



**St Helena
Government**

MARINE TOUR OPERATOR ENVIRONMENTAL ACCREDITATION CERTIFICATION SCHEME FOR ST HELENA

MARINE & FISHERIES CONSERVATION SECTION
ENVIRONMENT, NATURAL RESOURCES & PLANNING PORTFOLIO
ST HELENA GOVERNMENT



1 Glossary

In this Marine Environment Accreditation Certification Scheme document the following words shall have the following meaning:

Accreditation certification means the accreditation certificate signed by the Chief Environment Officer once a Marine Tour Operator has successfully undertaken training and assessment against marine best practice guidelines.

Diving tour means any tour that a Marine Tour Operator conducts on or below the water's surface e.g. scuba or snorkelling.

Marine Tour Operator means an individual, or company who provides expertise and guided service by sea or coast to a paying client for the purpose of utilising the marine environment for sport or recreational activities and holds a Marine Tourism Licence to do so under the Marine (Tourism & Interaction Marine Life) Regs 2023 supported by Environmental Protection Ordinance, 2016

Marine Tour Leaders and Marine Dive leader means an individual who is designated by a company, to represent said company in a leadership capacity, to provide expertise and guided service to paying clients for the purpose of utilising the marine environment sport or recreational activities under a Marine Tourism Licence under the Marine (Tourism & Interaction Marine Life) Regs 2023 supported by Environmental Protection Ordinance, 2016

Marine and Fisheries Conservation Section means the Marine and Fisheries Conservation staff members employed as part of the Environment, Natural Resources and Planning Portfolio of St Helena Government based at the Marine Centre on the wharf in Jamestown.

Wildlife Best Practice Guidelines refers to the Best Practise Guidelines for diving tours, wildlife viewing tours and wildlife interaction tours.

Marine training/information session means the training course provided by the Marine and Fisheries Conservation Section for which a certificate of completion is issued for either interaction, viewing or diving tours by the Chief Environment Officer.

Operations mean the commercial operations/activities which may be undertaken by an operator pursuant to the licence.

Passenger or **visitor** means those persons who are provided operations/activities/tours by the Marine Tour Operator.

Scheme means the marine tour operator environmental accreditation certification scheme.

Valid certificate means a certificate gained by attending a Marine Tour Operator Environmental Accreditation Certification Scheme training and assessment session (interaction, viewing or diving), that is no more than two years old and which is relevant scheme training course outline. Updates or changes to the course outline will occur from time to time, which may invalidate otherwise valid certificates. Whether a certificate affected by a change in the course is deemed to be invalid or not will be subject to the discretion of the Chief Environment Officer, who will take into consideration, the significance of the change to the course and the remaining time the certificate has to run.

Vessel means the vessel/s nominated by the Marine Tour Operator to carry out the marine tourism activities.

Wildlife interaction tour means any tour where a Marine Tour Operator interacts with either any of the said species in the policy on or above the water.

Wildlife viewing tour means any tour that is conducted from a boat.

Introduction

Marine tourism is a relatively new industry in St Helena and it is expected that this sector will continue to grow in the future. The provision of high quality, environmentally-friendly marine tourism and marine life interaction activities within the Marine Protected Area (MPA) will support St Helena's aim of being recognised as an outstanding, unique and sustainable tourism destination. St Helena's marine environment is one of the island's most valuable assets. Interaction with marine life and services associated with supporting the St Helena tourism industry is recognised as an important economic benefit for the island in its ability to achieve financial sustainability.

It is therefore important that the island has in place all of the measures necessary to proactively protect this valuable asset and acknowledges and mitigates the damaging effects such activities can have on the marine environment without management.

The Marine Management Plan (MMP) 2023, states that marine tourism activities can take place providing that all human activities within the MPA are managed within a comprehensive policy and legislative framework. To ensure that activities do not damage or disturb St Helena's marine habitats and species, the Chief Environment Officer (CEO) with the support of Marine and Fisheries Conservation Section (MFCS) must ensure that the tools required for people to demonstrate marine environmental consciousness and to attain a marine accreditation certification as per the policy and legislative framework outlined below. This document is designed to cover marine tour operator environmental accreditation certification only. It is not designed to cover application and processing of marine tour operator licensing.

