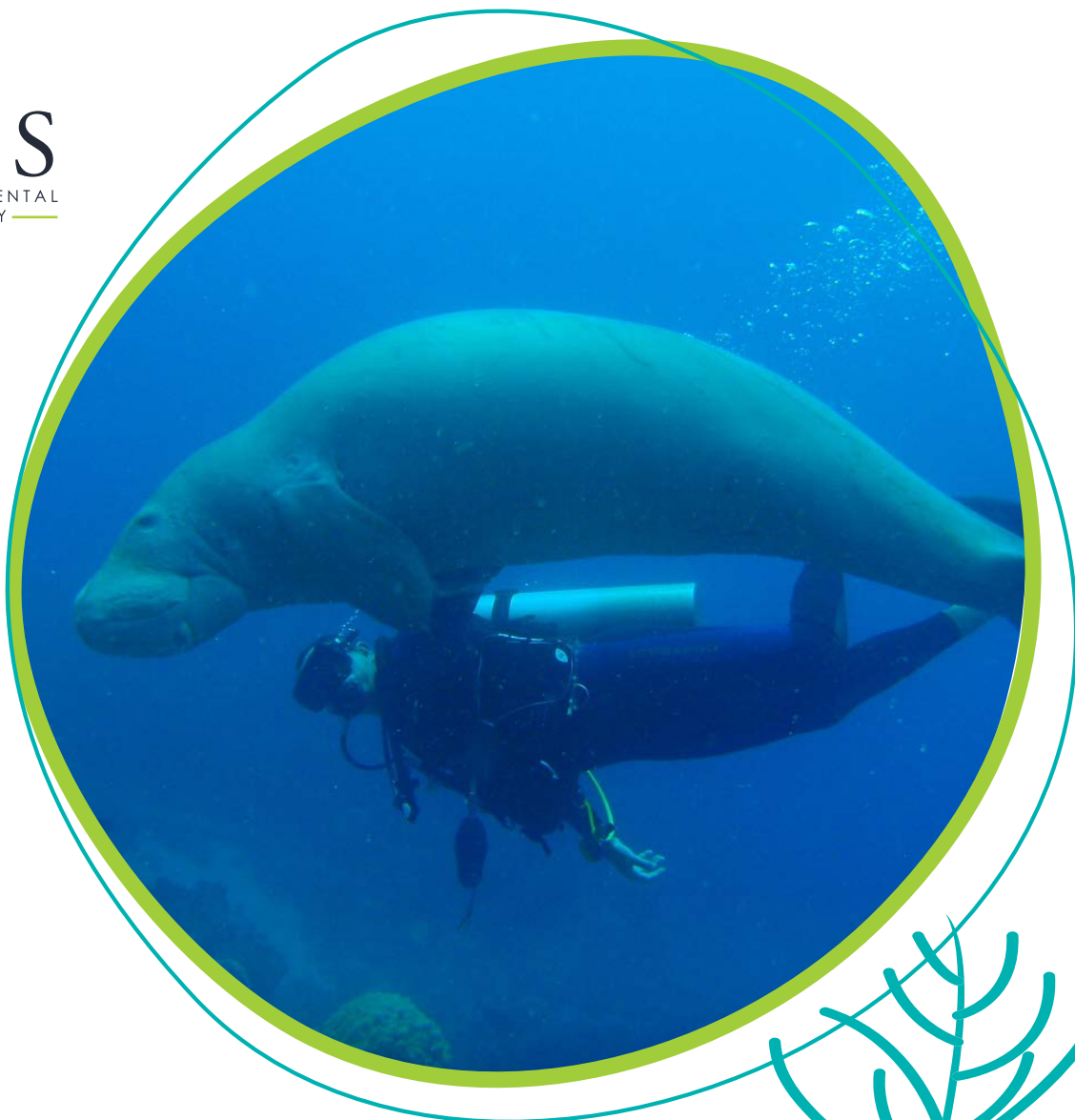




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SCIENCE SOCIETY



Guidelines for Interacting with Dugongs



Guidelines for Interacting with Dugongs

Dugongs are one of Vanuatu's most charismatic animals and many people are excited when they see them. In Vanuatu this is possible in many locations and our dugongs have a reputation of being 'friendly' and not afraid of people. We want that to continue so people can keep having once-in-a-lifetime encounters with these fascinating marine mammals. But for that to happen every encounter with a dugong needs to be a positive experience *for the dugong* as well as for the people. This guideline aims to give people the knowledge to ensure that our interactions with dugongs do not harm them and dugongs remain happy and healthy into the future.

Dugongs can be easily disturbed or frightened by people. They are intelligent animals with long memories. If they have an unpleasant encounter they will swim away and they