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A HIGH QUALITY WHALE WATCHING CERTIFICATE IN THE ACCOBAMS AREA

A High Quality Whale watching certificate in the ACCOBAMS Area

Cetacean watching activities for commercial purposes are increasingly being developed in the ACCOBAMS area, most of the time in the absence of any management rules. Considering that these activities, where properly conducted, should be encouraged as they do contribute to the building of education and awareness on cetaceans, Parties to ACCOBAMS decided through the [Resolution 5.10](#) to adopt the logo “High Quality Whale Watching”.

In this context, the ACCOBAMS Permanent Secretariat, in collaboration with the Secretariat of the Pelagos Sanctuary, launched an initiative to implement the «High Quality Whale Watching” certificate in the ACCOBAMS Area.



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The “High Quality Whale Watching” certificate aims at encouraging the implementation of good practices and sustainable know-how by the whale watching operators.

As decided in the Resolution 5.10, ACCOBAMS Parties are encouraged to adopt national rules in order to implement the certificate in the relevant bodies at national level. In order to give the choice to the Parties when facing juridical difficulties (such as France), the ACCOBAMS Bureau was in favor of the implementation of a private certificate as an alternative process to a public label.

In the case of the implementation of the private certificate, the ACCOBAMS Secretariat will authorize a private organization (only those already having the ACCOBAMS Partner status) to use the certificate upon conditions of compliance with the terms contained in a Convention "Partner Whale Watching High Quality" to be established between the ACCOBAMS Secretariat and the organization.

The first framework Convention "Partner High Quality Whale Watching" established with a private organization was signed in July 2014 with a the French NGO “[souffleurs d’Ecume](#)” which is now authorized to use and deliver the certificate for the French Mediterranean Sea, upon conditions of compliance with the terms contained in the Convention (including the ACCOBAMS/Pelagos code of conduct – Annex 1).

The "High Quality Whale Watching" certificate can be requested by any whale watching operator who will have to validate a training programme aiming at:

- giving added value to the concerned operators' trips;
- promoting quality service and an ecologically sensible approach with the public;
- restricting the impacts of the activity on cetaceans and helping protect them;
- thus ensuring that whale watching has a sustainable future.

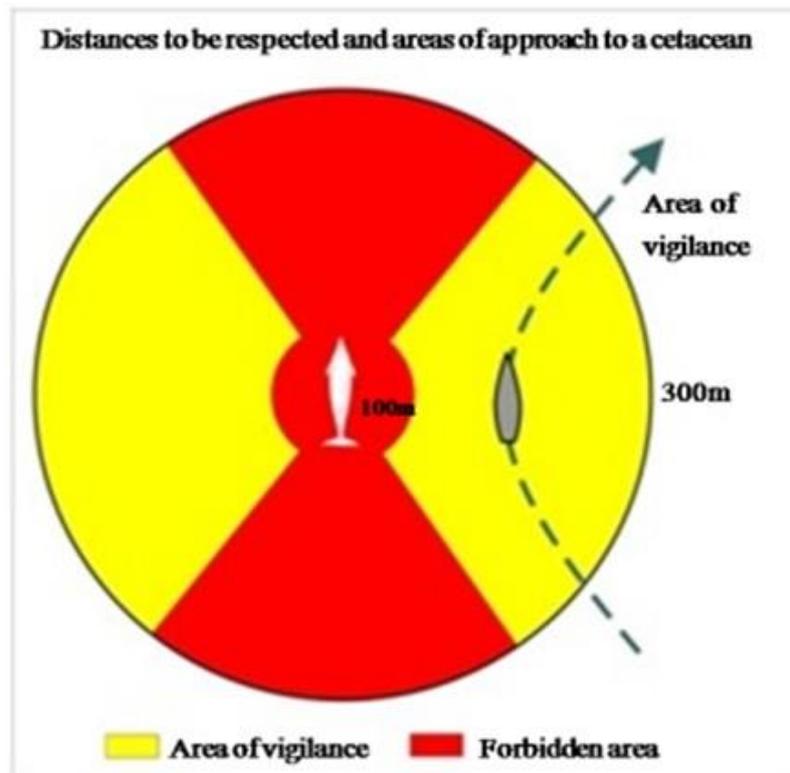
In addition, the beneficiary will ensure that each trip is guided by at least one trained person.