Legislative & Policy Background

In November 2021 St Helena Government (SHG) adopted a Marine Tourism Policy and Policy for Marine Species Interaction (best practice guidelines) to ensure that there was clear direction to sustainably manage the marine environment and the marine tourism activities which happen within the MPA as the industry grows, and to ensure that activities are compatible with the goal of the MPA: to conserve the marine environment and its associated biodiversity, habitats and ecosystems.

The Environmental Protection Ordinance (EPO), 2016 provides for the making of regulations to give effect to the provisions of the ordinance. In June 2023 Executive Council approved the Marine Regulations (Tourism & Interaction with Marine Life), 2023. The purpose of these regulations is to manage marine tourism and the interaction of persons with marine wildlife in the MPA so as to minimise any impact from such activities on the marine environment.

These regulations require any person who, for payment or reward, conducts or facilitates a regulated activity, whether by vessel or by leading a tour from shore to have a licence. In order to apply for a licence the CEO will require the applicant to provide proof that they and their staff are trained to interact with marine wildlife aligned to the Policy for Marine Species Interaction and Best Practice Guidelines for interacting with marine wildlife.

What is the marine environment accreditation certification scheme?

The CEO must be able to award an accreditation certificate to a person following successful completion of a form of study which is aligned with the Best Practice Guidelines for interacting with marine wildlife. Such certification would provide proof that the person is trained to interact with marine wildlife.

The Marine Accreditation Certification Scheme is an instrument by which the MFCS provides training and assesses an MTO as an individual, or company to quantify how they understand, comply and manage their activities/services subject to the conditions of St Helena's species specific Best Practice Guidelines, ensuring that activities do not damage or disturb St Helena's marine habitats and species as per the legislative framework. It provides the quantifiable reassurances to the CEO in issuing the final accreditation certificate, a prerequisite of applying for a Marine Tourism Licence.

The Marine Accreditation Scheme and the certification of MTOs can add to the value of the local tourism industry, it can complement businesses with their own marketing and St Helena for national marketing purposes as it will allow individual MTOs to easily advertise their competency and environmental awareness to customers and future clients and St Helena to do so collectively.

Examples of activities pertaining to St Helena marine environment includes (but is not limited to):

- Undertaking guided coastal or scenic tours by boat.
- Undertaking a guided coastal or scenic tour on a boat to view seabirds.
- Undertaking cetacean watching tours.
- Undertaking whale shark watching and interaction tours.
- Undertaking scuba diving, free diving or snorkelling tours.

Accreditation Principles

In addition to providing certification the accreditation scheme hopes to build on the following overarching principles:

- Sustainable use of resources and habitat.
- Promoting accountability, pride and a sense of responsibility to protect the marine environment amongst MTOs through their wildlife interaction management, habitat respect and marine conservation advocacy.
- To provide a baseline standard of marine environment tourism for local operators to assess themselves against and to add additional value to their marine based tourism products and services.
- St Helena's marine environment is a common property resource to be managed for the benefit of all users.
- Fostering of greater economic viability of marine tourism based activities. Supporting a quality over quantity marine tourism product.
- Collection of data to support and provide information appropriate for evidence based advice to facilitate future planning and management.

Number of Accredited Marine Tour Operators

At this time there is no limit to the number of MTOs who can become accredited operators providing that each operator meets the standards set out in this accreditation scheme.

It should be noted that little information exists to determine whether the current levels of marine tourism is ecologically sustainable in the long term. Until there is better understanding of how the present level of activity is affecting marine fauna and habitats, a precautionary approach will be adopted in relation to expansion of the industry.

As more information becomes available through research and monitoring, the sustainability can be assessed and it is possible that caps will be put on the number of licences issued to accredited MTO's allowed to operate in St Helena. It will be beneficial to all operators to work within the best practice guidelines for each activity to minimise impact. It is expected that this information will be collected from marine tourism logbooks starting January 2024.

Accreditation certifications are not transferable and MTOs should explain to prospective buyers of the business that they would be required to obtain their own accreditation certification by undertaking a marine training session.

