



**St Helena  
Government**

Environment, Natural Resources and Planning Directorate

## A Marine Tourism Policy for St Helena

November 2020

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## 2 Background

St Helena's marine environment is one of the island's most valuable assets. Its value lies not only in what can be harvested on a sustainable basis from this environment, but in the physical environment itself that shapes the lifestyle and culture of the community and attracts tourists who visit each year. With 90% of the UK's marine and terrestrial biodiversity contained within the Overseas Territories, St Helena's marine environment is also a globally significant ecological asset. The St Helena Marine Protected Area (MPA) encompasses the entire 200nm maritime zone and is managed as an IUCN Category VI MPA, which is defined as a protected area with sustainable use of natural resources.

SHG recognises that tourism will be the key driver of economic growth on the island. There were 5,135 arrivals during 2019, an increase of over 60% since 2010<sup>1</sup>. Almost 50% of arrivals (2,485) came to St Helena for tourism or a holiday, including tourists and St Helenians who live abroad. In 2016, tourism was estimated to generate approximately £854,000 each year based on the combined expenditure across cruise and passenger ships, yachts, and transit and tourist passengers<sup>2</sup>. Marine recreational activity was estimated to generate approximately £214,000 each year based on reported annual turnover from four marine tour operators. The most valuable recreation activities are directly associated with wildlife interactions within the MPA and include snorkelling with whale sharks and SCUBA diving. Marine tourism is a new industry in St Helena and it is expected that whale shark tourism in particular will continue to increase with the growing publicity of this unique experience due to marketing and international scientific research.

Well-managed tourism can create local jobs, boost resident satisfaction and ensure the protection of sensitive ecosystems. Tourism can generate income to promote and protect natural resources, and activities such as wildlife watching can enhance understanding and appreciation of the natural environment both among locals and tourists. SHG recognises however that increasing numbers of tourists can have detrimental impacts on the natural environment. Increased recreational activities such as anchoring, snorkelling and SCUBA diving can directly impact on marine habitats and cause disturbance to marine species. Marine animals such as whale sharks, dolphins, whales, and seabirds are disturbed by increased numbers of boats and by people approaching too closely<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> St Helena Government Statistics Office (2020). Estimates for arrivals and departures to and from St Helena, including nationality, reason and type of visit. <https://www.sainthelena.gov.sh/arrivals-and-departures-200824/>. Accessed 3 July 2020.

<sup>2</sup> Rees S., Clingham E, Rodwell L., Glegg G., and Collins M. (2016). Marine Ecosystem Services of St Helena. Part 2: Ecosystem Service Valuations, Future Development Thresholds and Management. A report for the Environment and Natural Resources Directorate, St Helena Government by Marine Institute Plymouth University. pp 70

<sup>3</sup> See for example: Trave, C., Brunnschweiler, J., Sheaves, M., Diedrich, A., & Barnett, A. (2017). Are we killing them with kindness? Evaluation of sustainable marine wildlife tourism. *Biological conservation*, 209: 211-222.

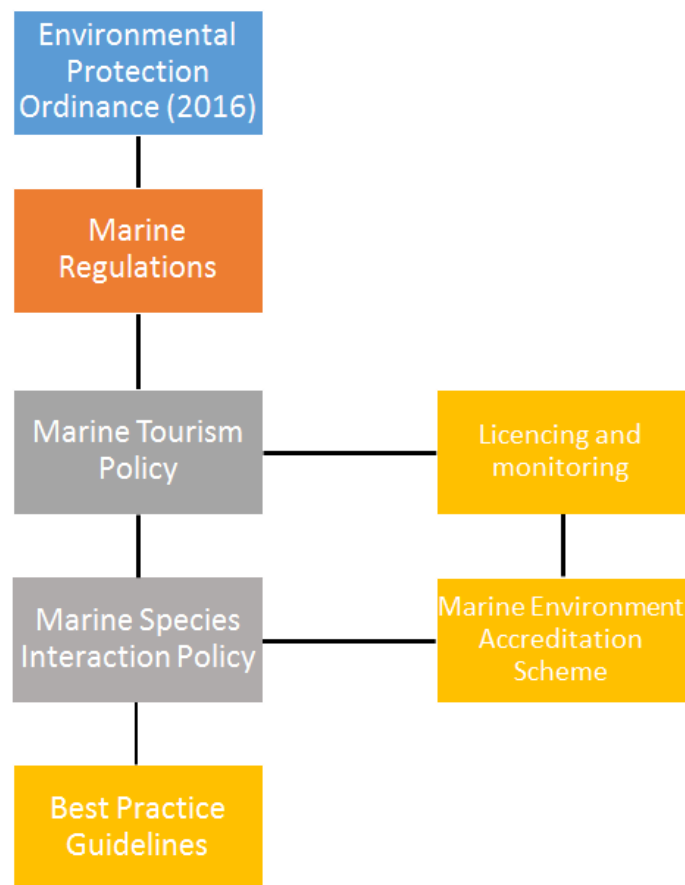
SHG therefore acknowledges the need to create a Marine Tourism Policy to continue to sustainably manage tourism activities within the MPA as the industry grows, and to ensure that they are compatible with the goal of the MPA to conserve the marine environment and its associated biodiversity, habitats and ecosystems. The provision of high quality, environmentally-friendly marine tourism activities will support St Helena’s aim of being recognised as an outstanding, unique and sustainable tourism destination. It should help to create jobs, raise the standard of living and improve quality of life for the local community.

