

# Encountering Whales & Dolphins in Irish Waters

Did you know that in 1991 the Irish Government declared all Irish Waters a whale and dolphin sanctuary? This means that these species must not be deliberately disturbed while they are swimming around our coasts.

In recent years, people have become more aware of these mammals in our waters. There are also lots more people in small boats, coming into contact with them. Though they are wonderful to see, there are risks involved when meeting these creatures, particularly large whales. Not only are these animals unpredictable, especially when they have young with them, but they are capable of damaging a small boat. In the excitement of seeing whales and dolphins, people may also be tempted to go further out to sea than is safe, just to get a closer look.

If you should encounter whales or dolphins when out in a boat this summer, guidelines given by the Department of Communications, Marine & Natural Resources are listed in the box on the right. For more information on whale and dolphin watching, visit the Irish Whale and Dolphin Group website ([www.iwdg.ie](http://www.iwdg.ie)). The site also gives lots of information about the different species you are likely to see in Irish Waters.

- When whales or dolphins are first encountered, craft should maintain a steady course.
- Boat speed should be maintained below 7 knots.
- Do not attempt to pursue whales or dolphins encountered.
- In the case of dolphins, they will very often approach craft and may engage in "bow riding". Always allow dolphins approach a boat rather than attempt to go after them.
- Maintain a distance of at least 100m from whales.
- Maintain a distance of 200m between any other boats in the vicinity.
- Attempt to steer a course parallel to the direction whales or dolphins are taking.
- Do not corral whales or dolphins between boats.
- Special care must be taken when young calves are seen - do not come between a mother and her calf.
- Successive boats must follow the same course.
- Boats should not spend more than 30 minutes with whales or dolphins.
- DO NOT attempt to swim with them.