Accreditation Certification Duration

Accreditation certification for periods of up to a maximum of 2 year in duration.

Granting of Accreditation Certification and Fees

None at this time. However this will be reviewed as the industry develops.

Accreditation Branding

The Marine Environment Accreditation Scheme will be represented by the following logo:



Administration and Assessment of Accreditation Certification

The MFCS will provide training programmes and materials to support the knowledge base required to undertake assessment. Assessment will be conducted via multiple choice exams and a short oral presentation. Assessments will cover the following topic areas:

- Species specific Best Practice Guidelines (e.g. whale sharks, humpback whales etc.)
- Environmental protection & legislation (wrecks, anchoring, litter etc.)
- Environmental best practices

The MFCS will deliver the accreditation training in September of each year. Before each training session a press release will be issued to provide information to all MTOs or perspective MTO's and the public of sessions and dates. (Appendix 1) A letter/email will also be sent to all MTO's to inform of training sessions and dates (Appendix 2). Requests to gain accreditation from new business outside of this period will be assessed on a case by case basis but may not be granted. Requests from certified MTO's who have employed new staff will be accommodated – as far as possible – in January of each year. Additional requests for staff training outside of this period will be assessed on a case by case basis but may not be granted.

A letter/email will be sent to all MTO's to inform them of training outcomes (Appendix 6) and certificates will be issued.

Accreditation Certification Review

The Accreditation Certification Scheme is not intended to be static but will be reviewed on an ongoing basis and updated as the CEO or MFCS deems appropriate, to reflect changes in protection measures in best interests of the marine environment and the development of the island's marine tourism product.

All reasonable efforts will be made by ENRP to obtain feedback from marine users affected by this scheme.

Application

All MTO's will be required to submit an application to attend a marine tour operator accreditation scheme certification training course to the MFCS by the Friday before each set of training sessions each year. (Appendix 3).

The MFCS will log participant details into training program and if there were to be any changes to training dates, times or venue details then they will respond with a letter/email/call.

Education

Training/information sessions will consist of four specific sessions relating to best practice, legislation and policies.

On initial application it will be a mandatory requirement for all MTOs and their staff to attend the appropriate training sessions specified by the MFCS at least every two years thereafter.

All sessions will ideally be delivered over the course of two weeks in September of each year.

Appendix 4 lists the types of courses available.

Assessment

MTOs will be required to undertake appropriate assessments for each tour type at the end of the training session/s under MFCS vigilance in the following forms:

- Multiple choice questions examination for general principles, interaction, viewing and diving.
- 2-5 min oral demonstration of tour briefing for interaction, viewing and diving assessed on a scoring system (content 1-5, professionalism 1-5, species knowledge 1-5 logical presentation).

All MTOs and their staff will be expected to complete the multiple choice questions. Only business owners, tour leaders and dive leaders will be expected to demonstrate an oral briefing.

The marking of multiple choice assessment will be undertaken by MFCS staff and oral demonstration of tour briefing for each MTO will be assessed by two independent assessors. Assessors will be either the CEO, a representative from MFCS or a representative from the Marine Compliance and Enforcement section (MCES).

To attain accreditation for each tour type MTO's are required to score 80% from each multiple choice topic and 50% for each oral briefing tour type.

See Appendix 5 for oral briefing score sheets

Affiliation with Scheme

MTOs who attain their accreditation certification will be issued with a letter and their official accreditation certificate (appendix 6 and 7). Accredited MTO will be given copies of the appropriate guidelines; printed materials, promotional stickers and a USB stick with electronic versions of the accreditation logo/s and materials. MTO staff or other organisations marine users who attended training will be provided with a certificate of attendance (appendix 7).

MTO will be encouraged to display their accreditation award on their vessels as well as promotional materials and tools.

Only MTOs who attain accreditation will be promoted by the Tourist Office.

Appendix 1

Marine Tour Operator Environmental Accreditation – Press release template

Press release will need to be sent out 2 weeks before expected training dates

MARINE TOUR OPERATOR ENVIRONMENTAL ACCREDITATION CERTIFICATION SCHEME TRAINING

On 27 June 2023 Executive Council approved the Marine Regulations (Tourism and Interaction with Marine Life), 2023, which will be brought into force on 1 November 2023.

