



## DOLPHIN CODE OF CONDUCT CÒD GIÙLAIN LEUMADAIR-MARA

### Overview

Please note that this is a local code of conduct, drawn up in consultation with Scottish Natural Heritage, which is designed to compliment the Scottish Canoe Association's Access and Environment Advice.

Download the SCA's advice here: <http://www.canoescotland.org/access/Access.aspx>

### Code of Conduct

We're lucky to live so close to the Moray Firth, which you'll all know supports the most northerly population of bottlenose dolphins. Bottlenose dolphins are rare in Europe and are protected by both UK and EU law: they are European Protected Species.

The population resident in north east Scotland is small and this makes them vulnerable. Disturbing them (intentionally or recklessly) is against the law and can have serious consequences both for people and for the dolphins.

Studies in other parts of the world have shown that recreational and tour vessels can lead to habitat abandonment, declines in reproductive success and increased mortality, particularly in small, coastal populations of dolphins.

Chanonry Point, the Kessock Narrows and the area between the North and South Sutors are the best feeding sites for dolphins in Europe. In these places the currents and coastal topography funnel fish into a relatively confined space which means they are more easily preyed on by the dolphins. These areas are therefore incredibly important for the dolphins and any disturbance there is likely to be very significant.

All of these areas are popular spots to paddle in and although sea kayaking is generally a low impact sport – we don't have noisy propellers or engines and we don't travel at high speeds – we can still have an impact. Research has shown that kayaks can disturb a variety of marine wildlife; we're quiet and that means marine mammals and birds don't always hear us coming.

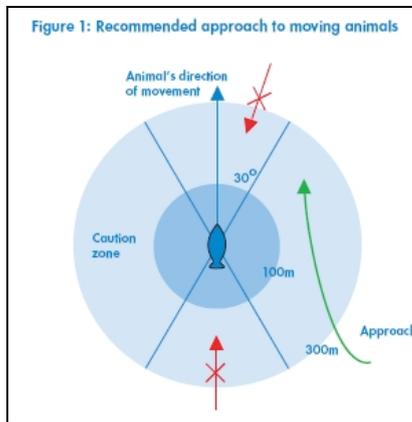
Whilst dolphins are probably more able to detect us than some other wildlife, due to their echolocation abilities, when they are feeding they may be more focused on this activity and therefore more prone to being startled by our approach.

A group of kayaks paddling through a pod of feeding dolphins is likely to cause disturbance. As a club we want to make sure that we follow best practice and don't cause any disturbance by following these simple rules:

### If you see dolphins in the wider firth area

- Be cautious and courteous: approach areas of known or suspected cetacean activity with extreme caution. Look in all directions before planning your approach or departure.
- Stay at least 50 to 100m away from them. If they come to you that's fine but don't paddle towards them! If they do come closer hold your course and speed or reduce speed gradually. When they depart do not attempt to re-encounter them. This means that the interaction remains under their control.

- Be predictable and act in a sensible way! Don't make any sudden changes in speed or direction.
- Approach the dolphins from the side on a parallel converging course not from the front or behind. Keep a parallel course as you paddle past them.



This diagram, taken from the Scottish Marine Wildlife Watching Code's 'A Guide to Best Practice for Watching Marine Wildlife' (page 11), shows the recommended approach for Whales, Dolphins and Porpoises.

See: [www.marinecode.org/documents/Guide-web.pdf](http://www.marinecode.org/documents/Guide-web.pdf)

- Try to avoid pointing your kayak at them as this may make them feel threatened (you'll look more like a predator).
- Make sure the whole group paddles on one side. If you split up and 'surround' the dolphins they're likely to feel trapped or hemmed in.

### At Chanory Point

- The time you are most likely to see dolphins at Chanory is from May to September, 2-3 hours after low tide, for a period of up to 3 hours. **So avoid paddling at Chanory between 2 and 6 hours after a low tide and plan to paddle at another location.**
- If there are dolphins feeding at Chanory don't paddle through the narrows **or** take a wide berth around the point paddling at least 150m off the point. There is a strong current moving through the narrows (up to 3.5 knots) so coaches and leaders will need to make a decision about whether this route is appropriate for their group.
- Paddle straight through the Chanory Narrows area rather than lingering.

### At the Kessock Narrows

- Avoid the area shown on the Google map below. This area can be easily identified during rising tide, when the dolphins tend to feed, by a foamy, fast-moving water mass running directly through the middle of the firth. The southern edge of this triangle especially the length between the Marina's exit/River Ness's mouth to the Vs point where the firth begins to widen. Keep as close to the coastline as possible, when entering and exiting the Beaully Firth, will allow the dolphins to carry on feeding with minimal disturbance.



### At the Sutors

- As the dolphins tend to be spread out in this area follow the general rules set out above.

### As a club we should also consider

- Splitting up into smaller discrete groups.
- Using a number of different locations for our weekly paddles.

### What about other wildlife?

- Be cautious and quiet around seal haul-outs and bird colonies, especially during breeding, nesting and pupping seasons (generally May to September). Avoid flushing animals from haul-outs and nests as this constitutes disturbance and can have significant impacts on energy expenditure, health and breeding success. Reduce speed, minimise noise and slowly pass without stopping at a distance of 50-100m from the animals. Monitor them carefully and move away slowly and cautiously at the first sign of disturbance or agitation, which for seals will be 'heads up' or shuffling. Don't point your boats at them as they may well see you as a predator.
- Don't travel through groups of mammals or birds in or on the water.
- Take particular care when young animals are present.
- Limit viewing time to 15 minutes. This will minimise the cumulative impact of many vessels and give consideration to other viewers.
- Don't swim with, touch or feed marine wildlife.
- Don't disturb, move, feed or touch any marine wildlife, including seal pups. If you are concerned about a potentially sick or stranded animal, contact your local stranding network where available. You can report stranded marine mammals at live strandings: SSPCA 0131 339 0111 ([www.scottishspca.org](http://www.scottishspca.org)) and Dead strandings: Scottish Agricultural College: 01463 243030 / 07979 245893.
- If you witness any wildlife being harmed or disturbed, call the local police station and ask to speak to the wildlife crime officer.

### Want to read up further?

Check out the following resources:

- The Dolphin Space Programme website [www.dolphinspace.org](http://www.dolphinspace.org) for FAQ's and for info about their work and code that commercial tour boat operators sign up to.
- The Scottish Marine Wildlife Watching Code can be found at <http://www.marinecode.org> - this includes advice about how to report your marine wildlife sightings. Reporting sightings helps to build up important information and knowledge.
- The Scottish Canoe Association Website <http://www.canoescotland.org/Home.aspx> and especially their access and the environment tab.



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