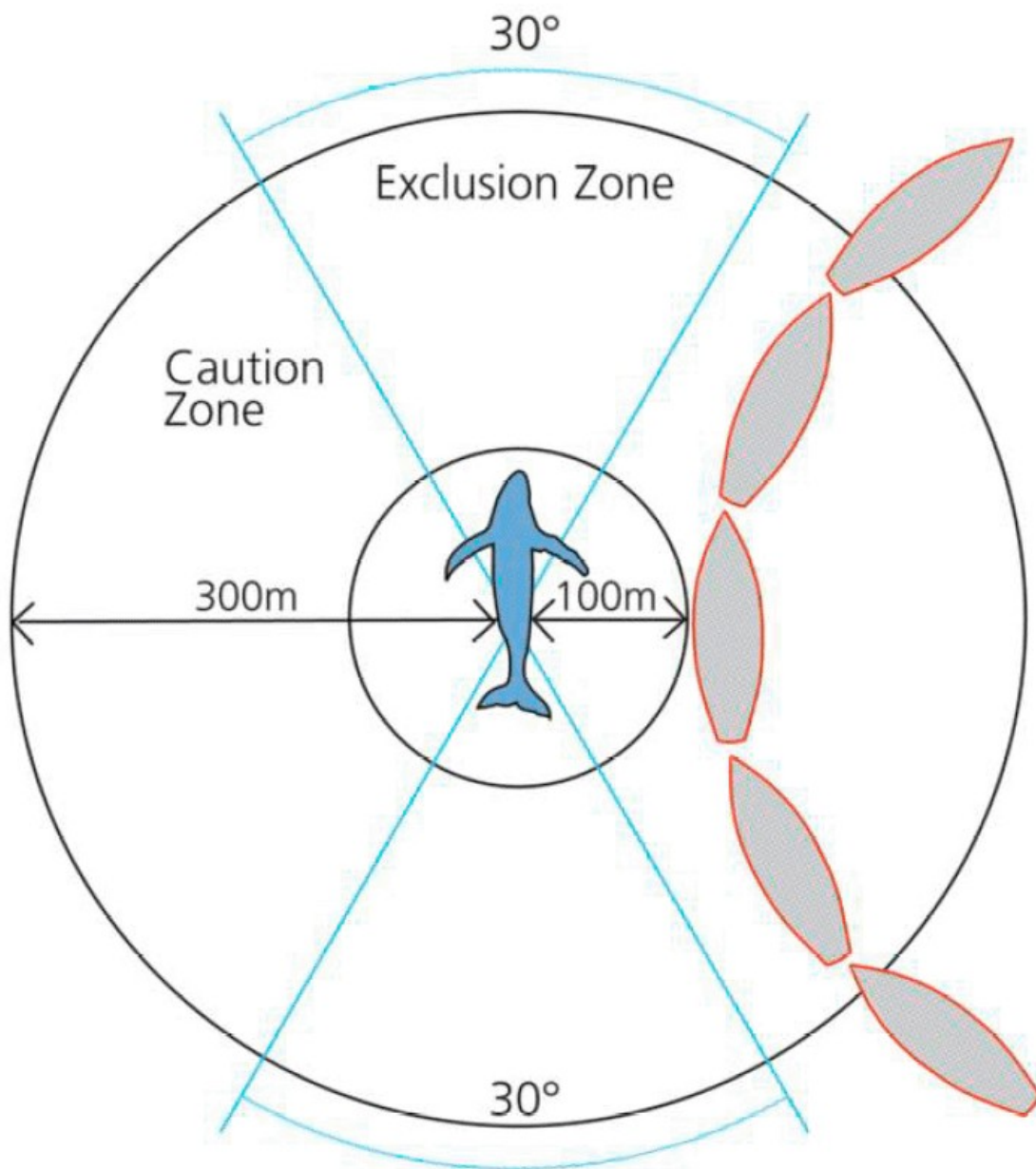


Overview! Tonga is serious about protection of Whales! Help us out....

- Whales may leave an area permanently if continually disturbed. Cease contact at any sign of whales, particularly mothers and calves, becoming distressed or alarmed.
- Respect the marine environment. Disposal of rubbish into the sea, particularly plastics, can kill whales and other marine life through accidental swallowing/entanglement etc. All vessels are to provide receptacles for rubbish collection which is to be returned and properly disposed of on shore.



