

Whale Watching Operator Code of Conduct for the Campbell River Area

PURPOSE

This document has been created and presented to operators, to encourage standard practices for commercial whale watching vessels operating out of and in and around the Campbell River area. The purpose is to ensure that all commercial whale watching vessels are acting responsibly for the safety and well-being of the wildlife and passengers, while reassuring the general public and visitors to the region that collectively and individually we are “Whale wise” and 100% committed to responsible marine wildlife viewing and contributing to ongoing research and conservation.

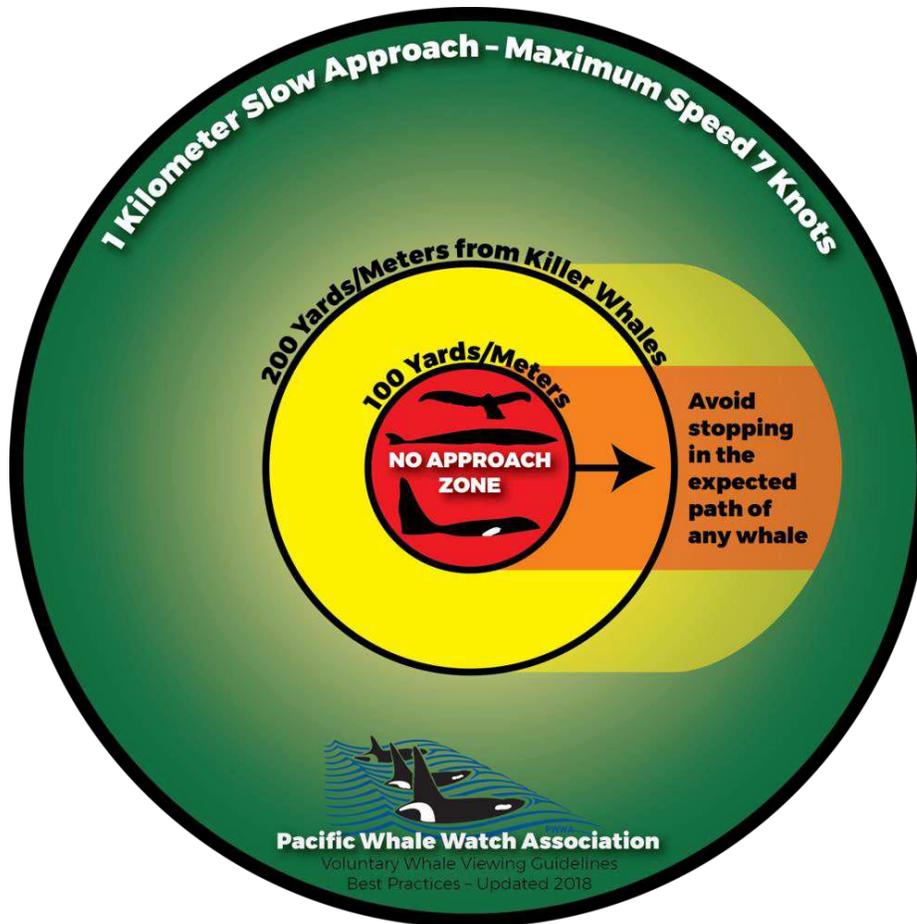
These guidelines have been drawn up to meet and exceed the laws & regulations within the Marine Mammal Regulations of the Fisheries Act published by the Government of Canada, the North Island Marine Mammal Association (NIMMSA) Code of Conduct, and the Pacific Whale Watching Association (PWWA) guidelines ensuring best practices and minimum disturbance to Killer Whales and greater protection for our marine mammals.

It is hoped that each company and all their captains adopt, adhere and sign-off on these guidelines to confirm their commitment to responsible whale watching practices. The guidelines will be reviewed at the end of each season, or as required in response to any updates in laws & regulations published by the Government of Canada.

In addition to signing up to this code of conduct, all operators are encouraged to fly the Whale Watching Flag while actively observing whales. The purpose of the flag is to let other vessels in the area know that whales are likely to be within 400 meters of the vessel(s) flying the flag. The flag alerts other vessels and recreational boaters that they should apply adjustments to course and speed as required to comply with the Marine Mammal Regulations of the Fisheries Act published by the Government of Canada.



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OPERATION OF VESSELS IN THE VICINITY OF WHALES

A vessel shall approach an area of known or suspected whale activity with extreme caution.

