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General Principles for Whalewatching**Agreed general principles to minimise the risks of adverse impacts of whalewatching on cetaceans.****CONTENTS**

[General Principles](#) These general principles were agreed by the IWC Scientific Committee in 1996

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(1) Manage the development of whalewatching to minimise the risk of adverse impacts:

- i. implement as appropriate measures to regulate platform¹ numbers and size, activity, frequency and length of exposure in encounters with individuals and groups of whales;
 - o management measures may include closed seasons or areas where required to provide additional protection;
 - o ideally, undertake an early assessment of the numbers, distribution and other characteristics of the target population/s in an area;
- ii. monitor the effectiveness of management provisions and modify them as required to accommodate new information;
- iii. where new whalewatching operations are evolving, start cautiously, moderating activity until sufficient information is available on which to base any further development;
- iv. implement scientific research and population monitoring and collection of information on operations, target cetaceans and possible impacts, including those on the acoustic environment, as an early and integral component of management;
- v. develop training programs for operators and crew on the biology and behaviour of target species, whalewatching operations, and the management provisions in effect;
- vi. encourage the provision of accurate and informative material to whalewatchers, to:
 - o develop an informed and supportive public;
 - o encourage development of realistic expectations of encounters and avoid disappointment and pressure for increasingly risky behaviour.

[TOP](#)**(2) Design, maintain and operate platforms to minimise the risk of adverse effects on cetaceans, including disturbance from noise:**

- i. vessels, engines and other equipment should be designed, maintained, and operated during whalewatching, to reduce as far as practicable adverse impacts on the target species and their environment;
- ii. cetacean species may respond differently to low and high frequency sounds, relative sound intensity or rapid changes in sound;
 - o vessel operators should be aware of the acoustic characteristics of the target species and of their vessel under operating conditions; particularly of the need

- to reduce as far as possible production of potentially disturbing sound;
- iii. vessel design and operation should minimise the risk of injury to cetaceans should contact occur; for example, shrouding of propellers can reduce both noise and risk of injury;
- iv. operators should be able to keep track of whales during an encounter.

[TOP](#)

(3) Allow the cetaceans to control the nature and duration of 'interactions':

- i. operators should have a sound understanding of the behaviour of the cetaceans and be aware of behavioural changes which may indicate disturbance;
- ii. in approaching or accompanying cetaceans, maximum platform speed should be determined relative to that of the cetacean, and should not exceed it once on station;
- iii. use appropriate angles and distances of approach; species may react differently, and most existing guidelines preclude head-on approaches;
- iv. friendly whale behaviour should be welcomed, but not cultivated; do not instigate direct contact with a platform;
- v. avoid sudden changes in speed, direction or noise;
- vi. do not alter platform speed or direction to counteract avoidance behaviour by cetaceans;
- vii. do not pursue², head off, or encircle cetaceans or cause groups to separate;
- viii. approaches to mother/calf pairs and solitary calves and juveniles should be undertaken with special care;
 - o there may be an increased risk of disturbance to these animals, or risk of injury if vessels are approached by calves;
- ix. cetaceans should be able to detect a platform at all times;
 - o while quiet operations are desirable, attempts to eliminate all noise may result in cetaceans being startled by a platform which has approached undetected;
 - o rough seas may elevate background noise to levels at which vessels are less detectable.

¹ Any vessel (with or without engine), aircraft or person in the water.

² Chase (as opposed to follow), causing the whale to change its course or speed.