When whale watching on the water

- All vessels both private and commercial, underpower or undersail, operating within the Vava'u group during whale-watching season must take care to remain outside a 300m radius of a sighted whale. If a vessel finds itself within a 300m radius of a whale, the vessel must slow to 4 knots until 300m away.
- If whales approach a vessel, the vessel must avoid sudden changes in movement until the whales move on. When leaving a whale, vessels must move away very slowly (no wake speed) until at least 100m away.
- Licensed operators only may either remain stationary within 300m of a whale or approach a whale no faster than 4 knots within 300-100m of a whale.

In the caution zone

- The caution zone is 100-300 meter of a whale (refer to diagram). Only licensed operators are allowed in the caution zone.
- No more than two licensed whale watching operator vessels may be in the caution zone at any one time.
- As a matter of courtesy, vessels should limit their time within the caution zone if other vessels wish to enter.
- If a licensed vessel is on its own with a whale(s) there is no time limit. However, if a second licensed vessel arrives a one and a half hour time limit starts to apply within the caution zone for the first vessel.
- All licensed vessels within the 300m zone should gain VHF radio contact with others. VHF channel 74 (lowpower) is to be the VHF channel monitored by licensed vessels within 300m.
- In the event of a vessel's VHF radio not working that vessel should remain outside the 100m caution zone.
- Dinghies, small boats, and kayaks engaged in whale watching within the 300m zone must carry handheld VHF radios.
- Two or more kayaks within the caution zone, if belonging to the same license holder are considered as one licensed operator.
- The caution zone moves with the whale(s). Vessels in restricted 300m area allow the vessels who were initially in the caution zone to move with the whales by positioning themselves away from the whale(s) if the whale(s) move closer to them.
- The licensed vessel with swimmers in the water may cautiously approach a whale up to 10m, if necessary, to pick up swimmers. The vessel should be stationary at 10m and should never be closer than 10m.
- Vessels should approach whales from the side as opposed to directly in front or behind. Vessels must not approach whales in the exclusion zone (refer to diagram).
- Vessels must not box whales in, cut off their path or herd or chase them.
- Vessels must minimise boat and other noise, eg. gear shifting.

Swimming with whales

- For the protection of the whales, and swimmers, it is advisable to go with a licensed operator if you wish to swim with whales.
- Conditions that allow swimming are at the skipper's discretion.

- If there are six or more clients on board a vessel an extra crew member is to be on board in addition to the skipper. It is recommended that Tongan staff are given preference.
- No more than four clients plus one guide per vessel may swim with any one group of whales at a time.
- Only one vessel may have swimmers in the water with any one group of whales at a time.
- An alpha flag is to be flown when swimmers are in the water.
- When a second vessel approaches a vessel with clients in the water, the second vessel must remain outside the 100m zone to give safe manoeuvrability to the first vessel.
- A first aid kit, 10m line and float should be onboard all vessels. It is recommended that vessels if possible should use an attached safety line (no longer than 10 metres) with an identification buoy.

Activities banned for interacting with whales

- The use of SCUBA equipment.
- The use of artificial light sources.
- The use of jet skis and motorised swimming aids. Jet skis must stay 2,000 metres away when in the vicinity of whales.

Specialist interactions

- Specialists include scientific researchers and commercial filmmakers/photographers who must obtain specialist licenses and all necessary permits from relevant government agencies.
- When working with whales specialists must adhere to the Whale Watching Guidelines as specified in their respective permits, and notify local operators of their presence and intentions.

Whale watching from the air

- Aircraft (including seaplanes, microlite and light aircraft) must maintain a minimum height of 300m from a whale.
- No aircraft may land on the water to whale watch.
- The duration of a whale encounter by aircraft is limited to five minutes or two approaches (sweeps).
- No more than one whale watching aircraft may be within five km of the whales being watched.
- Ban on helicopters for whale watching.
- Ban on remote control aircraft.

DO NOT Whalewatch or Swim with Whales from private yachts or by hiring a local speed boat! Fines, visa cancellation, risking your personal and your vessels safety and harassing a wild animal is NOT worth the risk!