The «High Quality Whale Watching " certificate was officially registered at the WIPO by ACCOBAMS on the 4th September 2014, as a collective mark with its logo and the regulations governing its use.

Annex 1 –ACCOBAMS / Pelagos Code of Good Conduct for whale watching

Whale watching can be a source of serious disturbance if badly done. The following rules allow our impacts on the vital behaviour of dolphins and whales (hunting, repose or inter-individual socialization) to be mitigated. Whether one is an amateur sailor, fisherman, whale watching operator or other user of the marine domain, these rules, set out below, apply equally inside and outside the Pelagos Sanctuary.

The pie chart defines two areas that are essential when approaching cetaceans: the area of vigilance (yellow) and the forbidden area (red).



1. Area of vigilance (yellow)

The area of vigilance (**300 m**) defines the sector in which the disturbance caused by your boat (presence, noise and exhaust fumes) is strongly felt by the animals. When you enter this area, your behaviour must respect strict rules to limit this disturbance:

- the boat's speed must be constant and attuned to the speed of the slowest animal. It must not be more than 5 knots;
- any approach must be made according to a trajectory that gradually draws parallel to the animal's path (green arrow in the pie chart). The boat thus positions itself alongside the cetaceans, moving in the same direction;
- any sudden change of speed or direction is forbidden;
- to mitigate acoustic disturbance, sounders and sonar must be switched off;
- be even more careful, and limit your distance of approach if you remark the presence of new-born animals;

- you must immediately leave the area of vigilance if the animals are disturbed: for example, flight behaviour (acceleration, changing direction, trying to get away from the observer) must be considered as a sign of disturbance;
- observation time is limited to half an hour;
- if many boats are present, only one is tolerated within the area of vigilance. Observation time is then shortened to a quarter of an hour and the other boats have to wait patiently 300 m away. Radio contact between the various boats will enable the watching to be coordinated;
- when the observation is over, the boat must gradually leave the site, taking a path that clearly signals that it is leaving. The speed will remain moderate for a distance that is sufficient to avoid the risk of collision.

2. Forbidden area (red)

The forbidden area defines the sector which your boat must never enter (except when the cetaceans approach the boat of their own accord). This distance is **100 m**. Any nearer than this and the cetaceans will see your presence as a danger or an intrusion into their vital space, and their behaviour will become greatly disturbed by it.

Also, the boat must not enter the sector in front of the animals (reduced field of vision). Neither must it approach them from behind, since the boat may then be seen as a pursuer.

When the boat reaches the outside limit of the forbidden area, its relative speed must be reduced to zero and its engine put into neutral gear.

It is forbidden to enter groups, for this will cause social disturbance.

3. Special case when the animals come to the boat of their own accord

When cetaceans voluntarily approach the boat, the passengers must not try to touch them directly or with an instrument, bathe near them or feed them. Most of the above rules also remain in force, particularly the ban on entering groups, and keeping to a slow, regular pace.

4. Generally speaking...

Once the cetaceans are spotted, or at 1,000 m distance, particular vigilance and a speed limited to 10 knots are compulsory: other animals may be present in the sector and the risk of collision cannot be ruled out. Furthermore, a greater speed would be likely to disturb the animals, even at this greater distance.

Generally speaking, whale watching is not recommended within the 5-mile coastal strip, since the cetaceans there are already greatly disturbed by human activity.

An operator must accompany his trip with an educational talk on cetaceans and the marine environment. This must be given by a qualified, trained guide. He must be able to identify the species encountered, determine their activity phases and notice possible disturbance.

5. In short

- ✓ Slow pace and calm, constant advance the moment the cetaceans are spotted, especially within the 300 m area
- ✓ No approach closer than 100 m
- ✓ Length of observation limited to 30 minutes, 15 minutes if other boats are waiting
- ✓ Only one boat within the 300 m area
- ✓ Never try to touch, feed or swim with a cetacean.