



WiSe guidelines for taking part in research and filming

Simple research

Commercial boat operators, being out on the water on a regular basis are in a unique position to assist with conservation research programmes, such as sightings recording schemes and photo-identification of a range of species. Such data are of vital importance to many conservation non-governmental organisations and any or all information is likely to be welcomed with enthusiasm.

Some operators who may conduct straight line voyages to and from their favoured areas may also view these as opportunities to conduct simple line transect surveys between fixed points or waypoints, recording sightings along the way when conditions are ideal. Such data have the benefit to researchers that they have a element of quantifiable effort, making them far more valuable.

As long as such data gathering is conducted on an informal basis, our current understanding is that there should be no problem in doing so. Incidental recording of sightings would not require a wildlife licence as there would be no intention to disturb (see below). However, taking part in this manner does not imply any additional rights as far as approaching or viewing marine life is concerned. All activities carried out on board your boat must be entirely in compliance with local, national or international wildlife law, at all times. It remains the responsibility of the operator to be aware of and observe the relevant legislation, follow the WiSe Code of Conduct for that species, and to always put the welfare of the animals being viewed first.

A wildlife licence is required by anyone who wishes to carry out an activity that is prohibited under wildlife legislation, where the activity cannot be sufficiently mitigated against. Licences can only be issued under specific circumstances.

Anyone who has the intention to carry out an activity that is likely to disturb a protected species such as basking sharks or cetaceans or that will result in an offence under wildlife legislation will require a licence.

If you are considering any such activities, it would be sensible to contact your insurers and let them know, to ensure they your planned activities are covered by your existing policy.

Examples of conservation groups you might like to contact:

- [Marine Conservation Society](http://www.mcsuk.org/)¹ – turtles and basking sharks
- [Sea Watch Foundation](http://www.seawatchfoundation.org.uk/)² – cetaceans
- [Hebridean Whale and Dolphin Trust](http://www.whaledolphintrust.org/)³ – cetaceans and basking sharks in Scotland.

¹ www.mcsuk.org/

² www.seawatchfoundation.org.uk/

³ www.whaledolphintrust.org/

Taking part in more structured research

If you would like to take part in more formal research programmes involving a protected species, such as dedicated photo-id of cetaceans or basking sharks, then you should contact your relevant authority as you may need to apply for a licence to do so, as such activities are viewed as having the potential to intentionally disturb. Similarly, if you are planning to be involved in satellite or plaque tagging of any protected species, this will be viewed as invasive, and will certainly require a licence.

This is not necessarily a complicated process, but the authority concerned will want to see evidence of how your work will contribute to science, and will likely require supporting comment from scientific referees. The licence will likely be for an individual species, for a specified range of activities within a designated geographical range. In some cases you may be requested to fly a flag indicating your involvement in scientific research whilst taking part in such activities. If you think you may require a licence, then it is strongly recommended that you make contact with the relevant authority well in advance to allow them time to consider whether a licence is required, and if it is, to process your application.

It is important that your work remains within the scope of your licence at all times. An additional responsibility that comes with a licence to make close approaches to protected animals is the effect that this may have on onlookers. At all times be aware of your responsibility to leave a good impression when carrying out your activities, even if it means limiting your activity as a result – you may well know what you are doing, but if, when you depart, others (who may not know you are engaged in research) decide to follow suit, the results could be harmful to the animal – and, almost certainly for the members of the public, illegal.

You should ensure your insurers are aware of your planned activities.

Authorities you may need to contact:

- [Countryside Council for Wales \(CCW\)](#)⁴ (Wales)
- [Marine Management Organisation \(MMO\)](#)⁵ (England)
- [Scottish Natural Heritage \(SNH\)](#)⁶ (Scotland)
- [Northern Ireland Environment Agency](#)⁷ (Northern Ireland).

Working with researchers onboard

You may be asked to act as a base vessel for scientific research projects on a paid basis on occasion, which can be a highly educational opportunity. However, many of the above information will apply.

You should ensure that the person in charge of the research, or whoever is their nominated person on board, holds the appropriate licence and that their name is listed on it. As they are effectively in charge of the research activities, you will be working under them, so it is essential that you are aware of what is listed on their licence in terms of licensed activities, and ensure that at no time they (or you, as skipper, under their instruction) exceed those stated boundaries.

You should ensure that your insurers are aware of your planned activities. Be aware that many research groups, and especially government agencies will require additional equipment and personal accident insurance which can be costly.

⁴ www.ccw.gov.uk/

⁵ www.marinemanagement.org.uk/

⁶ www.snh.gov.uk/

⁷ www.doeni.gov.uk/

Working with the media

You may be asked to act as a base vessel for film and TV activities on a paid basis on occasion.

As long as your activities remain within the law at all times whilst obtaining the film footage, this should not present a problem. However, it is sensible to obtain from the company concerned a written outline of their planned activities well in advance, to ensure that they are not expecting to carry out activities that might result in disturbance of a protected species, through a lack of knowledge of wildlife law.

If you are in any way concerned about the planned activities, then let them know in advance, and suggest that they contact the relevant agency for your region with a view to seeking clarification, and, if necessary, licence or permission to carry out those activities.

It is often flattering to be asked to take part in such activities, and can bring good public relations exposure to you and your business. However, it is absolutely your responsibility to take control of the situation, and ensure that all activities involving a protected species stay within the law. After all, in the event of an infringement of the law, it is you who will be held responsible.

Many media companies will require sight of your insurance, Maritime and Coastguard Agency licence and other relevant qualifications in advance. Your insurers should be informed, and you should request confirmation from the company concerned that their insurance covers their staff and equipment whilst aboard.

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