

## The Humpback Whale

Highly migratory, humpback whales undertake long journeys between Antarctica and tropical regions. From July to the end of October, humpbacks arrive in French Polynesia and gradually spread around the islands, across much of the Society Islands, the Austral Islands, and the Tuamotu and Gambier archipelagos. The waters of French Polynesia during the austral winter (21°C–27°C) provide newborn calves with optimal conditions for the first weeks of their aquatic life. In addition, mother whales seek areas where predators are rare and therefore stay close to islands, near barrier reefs, in sheltered bays, and even inside lagoons. It is therefore essential not to disturb them, and approaching them must strictly follow very specific rules. Traditional names given to whales are Tohora in Tahiti, To'ora in the Australs, Paraoa in the Tuamotu, Pa'aoa in the Marquesas, and Mago Puitai in the Gambier.

## The Dolphin

Dolphins are classified as toothed cetaceans. Around ten dolphin species are observed in French Polynesia, each with its own way of life: some hunt at night or during the day, some enter lagoons while others do not, some approach boats while others avoid them, and they may live in small or large groups. Some dolphins are very common and can be seen near pass entrances. Others are observed in the open ocean, mainly in the Marquesas, Tuamotu, and Society Islands. In French Polynesia, spinner dolphins, bottlenose dolphins, common dolphins, and pilot whales are among the most frequently encountered species. They are also the most popular dolphins. Pay attention to cetacean behavior: if they come to the bow of your boat, maintain your speed, and remember that sudden changes in speed or direction disturb and frighten them. Several traditional names are given to dolphins: Ou'a in Tahiti and the Austral Islands, Kaukura in the Tuamotu, Kumia and Konio in the Marquesas, and Ikarere in the Gambier Islands.

## The Pilot Whale

Pilot whales have a highly developed matriarchal social structure. Females can continue to nurse even after menopause. These dolphins prefer deep waters and are capable of diving to depths of up to 600 meters to hunt squid, which make up the main part of their diet.

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**THE PRESENCE OF  
MARINE MAMMALS  
IN POLYNESIAN  
WATERS DEPENDS  
ON OUR BEHAVIOR.**

”



**Direction de l'environnement**  
Ministère en charge l'environnement



**HOW TO OBSERVE  
MARINE  
MAMMALS  
in French Polynesia**



**Direction de l'environnement**  
Ministère en charge l'environnement



**FLUKE OF A HUMPBACK WHALE**



**SPINNER DOLPHINS**



**PILOT WHALES**

## Technical Principles for Approaching Cetaceans

To minimize stress and negative impacts on animals and their social behavior:

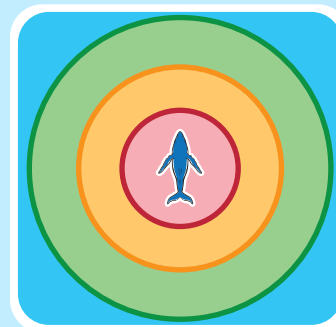
- Maintain a speed below 3 knots within a 300-meter observation zone ;
- Keep the engine running; shift to neutral if the animal approaches voluntarily ;
- Respect approach distances, especially during mating behavior
- Follow a route parallel to moving animals ;
- Avoid approaching unaccompanied young ;
- Limit observation to 15 minutes (or less with newborns).

Marine mammals are protected under French Polynesian environmental law. It is strictly forbidden to :

- Disturb animals (e.g., causing faster movement, longer dives, group separation) ;
- Chase an animal or group ;
- Cut across their path or change their trajectory ;
- Block movement (encircling, chasing, trapping against a reef);
- Make sudden changes in direction or engine speed nearby ;
- Approach from the front or rear ;
- Use sonar outside normal navigation frequencies.

## DISTANCE AND APPROACH LIMITS

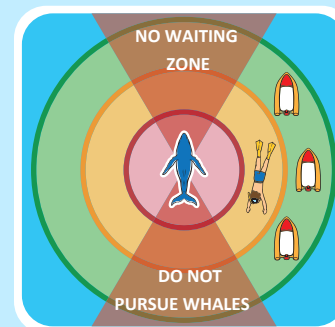
Do not forget that a whale weighs 40 tons and can pose a danger to your safety. Whale watching is strictly prohibited in lagoons, bays, and passes.



