

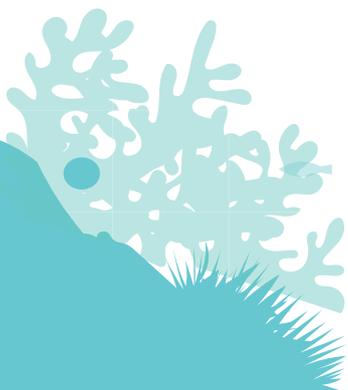


V E S S

VANUATU ENVIRONMENTAL
SCIENCE SOCIETY



Code of Conduct for Tourism Operators Interacting with Dugongs



Code of Conduct for Tourism Operators Interacting with Dugongs

Dugongs are one of Vanuatu's most charismatic animals and many tourists are excited when they see them. In Vanuatu, this is possible in many locations and our dugongs have a reputation of being 'friendly' and not afraid of people.

We want this to continue so people, including tourists can keep having once-in-a-lifetime encounters with these fascinating marine mammals. But for this to happen every encounter needs to be a positive experience *for the dugongs* as well as for the tourists. This code of conduct aims to give tourism operators the knowledge to ensure that dugongs remain happy and healthy into the future and continue to be an asset to Vanuatu and our tourism industry.

The dugong code of conduct is not just for tourism businesses with tours specifically for viewing dugongs but for any tour where tourists may come across dugongs during the tour such as diving, snorkeling, kayaking, boating, on stand up paddleboards, jetskis etc. It effectively includes any tour that happens on or under the sea anywhere in Vanuatu. It is also for any tourism properties on the coast where dugongs sometimes come close to the shore and for operators who transport tourists across the water including water taxis.



Images: Big Blue Vanuatu



Make sure you and your staff follow the recommendations in the “**Guidelines for Interacting with Dugongs**”.

These guidelines form the basis of this code of conduct but as a tourism operator you have additional responsibilities.

- You should display or provide the “Guidelines for Interacting with Dugongs” to all customers.
- It is your responsibility to ensure that all the tourists adhere to these guidelines. This includes tourists who enter the water from the shore on your property as well as those who are on watercraft or in-water tours.
- If the purpose of your tour is viewing or watching dugongs or other marine mammals you should hold a permit under the Fisheries Act (2014).

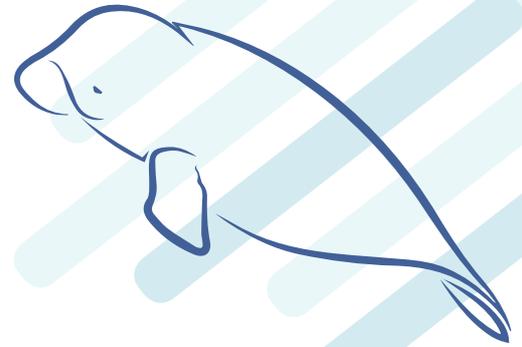
If you use a watercraft with an engine either on your **tours** or to **transport** tourists from place to place, know the recommendations in the guideline and make sure you adhere to them. This applies to banana boats, water taxis, fishing boats, sailing boats, other boats, jetskis, zegos, jetboats etc.

If you use a watercraft without an engine either on your **tours** or if you provide them for the tourist to use by themselves (boats, kayaks, canoes, sailing dinghies, stand up paddleboards etc.) know the recommendations in the guideline and make sure you, your staff, your customers and, in particular, your guides adhere to them.