may choose not to come back to that place or to avoid people. This will obviously spoil any chance of people seeing the dugong in the future and is not good for the dugong. If people disturb dugongs when they are feeding this can lead to them not eating enough which not only means they are more likely to get sick, but can lead to less calves being born. Dugongs are vulnerable to extinction and any reduction in their reproduction or their health makes them even more vulnerable.

We recommend the following actions whenever you see a dugong.

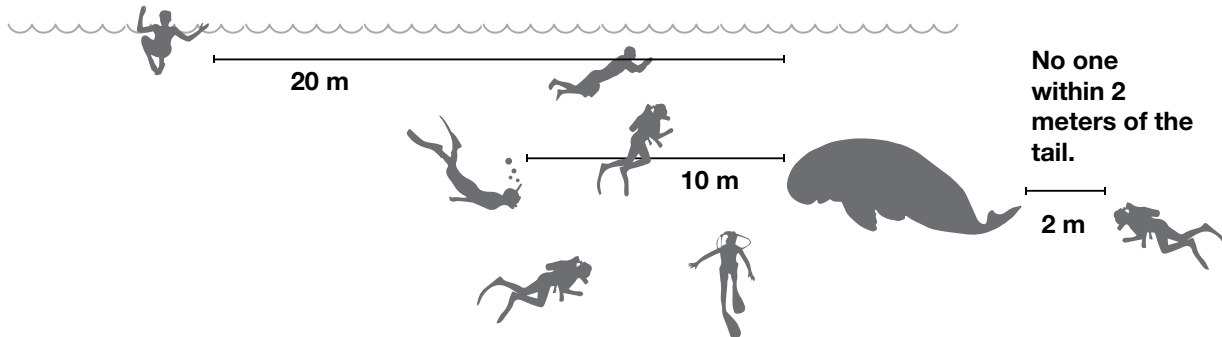
If you are in the water with dugongs:

- Dugongs can be shy animals and some may not want to be close to people. When you enter the water or first spot the dugong DO NOT swim towards it. You are likely to make it swim away from you and you won't have the best encounter you can.
- Stay where you are and let the dugong come to you if it wants to.

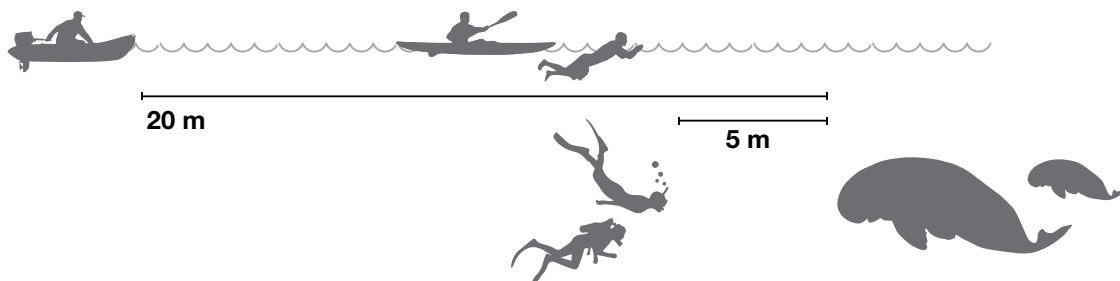


Guidelines for Interacting with Dugongs.