**SAFETY ZONE**  
within a 15-meter radius around the animal, into which no one is allowed to enter.

**EXCLUSION ZONE**  
within a 100-meter radius around the animal, into which no vessel is allowed to enter.

**OBSERVATION ZONE**  
within a 300-meter radius around the animal, into which no vessel is allowed to enter, except those with authorization. Their number is limited to three



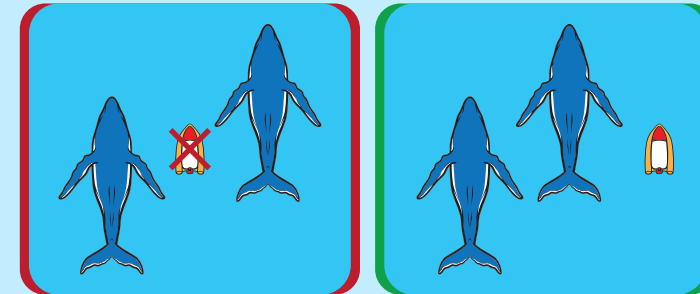
Vessels without authorization must remain outside the 300-meter observation zone.

Launches into the water, requested in advance in the authorization application, are permitted outside the exclusion zone for up to 7 people per vessel, including the supervisor.

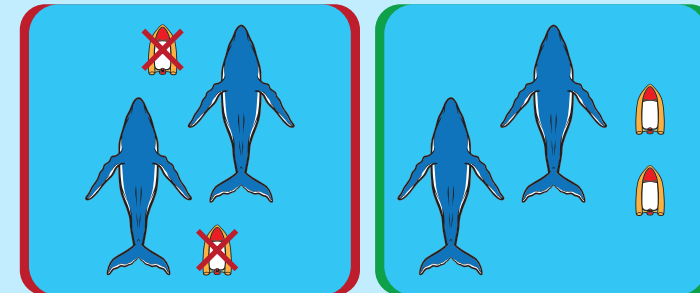
## SIMPLE RULES THAT MUST BE STRICTLY FOLLOWED

Navigate alongside by following a parallel course:

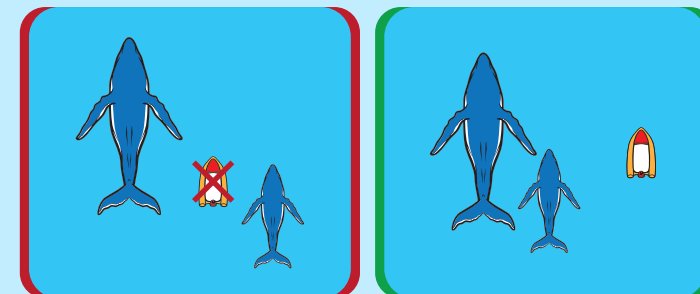
▼ staying outside groups of animals



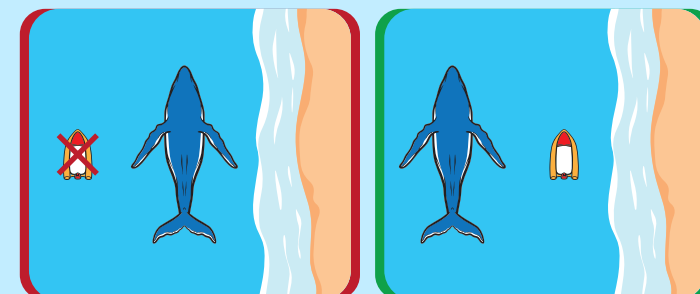
▼ avoid encircling the animals



▼ do not position yourself between a mother and calf



▼ do not block the animals against the reef



## THE REGULATIONS

Environmental Code of French Polynesia.

• **Art. LP. 2213-1-1**

Established the Sanctuary for the protection and conservation of whales and other marine mammals in French Polynesia.

• **Art. A. 2213-1-4 à A. 2213-1-11**

Regulate the approach to marine mammals in French Polynesia.

**Observation permits are only allowed :**

- In the territorial waters around Bora Bora, Hūāhine, Mo'orea, Ra'iātea, Rurutu, Taha'a, Tahiti, Tetiaroa, and Tubuai;
- From July 20 to November 20 inclusive;
- From 7:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.;
- For only one authorized vessel per island per group of companies.

**Permits are required for activities involving approaching marine mammals in French Polynesia. Application forms for authorization are available to you :**

- on the téléservice Paraoa (<https://www.paraoa.gov.pf>)
- at La Direction de l'Environnement  
B.P 4562 Papeete  
Phone : 40 47 66 66 Fax : 40 41 92 52