This Policy defines the long-term vision for marine tourism in St Helena. It applies to all persons who wish to participate in marine tourism activities within the St Helena

MPA. It should be read in conjunction with the ‘Policy for Marine Species Interaction

Activities on St Helena Island to Minimise Risk of Injury and Disturbance’ and the

‘Marine Environment Accreditation Scheme for St Helena’. The relationship between these policies is set out in diagram 1:



### 3 Policy Alignment with National Legislation and Key Policy Documents

The Policy objectives align with the objectives and principles of the Environmental Protection Ordinance (2016). The objectives of this Ordinance are to: “preserve and sustain the natural environment of St Helena, including by: protecting and conserving biodiversity and the habitats, ecosystems and ecological systems that support biodiversity”. When designating an MPA, the Environmental Protection Ordinance (2016) requires management measures: “to protect habitats and ecosystems; to protect biodiversity; or to ensure sustainable use of the marine environment; and that those management measures should limit the disturbance of an area by human activity, either at any time or at particular times”.

The Policy aligns with the Altogether Greener and Altogether Wealthier Goals of St. Helena’s 10 Year Plan. The Altogether Greener goal aims to ensure that the island’s natural resources are preserved and enhanced. The Altogether Wealthier goal aims to promote sustainable and green growth in St Helena including encouraging eco-tourism.

The Policy aligns with the St Helena’s Sustainable Economic Development Plan (2018 - 2028) Goal 3 (Attract visitors and increase tourism) by encouraging the provision of tourist attractions “serviced by a skilled and customer focused workforce”; and Goal 6 (Sustain and improve our natural capital) “maintaining and enhancing St Helena’s exceptional environment, landscape, heritage and cultural qualities for this generation and the next”.

The Policy will support implementation of the St Helena Marine Management Plan which specifies that marine tourism activities within the MPA will be regulated via a licence legally enforced through the Environmental Protection Ordinance with an accreditation system in place for operators; and that it is prohibited to interact with whale sharks, cetaceans or devil rays unless complying with the ‘Policy for Marine Species Interaction Activities on St Helena Island to Minimise Risk of Injury and Disturbance’.

### 4 Policy Aim and Objectives

The overall aim of the Marine Tourism Policy for St Helena is to effectively manage marine tourism in or near the marine environment to minimise impacts on the marine environment and large charismatic marine species, especially in the face of increasing pressures from economic development.

The Policy objectives are to:

- Ensure sustainable use of the St Helena MPA and minimise disturbance to marine biodiversity, habitats and ecosystems by human activity in line with the Environmental Protection Ordinance (2016) and Marine Management Plan.

- Ensure that marine tourism operations adopt high operational standards for environmental protection and tourism sustainability and have a full and detailed awareness of regulations and licencing requirements.
- Ensure that marine tourism activities provide a high quality, memorable visitor experience that is delivered by trained, knowledgeable operators to raise awareness of the values of the marine environment.
- Help increase benefits from marine tourism to the local economy and support a beneficial interaction between the local community and tourists.
- Develop effective co-operation and joint working between SHG, marine tourism businesses and the wider community to maximise the social and economic benefits of marine tourism opportunities.

## 5 Policy Definitions

### **Deliberate**

Done consciously, intentionally and pre-planned

### **Interact**

To interact with whale sharks, mobula rays, whales, dolphins, turtles, seabirds or other marine life means viewing these marine animals in their natural habitat. This includes watching whale sharks, mobula rays, whales, dolphins, turtles and seabirds from a boat or swimming, snorkelling or free diving with permitted species as described in the 'Policy for Marine Species Interaction Activities on St Helena Island to Minimise Risk of Injury and Disturbance'.