A vessel within 1 km or 0.65 mile of a whale is considered to be in the vicinity of whales and is required to abide by the law and all of these Best Practices Guidelines as are relevant.

If a vessel operator is unaware of the whales' location, they must always maintain a vigilant watch for whales. Mere observation of whale watching vessels in the distance does not fulfill this responsibility, as individual whale may be encountered anywhere and at any time.

Maintaining a vigilant watch often includes significant speed reductions.

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A vessel within the vicinity of whales - within 1 km (0.65 mile) of a whale - is considered to be in the slow zone and must operate at no more than 7 knots.

This reduced speed zone shall also be observed when disengaging the vicinity of whales, always approaching and disengaging from the side, moving in a parallel direction to the direction of the whales.

As the vessel approaches, the distribution of whales and the positioning of other viewing vessels should be surveyed. Communication with other member vessels is strongly encouraged at this point on marine VHF channel 7A.

Once in the vicinity radio communication and “chatter” should be kept to a minimum to allow guests the opportunity to quietly observe and listen.

A vessel shall limit its time in the vicinity of a particular group of whales on any one tour to 30-45 minutes.

Vessels should limit the amount of viewing time to a maximum of 30 minutes in the vicinity of whales on days when there are more than 5 commercial whale watching vessels within 1 km of that particular group of whales. On these occasions vessels should spend more of their tour observing other marine wildlife in other locations and searching for other groups of whales.

PARALLEL VIEWING SEQUENCE

When approaching vessels already engaged in viewing a whale or group of whales, the vessel operator must ensure their vessel moves to the outside of the vessels already accompanying these whales, and head in a direction parallel to the direction these whales are traveling. This is an expected courteous approach to maintain existing view angles of all vessels previously on scene.

Vessels should maintain heading and speed equal to the whales at all times while paralleling.

Minimum approach distances are governed by law and should be maintained as follows; 400 meters/yards from Southern Resident Killer Whales, 200 meters/yards from all other Killer Whales, increasing this distance, or avoid approaching, if they are in a resting line or with a nursing calf(s) and 100 meters/yards from all other cetaceans. An additional buffer should be added, depending on behaviour, especially when viewing at 100 meters/yards.

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The Captain and his crew are responsible for paying attention and must move away, slowly and cautiously, at the first sign of disturbance or agitation of marine wildlife.

Operators are required to make sure that they keep clear of the path of whales and should never approach head on or from behind.

A vessel's speed should be the same as the whale's speed or slower. However, when traveling slower than the speed of the whales, a vessel relinquishes its priority sequence. This technique is generally used to disengage the vicinity of whales when the intention is to break away and return to port.

OTHER MARINE WILDLIFE

Captain/driver, will not purposefully drive through groups of dolphins or porpoises to encourage bow or stern-riding. Should dolphins or porpoises choose to ride the bow wave of your vessel, you must hold course and speed or reduce speed gradually, avoiding any sudden course changes.

Reduce speed around sea lion haul-outs and bird colonies to minimise wake, wash and noise, slowly passing without stopping. Avoid approaching closer than 100 metres/yards. Encourage guests to be quiet particularly during breeding, nesting and pupping season (generally throughout our main operating season May - September).

Pay attention and move away, slowly and cautiously, at the first sign of disturbance or agitation.

ETIQUETTE AND RADIO COMMUNICATIONS

Every Captain/driver will always operate in a manner respectful of other vessels and their passengers, avoiding constant, distracting "radio chatter"

If required, Captains/drivers should feel comfortable politely letting other drivers know via VHF that the operation of their vessel is not consistent with these guidelines. Captains/drivers should work together to ensure guidelines are followed and always receive this type of communication graciously.

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COMPANY AND CAPTAIN COMMITMENT

Company owners and captains that are committed to adopting and adhering to these guidelines/code of conduct will be asked to sign below.

Name (Print):

Signed (Signature):

Company:

Date:

Name (Print):

Signed (Signature):

Company:

Date:

Thank you for your commitment to providing greater protection for the whales and other marine mammals by taking these necessary steps.

Acknowledgements

The Marine Mammal Regulations of the Fisheries Act published by the Government of Canada,
Whale Wise Code of conduct published by the North Island Marine Mammal Association (NIMMSA),
The Pacific Whale Watching Association guidelines and Infographic
The Marine Education & Research Society (MERS)