- Swim calmly, slowly and minimise excess noise and splashing.
- There should be no more than 5 people within 10m of a dugong.



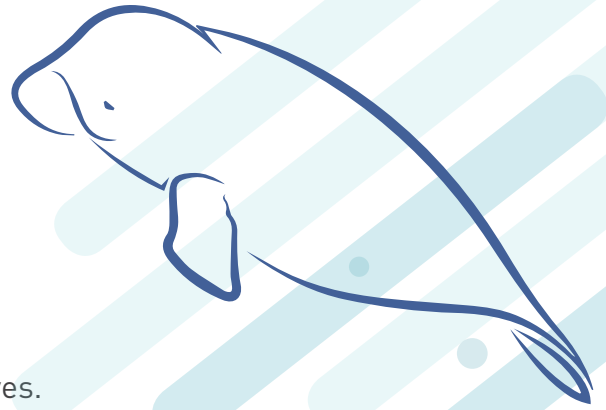
- If you come across a dugong and there are already 5 people within 10 meters, stay back, at least 20 meters away.
- If you see a mother with her calf keep at least 5 meters away. This is for their benefit as well as your safety. If the mother dugong or the calf approaches you, move away and keep 5 meters between you and the dugongs.



- Make sure no person or watercraft gets between a mother and her calf at any point.
- Never get between a dugong and the surface of the water. They need to come to the surface to breathe and anything that gets in the way of them surfacing can cause distress.
- When swimming with a dugong that has approached you, stay at least 2 metres away from the tail. Dugong tails are very powerful and you could get hurt if it hits you.
- If a dugong shows any signs of distress or disturbance (such as repeatedly swimming away from you) stop and move at least 50 meters away from the dugong.

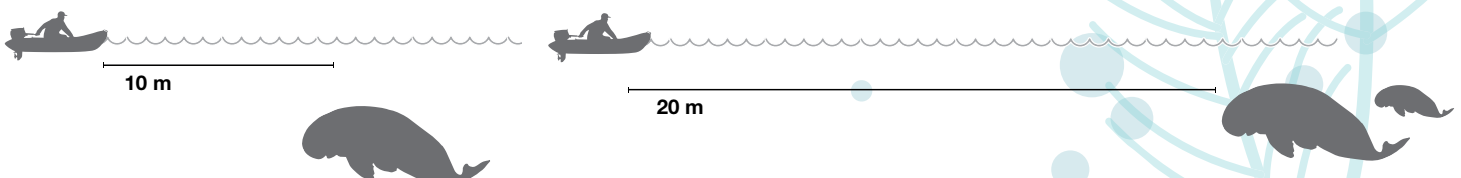


- Please make sure that when you are taking photos or filming the dugongs you don't forget about these guidelines and adhere to the distances. Protecting the dugongs and yourself from harm is more important than getting the perfect image or "selfie".
- Touching wild animals is not a good idea for the safety and health of both you and the wild animal. Touching dugongs might cause them harm and they might carry diseases that could infect you. It is best not to touch.
- Never try to touch a dugong on the head.
- Stay away from the tail and never hold onto or touch the flippers.
- Never attempt to "ride" a dugong.
- Never prod or poke a dugong.
- Do not touch calves (baby dugongs). Remember to keep at least 5 meters away from mothers and calves.
- Do not disturb feeding dugongs.
- Do not feed dugongs.