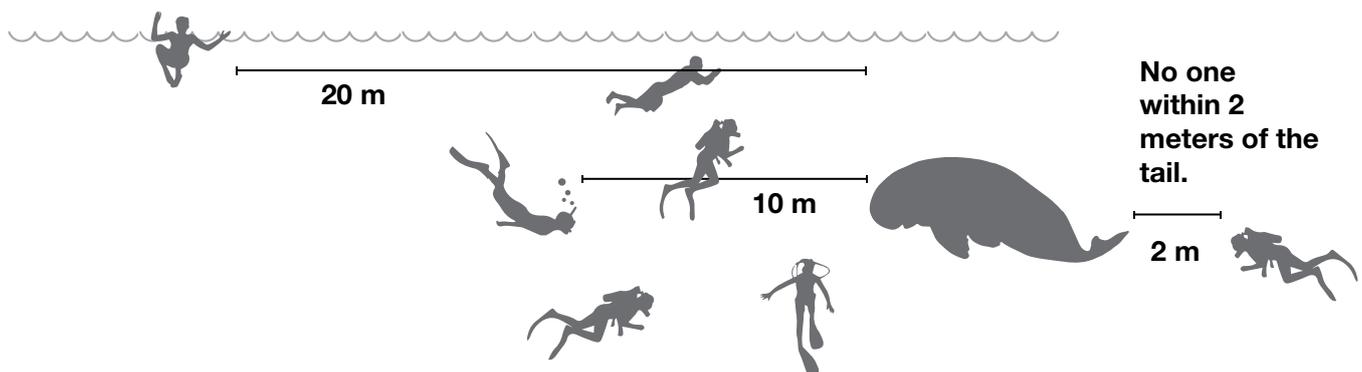
If you see dugongs from the air

- If you are flying a fixed-wing aircraft or a helicopter you should fly at a minimum 300 metres above dugongs.
- If you are flying a helicopter do not hover over them.
- If you are flying a drone it should fly at least 50m above dugongs. Remember you need a permit to fly a drone in Vanuatu (please contact the Vanuatu Civil Aviation Authority or the Vanuatu Cultural Centre for details).



If your tourists enter the water with dugongs

- Give a brief to your customers before they enter the water on how to behave when a dugong is present and ensure all the customers are familiar with the “Guidelines for Interacting with Dugongs”. Remember it is your responsibility to ensure that all the tourists adhere to these guidelines.
- Know the recommendations in the guideline and make sure you, your staff and, in particular, your guides adhere to them.
- Instruct your tourists NOT to swim towards the dugong and wait until the dugong comes to them if it wants to.
- On tours there should always be a trained guide in the water whenever there are tourists in the water with dugongs.
- There should be no more than 4 tourists and one guide within 10m of a dugong. If you come across a dugong and there are already 5 people within 10 meters, stay back, at least 20 meters away.



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- Take extra precautions to ensure the tourists stay away from the tail and away from mothers with calves for their safety.
- If a dugong shows any signs of distress or disturbance (such as repeatedly swimming away from the people) make sure the tourists stop and move at least 50 meters away from the dugong.
- Discourage tourists from touching the dugong.
- Do not attempt to feed dugongs or allow tourists to attempt to feed a dugong.
- When tourists have encounters with a dugong they often want to have photos or footage to remind them of their amazing experience. Please make sure that when they are taking photos or filming the dugongs they don't forget about the guideline and get too close or annoy the dugong when trying to get the perfect "selfie". Protecting the dugongs and your customers from harm is more important than getting the perfect image.