These new Regulations govern tourism and the interaction of persons with marine wildlife in the Marine Protected Area (MPA). Primarily, they aim to minimise any impact from such activities on the marine environment. They introduce the concept of 'regulated activities' within St Helena's MPA and a requirement for a licence in order for someone to conduct or facilitate certain activities where these are for payment or reward.

Regulated activities include:

- Scuba diving, snorkelling, swimming and freediving
- Scenic or coastal touring and wildlife viewing by boat
- Wildlife interaction by boat

Any person wanting to obtain a licence must hold a valid accreditation certificate. These certificates are awarded following attendance at the Marine Tour Operator Environmental Accreditation Certification Scheme training, which is provided by the Environment, Natural Resources & Planning Portfolio's Marine & Fisheries Conservation Section.

The Marine Tour Operator Environmental Accreditation Certification Scheme training intends to create an environmental consciousness amongst local marine tour operators, and has been designed to focus on safeguarding marine habitats and the flora and fauna that live there. In order to obtain certification persons attending the training must pass a multiple choice and oral exam at the end of each session.

In preparation for the issuing of licences for the upcoming marine tourism season, the Marine & Fisheries Conservation Section have arranged certification scheme training sessions over the period 19 – 28 September 2023. Sessions have been arranged by category and each one is offered twice over the two weeks to offer some flexibility for attendance.

All sessions are free of charge and will take place at the Marine Centre at Jamestown Wharf, as follows:

Date	Time	Session	Notes
Tuesday, <i>Insert date</i> September	5pm – 7pm	Interaction and viewing species session	Prior booking required
Wednesday, <i>Insert date</i> September	5pm – 6pm	Diving session	Prior booking required
Thursday, <i>Insert date</i> September	5pm – 6pm	Recreational users information session on Best Practice Guidelines	No booking required
Tuesday, <i>Insert date</i> September	5pm – 6pm	Recreational users information session on Best Practice Guidelines	No booking required
Wednesday, <i>Insert date</i> September	5pm – 7pm	Interaction and viewing species session	Prior booking required
Thursday, <i>Insert date</i> September	5pm – 6pm	Diving session	Prior booking required

Anyone interested in becoming a Marine Tour Operator, or a dive leader, tour leader, skipper or boat crew for a marine tour operator, is encouraged to attend.

Recreational users do not need to hold a licence but it is recommended to attend the information session on Best Practice Guidelines (to be held on 21 and 26 September) which outline the rules for interaction with wildlife. This will ensure that you are comfortable knowing you will not commit any offences whilst undertaking any recreational activities, such as SCUBA diving or freediving.

Where prior registration is required for the training, please contact kirsty.jones@sainthelena.gov.sh for an application form. Application forms need to be completed and returned by Friday, *Insert date* September 2023.

If you have any queries regarding the accreditation certification scheme, please contact leeann.henry@sainthelena.gov.sh. For general queries regarding marine regulations and licensing, please contact Isabel.Peters@sainthelena.gov.sh.

#StHelena #MPA #MarineRegulations #smallislandBIGIMPACT

www.facebook.com/StHelenaGovt/

www.twitter.com/StHelenaGovt

Appendix 2

Notice of Accreditation Training Dates Template



**St Helena
Government**

Mr John Smith
No.1
Orange Street

Ref: xx/x/xx
Date: xx/xx/20xx

Dear Mr Smith

Licensing of marine tourism and Marine Tour Operator Environmental Accreditation Certification Scheme training

On 27 of June 2023 Executive Council approved the Marine Regulations (Tourism & Interaction with Marine Life), 2023 and these Regulations will be brought into force on 1st October 2023. These new regulations outline regulated activities within St Helena's Marine Protected Area and the requirement for a licence in order to conduct or facilitate a regulated activity for payment or reward.

In order to obtain a licence you must attend the Marine Tour Operator Environmental Accreditation Certification Scheme training provided by ENRP's Marine and Fisheries Conservation Section.

The training sessions have been divided into respective categories and are offered twice over the two weeks to ensure offer of availability. All sessions will take place at the Marine Centre at the Wharf.