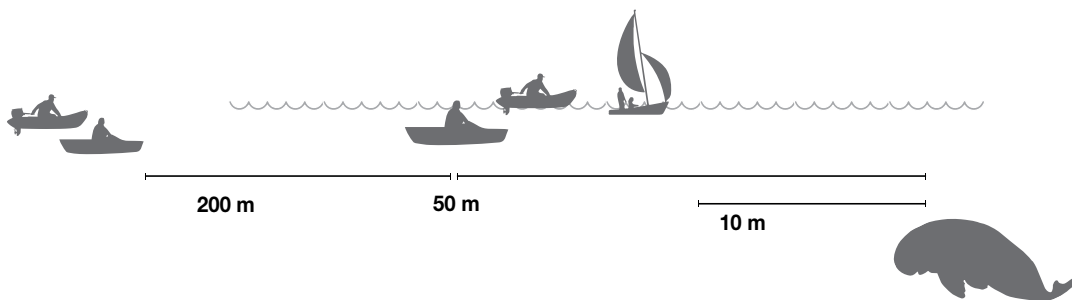
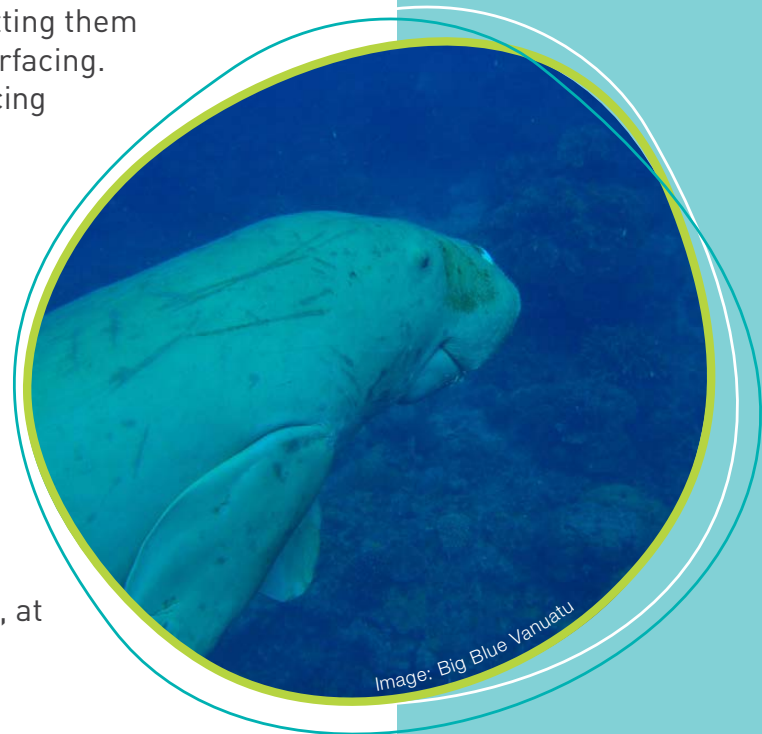
If you are in a watercraft with an engine (banana boat, fishing boat, sailing boat, other boats, jetski, zego, jetboat etc).

- Keep a watch out for dugongs when travelling near seagrass meadows.
- Keep to "no wake" speed or a maximum of 5 knots whenever you are travelling over a seagrass meadow where dugongs often occur.
- Keep to "no wake" speed or a maximum of 5 knots whenever you are within 100 metres of a dugong to avoid hitting the dugong with the boat or cutting the dugong with the propeller.
- If you are within 50 meters of a dugong make sure your engines are in neutral. Only engage the engine to move away from the dugong after you are sure where the dugong is and you have checked carefully that there are no other dugongs close by.
- Keep the boat at least 10 metres away from dugongs at all times. If there is a mother with her calf stay at least 20 metres away. If the dugong approaches your boat within 10 meters, do not engage the engine and wait until the dugongs have moved away from the boat before putting the engine in gear (unless there is a risk to the boat and passengers in which case the engines can be engaged but with extreme care not to harm the dugongs. It is best to anticipate if there might be a risk and avoid any situations that might put you close to a dugong when there is a risk to the boat e.g. close to the reef or rocks).



Guidelines for Interacting with Dugongs.

