

# MINIMAL IMPACT EDUCATION / INTERPRETATION GUIDELINES for Victoria's Marine National Parks and Marine Sanctuaries



***While there are many opportunities to enjoy and learn about our magnificent Marine National Parks and Marine Sanctuaries it is also important to remember that these areas have been set aside for conservation of Victoria's biodiversity and that activities that cause damage or undue disturbance are not permitted.***

In order to minimise the potential impact of education and interpretation programs a series of minimal impact guidelines have been developed. These have been developed to guide providers of education and interpretation programs with strategies to minimise the impact that their groups may have on natural or cultural values of the marine environment.

These guidelines have been developed by a consortium of Education and Interpretation providers which include Parks Victoria, Coast Action/Coastcare, Marine Discovery Centre, Phillip Island Nature Park, the Gould League, Marine Care Ricketts Point and Ecologic. Guidelines were developed based on best practice then assessed for practical application over a six month period before being reviewed and agreed upon.

These guidelines provide strategies that should be adopted by all formal education groups, or groups participating in organised interpretive programs, utilising Marine National Parks and Marine Sanctuaries. This includes schools, tertiary students on field trips, organised holiday program activities, interpretive sessions delivered by government or private agencies and organisations, and any other training programs.

Marine National Parks and Marine Sanctuaries have been established to protect representative areas of Victoria's marine and coastal environment and it is important that opportunities to engage people with these areas does not result in compromising natural or cultural values of the locations.

In addition, Marine National Parks and Marine Sanctuaries are proclaimed under an Act of Parliament that provides for full protection of these areas. There are severe penalties for offences where fish, animals, plants, shells, sand seaweed, or other artefacts are removed or unduly disturbed.

## GUIDELINES

### Group Sizes

- Group sizes should be limited to a maximum of 25 and school groups to class sizes (max 30).
- Larger groups should be split into smaller groups with a ratio of 1 leader: 25 participants max for intertidal activities.
- For in-water activities such as canoeing / snorkelling lower ratios established in Department of Education and Training Guidelines for Safety in Outdoor Adventure Activities should be adopted for safety and natural values protection.
- Smaller group sizes improve safety as well as provide for greater protection of natural values.

### Operator Permits

- Commercial tour operators must obtain a permit to conduct activities within Marine National Parks and Marine Sanctuaries.
- Permit holders have responsibility for the management of groups and their behaviour.
- All groups seeking to undertake scientific research within Marine National Parks and Marine Sanctuaries are required to obtain a permit for their activity from Parks Victoria.

### Responsible Handling

- Group leaders only should be involved in turning over rocks for both protection of habitats as well as safety.
- All organisms and rocks should be returned to their original locations and orientation if disturbed. Ensure that rocks are the “right” way up.
- All organisms removed for observation are to be returned to the habitat they were found.
- Marine life (animals) should be kept in water when displaying them.
- Buckets with water provide a suitable means for participants to observe animals.
- Organisms can be viewed underwater using sea scopes or clear containers.
- Ensure that no animals or plants are unduly stressed or damaged during activities.
- No animals should be killed.
- No tools should be used to dislodge animals eg. knives, keys.
- Large wildlife should be viewed from a non-intruding and safe distance.

### Wildlife Conservation Issues

- Excursions should be avoided to locations or at times of year where there are critical events occurring such as bird breeding on islands.
- When walking on beaches groups should keep close to low tide mark in hooded plover nesting areas.
- Understanding of why certain areas cannot be accessed during critical times should be promoted.
- Highly sensitive areas should be avoided by education / interps groups eg. saltmarsh, fragile habitats
- Sensitive areas will be identified and made known to operators.

## **Code of Practice**

- A Code of Practice should be developed by education and interpretation providers using Marine National Parks and Marine Sanctuaries that reflect protection of natural and cultural values along with safety.
- Parks Victoria will provide guidance to ensure minimal impact code of practice is understood by all operators.

## **Values**

- Parks Victoria provide a number of key messages for Marine National Parks and Marine Sanctuaries that should be included in all education and interpretation programs as a part of the introduction to the site. (These are provided as in other sections of the CD as well as an appendix to this document.)
- All activities in Marine National Parks and Marine Sanctuaries must be conducted as “no-take” activities for all animals, plants, shells, sand, seaweed, and other artefacts
- Providers should promote awareness of the positive changes brought about by establishing highly protected Marine National Parks and Marine Sanctuaries.

## **Cultural Respect**

- Awareness of cultural sites that exist within Parks along the coast and respect for these areas should be promoted.
- Local Aboriginal groups should be consulted in developing interpretation / education programs for indigenous cultural sites.

## **Minimal Impact Adventure Activities**

- Appropriate locations for potentially high impact activities such as canoe launching or accessing water by snorkellers should be identified and used.
- Entry sites for snorkellers / canoes should be protected.
- Mats can be used to protect access points for snorkellers.
- ensure that Beginners activities in snorkelling / diving / canoeing should be conducted in more resilient environments such as sand / rock in order to develop skills and minimise impact.
- Canoe / kayak launching facilities should be established outside of Marine National Parks where possible.

## **Personal Responsibility**

- Understanding of potential impacts on Parks through visitor behaviour should be promoted.
- Awareness of the impacts of personal behaviour at home / school / work on marine and coastal environments eg. impact of stormwater litter, nutrients should be promoted.
- The collection of litter by providing positive role models and carrying of rubbish bag on activities (be aware of safety issues in regards litter collection) should be encouraged.
- Involvement in activities to reduce human impact on coastal environments should be encouraged.

## **Access**

- Damage to plants or coastal habitats when accessing coastal environments should be avoided by staying on tracks.

## Appendix 1. Parks Victoria's Key Messages for Victoria's Marine National Parks and Marine Sanctuaries

- Between 90-95% of species in Australia's southern waters are found nowhere else in the world.
- The establishment of Victoria's system of Marine National Parks and Sanctuaries protects 5.3% of our Victoria's coastal waters, compared to 0.05% previously.
- Victoria's new Marine National Park's system will help ensure the protection of our unique and diverse underwater environments through a representative system similar to the way we protect our terrestrial national parks.
- A wide diversity of habitats has been protected through the establishment of Marine National Parks and Marine Sanctuaries including kelp forests, sponge gardens, sandy plains, saltmarshes and mangroves, mudflats and seagrass meadows.
- Establishment of the Marine National Park system is based on scientific research and best management practices.
- There has been extensive community and industry consultation throughout the last ten years on the establishment of Marine National Parks and Marine Sanctuaries.
- Marine National Parks have a wide range of uses, benefits and values, including scientific research, education, conservation, recreation and tourism, and fisheries management.
- Recreational activities that are compatible with long term marine conservation will be encouraged.
- Marine National Parks and Marine Sanctuaries are no-take environments like National Parks on land - all forms of fishing and the removal of animals, plants, and objects such as shells, sand, and other material are not allowed.