The sessions are as follows:

- *Insert Date* September at 5pm – Interaction and viewing species session (2 hours)
- *Insert Date* September at 5pm – Diving session (1 hour)
- *Insert Date* September at 5pm – Recreational users information session (no booking required)
- *Insert Date* September at 5pm – Recreational users information session on Best Practice Guidelines (no booking required)
- *Insert Date* September at 5pm - Interaction and viewing species session (2 hours)
- *Insert Date* September at 5pm - Diving session (1 hour)

Please must register your attendance using the attached application form by *Insert Date*.

The Marine Tour Operator Environmental Accreditation Certification Scheme training intends to create an environmental consciousness amongst local marine tour operators and has been designed with the focus of safeguarding marine habitats and the flora and fauna that live there. In order to obtain the licence you must pass a multiple choice and oral exam at the end of each session.

Marine tour operators are encouraged to bring all staff that operate within their business, this includes dive leaders, tour leaders, skippers and crew. The licence holder will be responsible for all who operate under their licence so it is recommended that all staff receive the required training under the accreditation certification scheme.

Recreational users do not need to hold a licence but it is recommended to attend the information session on Best Practice Guidelines which outline the rules for interaction with wildlife. This would ensure that you are comfortable knowing you will not commit any offences whilst undertaking any recreational activities like SCUBA diving or freediving.

If you have any queries regarding the accreditation certification scheme please contact leeann.henry@sainthelena.gov.sh or if you have queries regarding the regulations and licence please contact Isabel.peters@sainthelena.gov.sh

Yours sincerely

(Signature)

Miss Isabel Peters
Chief Environment Officer
Environment, Natural Resources and Planning Portfolio

Appendix 3

Marine Tour Operator Environmental Accreditation Certification Training Application Form

Each question should be **fully and accurately answered.**

PLEASE USE CAPITAL LETTERS

Business details:

Business Name

Business Type: Sole trader ☐ Ltd Company ☐

Other (please state)

Owner/s details

Title (Mr/Miss/Mrs)

Telephone Numbers (below)

First Names

Home Work

Surname

Male ☐ Female ☐

E-mail

1. What tours will your business offer? (Select box)

Wildlife interaction tours ☐

Wildlife viewing tours ☐

Dive tours ☐

2. Please list all persons who represent your business during tours.

Vessel Skippers (First and Surname)

--

Tour leaders (First and Surname)

--

Dive Leaders (First and Surname)

--

3. Please tick which sessions will be attended.

Tuesday *Insert date* September at 5pm – Interaction and viewing species session (2 hours) ☐

Wednesday *Insert date* September at 5pm – Diving session (1 hour) ☐

Wednesday *Insert date* September at 5pm - Interaction and viewing species session (2 hours) ☐

Thursday *Insert date* September at 5pm - Diving session (1 hour) ☐

4. Please state how many will be in attendance.

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Signed _____

Date _____

Appendix 4

Training Course Outline

Training courses will be divided into three categories for MTO's and an additional recreational session will be offered to recreational users. Each session will be available twice over a two week period.

MTO's will be required to register for training but recreational users will not.

Introduction – 10 minute session

Session covers background to certification process and policy and legislation that underpins the scheme

Interaction (Whale Sharks) – 30 minute session

Session covers requirements for briefing and interaction guidelines for operators and their passengers including duration of interaction

Viewing (cetaceans + Seabirds) - 30 minute session on cetaceans and 30 minute session on seabirds.

Session covers requirements for briefing and interaction guidelines for operators and their passengers including duration of interaction for cetaceans, seabirds and offshore islands.

Diving – 30 minute session

Session covers requirements for briefing and interaction guidelines for operators and their passengers. Includes information on wrecks and specific megafauna (rays, turtles, dolphins and whales). Included is notification requirement and protocols for diving in Whale Shark hot spots.

Recreational – 90 minute session

Session covers all interaction and viewing guidelines including whale sharks, cetaceans, seabirds diving and marine megafauna.