- Never drive over the top of a dugong even if you think it is deep under the water. They need to surface to breathe so there is a chance you can injure them by hitting them with the boat or propeller when they are surfacing. Anything that impedes dugongs from surfacing can cause distress.
- Approach dugongs from the side and travel parallel with their bodies. Try not to approach from the front or behind.
- Never chase a dugong.
- Never corner or harass a dugong trying to swim away from a vessel.
- There should never be more than 3 motorised vessels within 50 m of a dugong. If you come across a dugong and there are already 3 boats within 50 meters, stay back, at least 200 meters away.

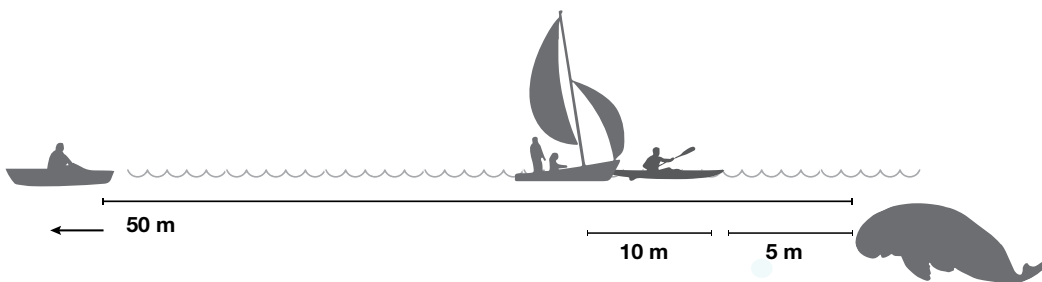


- Make sure no watercraft gets between a mother and her calf at any point.
- If a dugong shows any signs of distress or disturbance (such as repeatedly swimming away) stop and move at least 100 meters away from the dugong.
- Dugongs are reliant on seagrass to survive. Be careful when travelling over seagrass meadows to make sure you don't damage them with your propeller.
- Be careful where you anchor to avoid damaging seagrass meadows.



If you are in a watercraft without an engine (boat, kayak, canoe, sailing dingy, stand up paddleboard, surf board etc).

- Stay at least 5 metres away from a dugong. This is for your safety as well as the dugong's.
- Approach dugongs from the side and travel parallel with their bodies. Try not to approach from the front or behind.
- Never chase a dugong.
- Never corner or harass a dugong trying to swim away from you.
- There should never be more than 3 watercraft within 10 meters of a dugong. If you come across a dugong and there are already 3 watercraft within 10 meters, stay back, at least 50 meters away.



- Make sure no watercraft gets between a mother and her calf at any point.
- If a dugong shows any signs of distress or disturbance (such as repeatedly swimming away from you) stop and move at least 50 meters away from the dugong.

Don't forget, you will have the best experience by staying calm and watching from a distance.

Dugongs can be very shy and it's incredibly special to see their natural behaviour so be sure not to frighten them away!