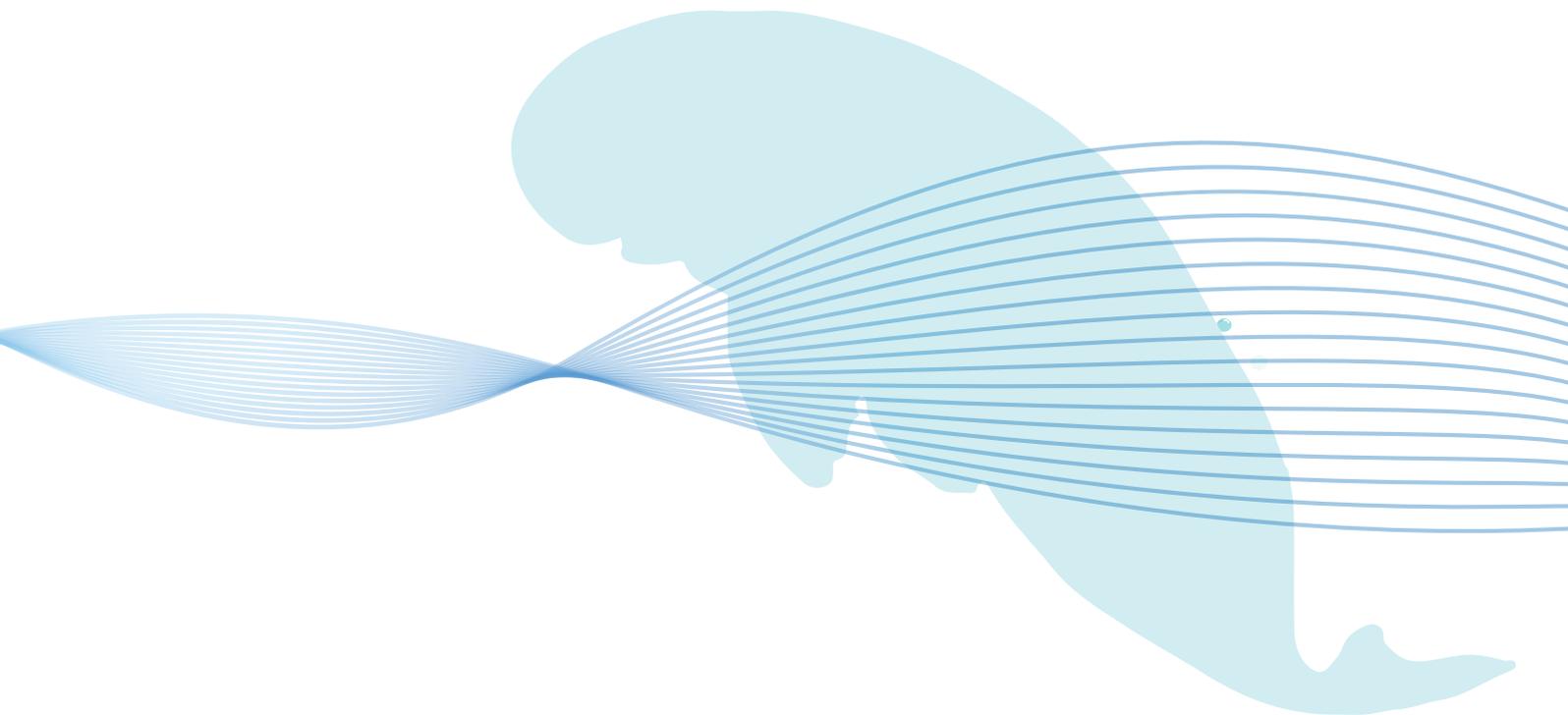
Dugongs are protected by Vanuatu laws

- All Vanuatu waters are a Marine Mammal Sanctuary and all marine mammals, including dugongs, are protected under the Fisheries Act (2014). A person must not kill, harm, harass, take, possess, hold in captivity or restrict the movement of any marine mammal in the Vanuatu Marine Mammals Sanctuary. A person who breaks this law faces a fine of up to VT50,000,000 or 2 years in jail, or both. There is also an on the spot fine of VT1,000,000 for breaking this law.
- If you have a dugong watching tour you are required to have a permit from the Vanuatu Fisheries Department in addition to your tourism permit. There is an on the spot fine of VT1,000,000 for operating without a permit.
- If a dugong is accidentally injured or killed you must report it immediately to the Vanuatu Fisheries Department. Call +678 23119 or +678 5333340. If you see a sick, injured or dead dugong please also report this to the Vanuatu Fisheries Department or the Vanuatu Environmental Science Society by emailing vess@vanuatuconservation.org
- If you witness a tourism operator who is not abiding by these guidelines you can contact the Department of Tourism on 33400 and ask for the officer for minimum standards.



Image: Big Blue Vanuatu

If all tourism operators in Vanuatu follow this **Code of Conduct for Tourism Operators Interacting with Dugongs** we hope that our majestic wild dugongs will continue to be happy, healthy and attract tourists to our country into the future. We hope that following these guidelines will ensure the encounters tourists have with dugongs will be a better experience for both the tourist and the dugongs. You can enhance this experience further ensuring you and your staff know about dugongs, particularly about their biology, life cycle, threats and the conservation measures we can take to protect them. You can then include this information on your tours or display it to your guests to give the tourists a better experience and increase awareness about these magnificent creatures not only in Vanuatu but around the world.



Code of Conduct for Tourism Operators interacting with Dugongs

These guidelines were developed by the Vanuatu Environmental Science Society (VESS) under the Dugong and Seagrass Conservation Project which is funded by the Global Environment Facility (GEF). The global project is supported by the Dugong Secretariat of the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) and project managed by Mohamed bin Zayed Species (MbZ) Conservation Fund. The project in Vanuatu is implemented by VESS and supported by the Department of Environmental Protection and Conservation, the Vanuatu Fisheries Department and the Department of Tourism.

