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Department of Biodiversity,  
Conservation and Attractions

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# Enjoy dolphins from a distance



## What are the distances?

For boating and swimming (including dogs) as stated in the *Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016* and *Biodiversity Conservation Regulations 2018*.

### In Western Australia:

- A person in water must maintain a separation distance of **at least 50m** from a dolphin.
- A person driving or in charge of a vessel (including kayaks and sailboards) **must not allow the vessel to get closer than 100m** to a dolphin.
- Drones must maintain a **60m separation distance**.

Offences for disturbing a dolphin (or any other cetacean) can carry a maximum fine of \$500,000.

State laws also do not permit dogs to chase wildlife (*Dog Act 1976*) and can attract a fine of up to \$3000 which the owner is liable to pay.



## Are there any exemptions to these laws?

The department has granted licenses to certain tourism operators in Bunbury and Rockingham and runs the Monkey Mia Dolphin Experience that allows them to breach distances stipulated in state legislation under strict conditions. These licensed activities are undertaken under strict protocols and are closely monitored by the department. Researchers also have permits to breach these distances.

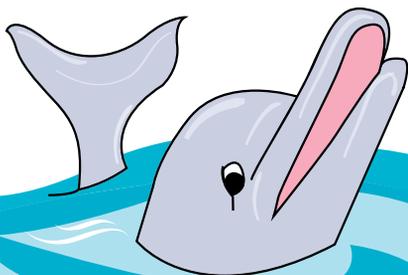
## Why is it important to maintain these distances?

Approaching dolphins, including chasing, circling, or harassing them, can induce stress and disrupt their natural behaviour. For example, any approach on a boat or by a person who is in the water when dolphins are foraging or feeding, may startle them and result in a failed feeding attempt or cause dolphins to spend more time and energy searching for fish elsewhere.

Also, if dolphins are consistently disrupted by people, this may lead to compromised health. Like us, dolphins need adequate uninterrupted time to rest to ensure their wellbeing. Dolphins always maintain a level of alertness, however, while they are resting, they may be more vulnerable to boat strikes.

## What do I do if a dolphin starts bow riding while I'm driving the boat?

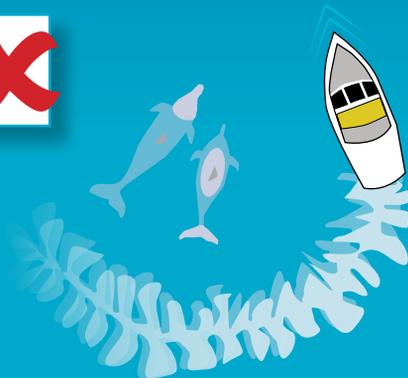
Vessels that are underway and approached by dolphins that begin bow riding in front of the vessel should reduce their speed gradually and avoid making sudden changes in direction. Move away slowly at a speed <6 knots until you are 100m apart, when it is safe to do so.



## Stop and watch dolphins from a safe distance



**NO circling NO chasing**



**Large fines apply**

**Fun Fact** Did you know a dolphin requires 6.8–13.5kg of food a day to survive?

That's a lot of fish and energy required to catch them!



## What do I do when it's not possible to maintain the distance or if a dolphin approaches me?



Laws surrounding separation distances are not intended for areas such as confined waterways and canals where it is impossible to maintain separation distances. In these instances, you should take care to look for dolphins before entering these canals or narrow waterways, and never follow them in. If dolphins are present, allow them to move away before entering the waterway. We want to share our waterways with wildlife so that we can continue to see these amazing creatures from a safe distance.

If a dolphin approaches you in the water (including if you're on a paddle board or other floating device), you must move away from the dolphin as soon as reasonably possible to the required separation distance.

Motorised vessels should put their motor into neutral when safe to do so, and move slowly away until you are 100m apart.

### For more information

[riverguardians.com](http://riverguardians.com)

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Photos – K. Nicholson (front cover), DBCA and Tourism WA

