes due to inexperience or less capacity to avoid the vessel. Boat operators are reminded to adhere to the set speed limits in the Port River and Barker Inlet, and to maintain the regulated 50 metre approach distance when watching a dolphin, or 150 metres if there is a calf present. You can further protect dolphins by installing a propeller guard on your outboard.

Noise produced by boating and shipping may also be a disturbance to dolphins of the Port River. It is important to give dolphins their space and never engage in chasing or circling the animals. The dolphins are usually just as inquisitive as you and will approach your vessel if you remain quiet and in neutral gear.



Maintaining appropriate distance

In the water:

- Prescribed vessels' such as jet-skis and ski boats, etc. must never move closer than 300m to any marine mammal. If inadvertently the prescribed vessel comes within 300m, they must move away from the animal or hold position and not exceed a speed of 4 knots.
- Other vessels (including motorised vessels, sail boats, kayaks and wind surfers, etc.) must never move closer than 100m to whales and no closer than 50m to other marine mammals. If inadvertently within these limits, they must move away from the animal or hold position and not exceed a speed of 4 knots.
- Swimmers: No closer than 30m to any marine mammal.

Viewing from shore:

- No closer than 30 m to a seal or sea lion, whether the seal is on land or in the water.

Special rules and further restrictions exist for:

- Distressed, stranded or entangled marine mammals.
- Marine mammal calves and pups.
- If you are observing marine mammals at the appropriate distance and an animal moves towards you - you must maintain your position or move away from the animal.
- Further restrictions apply to Commercial Tour Operators and other activities.

Why does interaction matter?

Marine mammals may be disturbed by the mere presence of people, vessels or aircraft. Therefore it is important the viewing distances and requirements set under the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1972* and its Regulations are observed.

Disturbance to marine mammals by inappropriate interaction can impact in a number of ways, such as:

- Disruption to normal life behaviours. Eg: feeding, foraging, migrating, suckling young, breeding, resting
- Displacement or avoidance of key habitat areas important for survival. Eg: breeding areas, foraging areas, calving and nursery sites, haul-out and resting sites
- Reduced reproductive success
- Increased mortality rates
- Stress and injury

Disturbing marine mammals can also be dangerous for people and lead to serious or fatal injury. Marine mammals are wild animals and may use aggression to defend themselves if a threat is perceived. Therefore it is important to identify the key signs of disturbance when observing marine mammals and move away immediately. The following is a brief summary of key reactions that a marine mammal may show if disturbed:

- vocalisation, trumpet blows or changes in acoustic behaviour
- efforts made to move away from a vessel or the area
- rapid changes in direction or speed of swimming;
- chasing and/or biting
- breaching water and tail slapping
- altered breathing patterns becoming more rapid
- sudden movement and head lifts in response to interaction

This Fact Sheet is not intended to be an exhaustive examination of the Regulations - as with any legislation ignorance of the law is no excuse.

Water users are urged to familiarise themselves with all the rules for interacting with marine mammals by referring to the National Parks and Wildlife (Protected Animals - Marine Mammals) Regulations 2010.

Please Note: Substantial penalties apply for breaches of the National Parks and Wildlife Act 1972 and its Regulations - with maximum penalties up to \$100,000 or 2 years imprisonment.