

NIMMSA

Code of Conduct



Purpose and Guiding Principles

The vessel operators and naturalists of NIMMSA member companies are required to be professionally trained and experienced in identifying marine species, their behaviours, and movement patterns. This knowledge guides all marine wildlife viewing activities and supports adherence to this Code of Conduct.

Where a situation is not specifically addressed in this Code of Conduct, NIMMSA members are expected to operate in a manner that is respectful of wildlife, wildlife viewers, and other mariners.

Legal and Regulatory Compliance

NIMMSA members are required to comply with all applicable Canadian laws and regulations. The Be Whale Wise cetacean viewing guidelines and marine mammal regulations must be followed as closely as possible, except where compliance would conflict with collision regulations or human safety requirements.

Viewing Conduct



General Marine Mammal Viewing Guidelines

To minimize disturbance and ensure safe, responsible wildlife viewing, NIMMSA members adhere to the following practices:

- Do not approach or position a vessel closer than 200 metres to any killer whale, or closer than 100 metres to any other marine mammal.
- Exercise caution, courtesy, and reduced noise near known or suspected marine wildlife activity, including haul-outs and bird colonies, particularly from May to September during breeding, nesting, and seal pupping seasons.
- Look in all directions before planning an approach to or departure from wildlife.
- Reduce speed to less than 7 knots when within 1 kilometre of the nearest marine mammal, minimizing engine noise and vessel wake.
- Approach and depart animals from the side, travelling parallel to their direction of movement. Do not approach from the front or behind.

Viewing Conduct



General Marine Mammal Viewing Guidelines (cont...)

- If animals approach the vessel, move cautiously out of the way and avoid abrupt course changes. If within approach distances unintentionally, place engines in neutral and allow animals to pass.
- Move away slowly and cautiously at the first sign of disturbance or agitation.
- Stay on the offshore side of whales when travelling close to shore.
- Avoid travelling through groups of porpoises or dolphins. Maintain course and gradually reduce speed to discourage bow or stern riding.
- Limit viewing time to 30 minutes or less to reduce cumulative vessel impacts and allow space for other viewers.
- Do not disturb, swim with, move, feed, or touch marine wildlife.
- Report sick, stranded, or entangled animals to the local marine mammal stranding network.

Regionally Specific Viewing Conduct



Northern Vancouver Island

In addition to the general viewing guidelines, NIMMSA members operating off northern Vancouver Island are expected to follow these regionally specific practices to reduce impacts on marine wildlife and promote respectful interactions among mariners:

- Shut off engines whenever possible, particularly within 400 metres of whales, to reduce underwater noise and exhaust emissions.
- Maintain a minimum distance of 200 metres from any whale displaying signs of stress, trauma, labour, unfamiliar behaviour, habituation, or requiring additional space.
- If a whale approaches a vessel (commonly known as “mugging”), turn off engines and wait until the whale moves beyond 100 metres. Avoid areas where mugging behaviour is known to occur.
- Do not transit through or go ashore within the Robson Bight (Michael Bigg) Ecological Reserve at any time.
- Shut off sonar, depth sounders, fish finders, and other underwater transducers whenever possible when whales are foraging or when hydrophones are in use.
- Refrain from using PA systems when viewing marine mammals within 200 metres.

Regionally Specific Viewing Conduct



Northern Vancouver Island (cont...)

- Monitor marine VHF radio channel 07A (156.350 MHz) when viewing whales or operating in their vicinity.
- Keep radio communications brief, respectful, and professional.
- Share sightings information with other NIMMSA members and local researchers when appropriate.
- Pass on the outside of other vessels viewing whales whenever practical.
- Reduce engine and transducer noise near fixed hydrophone stations when killer whales are present.
- Avoid blocking shore-based whale viewing or observations from other vessels.
- Fly the whale warning flag whenever possible when viewing whales within 1 kilometre.
- Follow all applicable DFO, Transport Canada, and Be Whale Wise guidelines when operating drones, and limit drone use where it may impact wildlife or other viewers.

Marketing and Social Media Guidelines



NIMMSA Members Marketing Guidelines

As stewards of the marine environment, NIMMSA members are expected to model responsible behaviour through their marketing and communications.

Use only images and video that reflect responsible marine mammal viewing in alignment with this Code of Conduct.

- Content should reflect legal approach distances and responsible vessel positioning.
- Avoid imagery or language that implies close encounters, pursuit, or crowding of marine mammals.
- Do not use or share content that sensationalizes or misrepresents wildlife interactions.
- Where relevant, provide context to help viewers understand how imagery was captured responsibly (for example, "land-based viewing" or "images captured using a telephoto lens.")

Educate clients about responsible viewing practices and encourage them to share only content that reflects these standards.

- Communicate responsible viewing expectations to guests before, during, and after tours.
- Encourage guests to share images and stories that reflect care, respect, and responsible practices on the water.

Marketing and Social Media Guidelines



NIMMSA Members Marketing Guidelines (cont...)

- Discourage sharing content that could mislead others about appropriate wildlife viewing behaviour.
- Where appropriate, support education and stewardship messaging, including research or monitoring efforts connected to sightings.

NIMMSA will respond to reported non-compliance through its Ethical Advertising Policy Enforcement process.

Ethical Advertising Policy Enforcement Process

If non-compliant images or video are being marketed then NIMMSA will work with the member to develop a compliance strategy. The process will start with a letter from NIMMSA regarding the offending material and requesting a remediation plan with timeline.

Each offence will be considered on a case-by-case basis. After repeat offence warnings without action to resolve, the company at fault will be reported to DMO's and other pertinent organizations.

Reconciliation



Reconciliation

NIMMSA members commit to advancing Reconciliation and to operating in a manner consistent with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's Call to Action 92, which calls upon the corporate sector to adopt the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) as a framework for reconciliation.

In practice, this commitment includes:

- Respecting the rights, cultures, and knowledge of Indigenous Peoples
- Building respectful and mutually beneficial relationships with Indigenous communities
- Supporting meaningful engagement and collaboration where marine tourism and stewardship intersect with Indigenous territories
- Conducting business in a manner that contributes to long-term community wellbeing and economic inclusion

Through this commitment, NIMMSA and its members recognize the importance of responsible business practices that support reconciliation, foster trust, and contribute positively to the communities and waters in which we operate.