### **Local resident**

A local resident means those persons who are as an "Islander" or their "dependant", or who hold a valid "long-term entry permit" as described in the St Helena Immigration Ordinance (2016)

### **Marine tour operator**

An individual, or company who provides expertise and guided service by sea or coast to a paying client for the purpose of using the marine environment for recreational activities.

### **Marine tourism activities**

The provision of tourism activities in the coastal and marine environment with the intent of making a profit. This excludes sports fishing operations which are managed under the Fishing Licence Policy for St Helena.

### **Stakeholder**

Any individual or group with an interest in the outcome of an activity, process or service. This can include government departments, non-government organisations, businesses and members of the public.

## **Sustainable**

Describes activities carried out in a manner which does not adversely impact on future generations. In marine tourism terms this means taking full account of the current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and local communities.

## **6 Policy Statements**

To achieve the aim and objectives of the Policy, marine tourism activities within the MPA will be managed as follows:

### **6.1 Permitted marine tourism activities**

Only activities that are compatible with the goals and objectives of the St Helena Marine Management Plan will be permitted to operate within the MPA for the purpose of marine tourism interactions.

Acceptable marine tourism activities for the purposes of interaction are those set out in the 'Policy for marine species interaction activities on St Helena Island to minimise risk of injury and disturbance'. These activities are considered to be low impact, non-consumptive and promote education and awareness building that do not damage or disturb marine habitats and species. This includes existing activities at current levels such as:

- SCUBA diving
- Snorkelling
- Free diving
- Guided coastal or scenic tours by boat
- Wildlife viewing tours (dolphins, whales and seabirds)
- Wildlife interaction tours (permitted species)

Deliberate scuba diving with whale sharks unless for scientific purposes is prohibited, as described in the 'Whale Shark Tourism – Environmental Best Practice Guidelines'. Snorkelling, freediving and SCUBA diving with whales, dolphins and porpoises are also prohibited.

Proposals for new marine tourism activities for the purposes of interaction with species within the MPA will be considered by the Chief Environmental Officer or Environmental Officer on a case-by-case basis, taking cumulative and in-combination effects into account and may require an environmental assessment.

Activities not permitted for interaction such as (kayaking, jet skis, windsurfing etc.) are permitted to operate within the MPA as long as they follow the guidance set out in the 'Policy for marine species interaction activities on St Helena Island to minimise risk of injury and disturbance' and associated best practice guidelines should an encounter occur.

For all activities, wilful, reckless or deliberate acts pertaining to section 20 of the Environmental Protection Ordinance (2016) will be dealt with accordingly and may result in legal action being taken against the person who commits the offence.

## **6.2 Marine tourism licences**

Any individual or company planning to undertake marine tourism activities for the purposes of interaction within the MPA will be required to apply for a marine tourism licence from the Chief Environmental Officer.

Both local residents and non-residents aged 18 years old or older will be eligible to apply for a marine tourism licence. Any non-residents wishing to undertake marine tourism activities must employ an accredited marine tour operator on their vessel, or have completed the relevant immigration procedures (i.e. entry/work permits) in order to be eligible to apply for a marine tourism licence. This is to ensure that marine tourism provides benefits to the local economy and to prevent conflict between residents and non-residents.

All marine tourism licences will be for a period of no more than one year in duration.

The Chief Environmental Officer may charge a fee for the grant of a licence.

The Chief Environmental Officer or Environmental Officer may limit the number of marine tourism licences issued in any one year. This decision will be based on an assessment of the balance between providing economic benefit to the local community whilst prioritising the welfare of the marine habitats and species involved. This will be determined by results from the monitoring regime described below.

Non-commercial recreational activities within the MPA conducted by local residents will not require a licence. Any persons that intend to interact with whale sharks, mobula rays, whales, dolphins, turtles, seabirds or other marine life will however be required to comply with the 'Policy for Marine Species Interaction Activities on St Helena Island to Minimise Risk of Injury and Disturbance' and the relevant Best Practice Guidelines.

## **6.3 Licence conditions**

All marine tourism activities should be carried out with the minimal practicable impact on marine biodiversity and with the greatest practicable protections for any protected marine species.

