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Whale Watching

Watch out for whales when on the water

With the first sightings of migrating whales for 2010 off Queensland's east coast, the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA) is reminding vessel operators to take care, watch out for whales and know the approach distances.

From May through until around September each year migrating humpback whales can be seen in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park. Having left the colder southern oceans they undertake an annual migration to warmer northern waters – to court, mate, give birth or rear their young.

Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority Manager Species Conservation Dr Mark Read said it was important to abide by approach distances for both the safety of whales and onlookers.

"Whale watching regulations are in place to ensure whale watchers are kept safe and whales are not harassed or disturbed," Dr Read said.

"These are large and powerful animals; an adult humpback whale is between 12 to 15 metres long and can weigh up to 40 tonnes. The regulations are there to make sure these majestic animals can freely go about their usual activities.

"A whale that is disturbed is less likely to spend time at the surface and consequently whale watchers may not get the best from the experience.

"Disturbing a mother and its calf can cause the calf to stop feeding and move away from its mother which is a situation that must be avoided. Separating a mother and calf can also be dangerous should the mother feel her calf is being threatened in any way."

Legally, vessels must stay at least 100 metres away from whales in the Marine Park and 300 metres away in the Whitsunday Whale Protection Area. Jet skis must stay at least 300 metres away from whales throughout the Marine Park.

Dr Read said while whales can be social animals and may approach boats or people in the water, it is important not to approach them for both the safety of the whales and people watching them.

"The best whale watching experience is when whales are given the space to do as they normally would."

The following legal requirements when operating a vessel around whales are some that are set out in the *Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Regulations 1983*:

Events

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Runs all year to 30th June 2015

Open to all ANSA QLD members

Junior and Senior Categories

The North Queensland Sportfishing Championships will be on 6th & 7th June Put it in your calander now



- A vessel must not approach closer than 100 metres to a whale or 300 metres to a whale calf
- If your vessel is closer than 300 metres to a whale, it must be operated at a constant slow speed
- If there are three vessels within 300 metres of a whale, all additional vessels must remain outside 300 metres from the whale
- Vessels cannot be operated in a way that restricts the path of whales
- If a whale approaches close to your vessel, take all precautions to avoid a collision, either slow down and steer away from the animal, or place the engines in neutral and let the animal pass.

If you encounter a sick, injured, stranded or dead whale take as many details as possible and report it to the Department of Environment and Resource Management on 1300 130 372.

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