Appendix 5

Oral briefing scoring sheets

Accreditation Scheme Briefing Assessment – Interaction

Assessor:		Date:	
Trainee:			
Business affiliation:			
Primary role:			
Secondary role(s):			

To be included	Examples	Notes
Welcome & introduction	5 minutes (approx.) Welcome people on board and introduce yourself and the crew.	
Introduction & Characteristics of Whale Sharks	The whale shark is a filter feeding shark and is listed as endangered on the IUCN red list. It is the largest fish in the sea, yet despite its size and popularity we really know very little about it. Male/female ratio, average length. Explain the expectation when they first see a shark.	
Encounter code of conduct	Explain each part of the process. i.e. what will happen when a whale shark is sighted when will visitors be allowed to enter the water how many visitors will be allowed to enter the water Run through the list of do's and don'ts. Explain and emphasise the importance of each one	
Any questions	Thank guests for their attention and invite them to approach you with any questions or concerns they may have at any time	

2-5 min oral demonstration of tour briefing assessed on a scoring system (content 1-5 , professionalism 1-5, species knowledge 1-5 logical presentation).

Content	Professionalism	Species Knowledge	Logical Presentation	Total Score

Accreditation Scheme Briefing Assessment – Viewing

Assessor:		Date:	
Trainee:			
Business affiliation:			
Primary role:			
Secondary role(s):			

To be included	Examples	Notes
Welcome & introduction	5 minutes (approx.) Welcome people on board and introduce yourself and the crew	
Introduction & Characteristics of cetaceans	Description of species that could be encountered and any seasonal variation	
Encounter code of conduct	Run through the list of do's and don'ts. Explain and emphasise the importance of each one	
Any questions	Thank guests for their attention and invite them to approach you with any questions or concerns they may have at any time	

2-5 min oral demonstration of tour briefing assessed on a scoring system (content 1-5 , professionalism 1-5, species knowledge 1-5 logical presentation).

Content	Professionalism	Species Knowledge	Logical Presentation	Total Score

Accreditation Scheme Briefing Assessment –Diving

Assessor:		Date:	
Trainee:			
Business affiliation:			
Primary role:			
Secondary role(s):			

To be included	Examples	Notes
Welcome & introduction	5 minutes (approx.) Welcome people on board and introduce yourself and the crew	
Introduction to site and species	Describe the physical features of the dive site Describe any common, endemic and protected species and any rules that apply to the site Seasonal variation	
Technique & kit	Techniques to minimize impact specific to the marine environment (i.e. buoyancy control, trailing or unsecure kit)	
Encounter code of conduct	Run through the list of do's and don'ts. Explain and emphasise the importance of each one	
Any questions	Thank guests for their attention and invite them to approach you with any questions or concerns they may have at any time	

2-5 min oral demonstration of tour briefing assessed on a scoring system (content 1-5 , professionalism 1-5, species knowledge 1-5 logical presentation).

Content	Professionalism	Species Knowledge	Logical Presentation	Total Score

Appendix 6

Notice of certification letter

Appendix 7

Marine Tour Operator Environmental Accreditation Certificate



St Helena
Government



This is to certify that:

Mr Joe Blogs

MCSA/2023/001

September 2023

Has successfully undertaken assessment by the St Helena Government's Marine and Fisheries Conservation Section and has been accredited by the Chief Environmental Officer as competent in the following:

Whale Shark Interaction

Cetacean (Whales & Dolphins) Viewing

Seabird Viewing

Diving & Snorkelling

This accreditation demonstrates that the recipient is trained to interact with marine wildlife and conducts activities in a manner that protects and sustains St Helena's unique marine environment.

This accreditation is valid until September 2025

Senior M&FC Assistant (facilitator)

Chief Environmental Officer

Appendix 8

Marine environment accreditation certificate of attendance



St Helena
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Certificate of Attendance

Marine Environment Accreditation Scheme

This is to certify that:

Mr Dorian Caswell

Has attended an information session with the St. Helena Government
Marine and Fisheries Conservation Section.

September 2023

Topics covered :

Whale Shark Interaction

Cetacean (Whales & Dolphins) Viewing

Seabird Viewing

Diving & Snorkelling

Senior M&FC Assistant (facilitator)

Chief Environmental Officer