As such, a marine tourism licence will only be granted to operators who have obtained accreditation from the Environment and Natural Resources and Planning Directorate of St Helena Government through the Marine environment accreditation scheme for St Helena. In the case of non-residents, they must be accompanied by an accredited marine tour operator on their vessel, or have completed the relevant immigration procedures (i.e. entry/work permits) in order to be eligible to apply for a marine tourism licence.



All marine tour operators will also be required to comply with the 'Policy for Marine Species Interaction Activities on St Helena Island to Minimise Risk of Injury and Disturbance' and the relevant Best Practice Guidelines. Other conditions may be attached to the marine tourism licence by the Chief Environmental Officer to minimise impacts to the marine environment as required.

Any licenced vessel is considered to be undertaking licenced work and must comply with the licence conditions at all times even in circumstances when the people on-board the vessel are non-paying.

#### ***6.4 Stakeholder engagement***

SHG will continue to consult regularly as part of the yearly Marine Environment Accreditation Scheme with all stakeholders to ensure direct and active involvement of the local community in the management of marine tourism activities in St Helena. Stakeholders include marine tour operators, non-governmental organisations, science partners, St Helena Tourism and other interested parties.

#### ***6.5 Awareness-raising***

Information about the St Helena MPA and the rules and regulations in relation to marine tourism activities within the MPA will be provided to all visitors to St Helena by SHG. Visitors will also be provided with a list of accredited marine tour operators.

#### ***6.6 Appeals against licensing decisions***

Any person or company may appeal to the Chief Magistrate within the period of twenty-one days against any decision made by the Chief Environmental Officer in relation to the refusal to grant a licence, or a decision to attach a condition to a licence, or to vary, suspend or revoke a licence.

#### ***6.7 Compliance and enforcement***

Compliance and enforcement will be carried out in line with the SHG 'Compliance and Enforcement Strategy for Marine Operations' which outlines the need for regulation, the legal basis on which any regulation is put in place and the actions SHG are taking to ensure compliance.

Spot checks will be carried out by the Marine Enforcement Officer or any other any public officer, deemed to be an enforcement officer under the Environmental Protection Ordinance, to monitor compliance with the Policy, legislation, best practice guidelines or licence conditions (including data collection/monitoring activities).

Failure to comply with the St Helena Marine Tourism Policy, legislation, best practice guidelines or licence conditions (including data collection/monitoring activities) constitutes an offence and could result in an administrative penalty. In the case of marine tourism operators, it may also result in a licence being immediately revoked, suspended and may preclude the possibility, or place restrictions, on future licencing.

Enforcement will be conducted through a series of steps employed as an escalating response to non-compliance. Responses will include:

- fixed penalties across all marine activities
- suspension or revocation of licence
- court proceedings

## **6.8 Monitoring**

An effective monitoring regime will be implemented by SHG to assess the impacts of marine tourism activities on the health of marine habitats and the behaviour and ecology of marine wildlife. This will form part of the adaptive management process and will inform decisions on the number of licences to be granted and conditions to be attached to licences in the subsequent year to ensure that the industry continues to be sustainable.

The marine tourism license (unless by exception) will include requirements for all marine tour operators to complete a data collection form (in the form of a log book) as a license condition; this will provide the main mechanism for collecting the monitoring data'

Monitoring data will be required to be submitted by the operator to the Marine Enforcement Officer or Marine and Fisheries Conservation Officer no more than 7 days after the trip has been undertaken. A summary of monitoring data collected will be made available to marine tour operators and the public if requested and can be provided by the Marine and Fisheries Conservation section.

SHG will also encourage scientific research into the biology and ecology of the marine species that are the focus of marine tourism activities. Any scientific research should be conducted in lines with the policy and guidance set out by the St Helena Research Institute and will be required to utilise accredited marine tour operators to undertake the work.

## **7 Implementing the Policy and Policy Distribution**

The Policy will be issued to all SHG Directorates and made available along with supporting documents online on the SHG website. Policy procedure will be developed to support implementation. This will set out the process for applying for a marine tourism licence, a prescribed application form and the timeframe for response and processing by SHG. Copies are available upon request from the Marine Conservation Section.

Implementation of the Policy will be supported by the 'Policy for Marine Species Interaction Activities on St Helena Island to Minimise Risk of Injury and Disturbance' and the 'Marine Environment Accreditation Scheme for St Helena'. Pro forma application forms and a timeline for the application process will be available from the Chief Environment Officer, or Marine and Fisheries Conservation section.

## **8 Monitoring, Review and Revision Arrangements**

This Policy will be reviewed every three years by SHG in order to monitor progress and accomplish the long term objectives set out in the Marine Tourism Policy for St Helena.