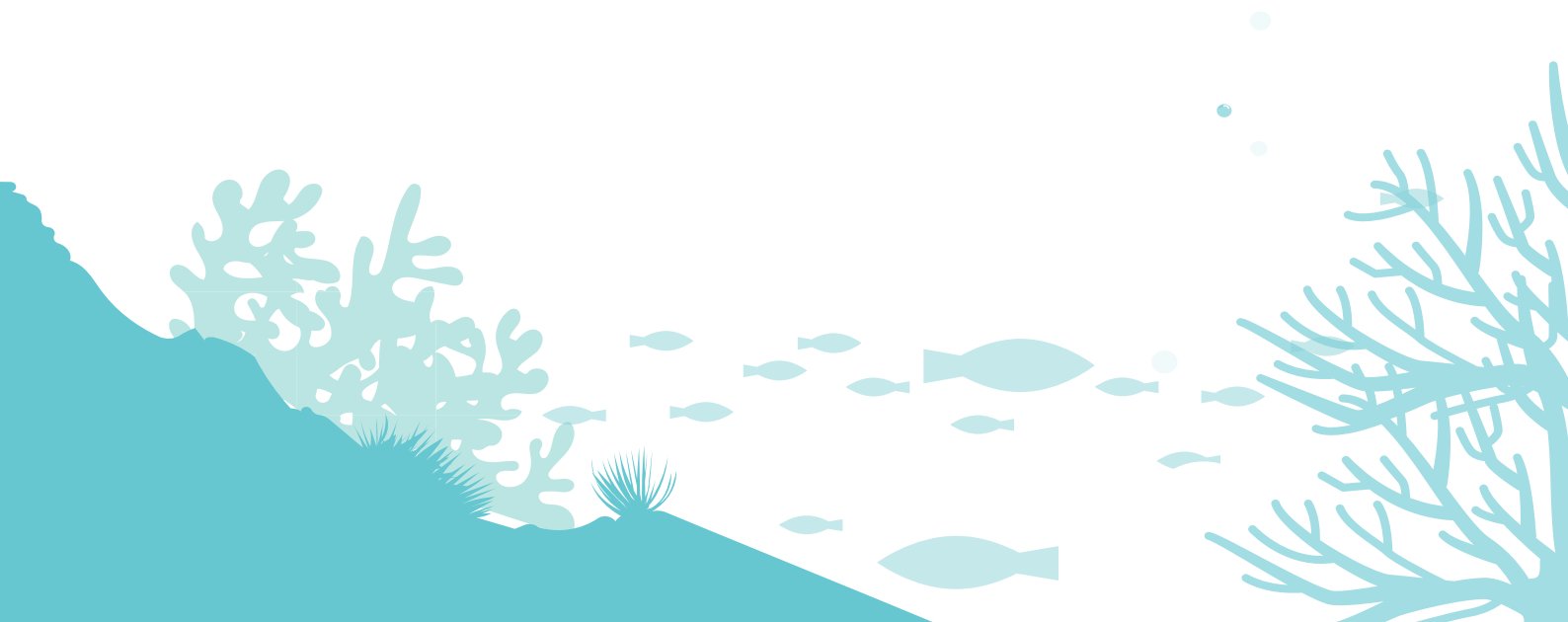
If you see dugongs from the air

- If you are flying a drone it should fly at least 50m above dugongs. Remember you need a permit to fly a drone in Vanuatu (please contact the Vanuatu Civil Aviation Authority or the Vanuatu Cultural Centre for details).

Dugongs are protected by Vanuatu laws

- All Vanuatu waters are a Marine Mammal Sanctuary and all marine mammals, including dugongs, are protected under the Fisheries Act (2014). A person must not kill, harm, harass, take, possess, hold in captivity or restrict the movement of any marine mammal in the Vanuatu Marine Mammals Sanctuary. A person who breaks this law faces a fine of up to VT50,000,000 or 2 years in jail, or both. There is also an on-the-spot fine of VT1,000,000 for breaking this law.
- If a dugong is accidentally injured or killed you must report it immediately to the Vanuatu Fisheries Department. Call +678 23119 or +678 5333340. If you see a sick, injured or dead dugong please also report this to the Vanuatu Fisheries Department or the Vanuatu Environmental Science Society by emailing: vess@vanuatuconservation.org
- If you witness a tour operator who is not abiding by these guidelines you can contact the Department of Tourism on +678 33400 and ask for the officer for minimum standards.

If everybody in Vanuatu follows this **Guideline for Interacting with Dugongs** we hope that our majestic wild dugongs will continue to be happy, healthy and exist in Vanuatu into the future. We hope that following these guidelines will ensure the encounters you have with dugongs will be a better experience for both you and the dugongs.



Guidelines for Interacting with Dugongs

These guidelines were developed by the Vanuatu Environmental Science Society (VESS) under the Dugong and Seagrass Conservation Project which is funded by the Global Environment Facility (GEF). The global project is supported by the Dugong Secretariat of the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) and project managed by Mohamed bin Zayed Species (MbZ) Conservation Fund. The project in Vanuatu is implemented by VESS and supported by the Department of Environmental Protection and Conservation, the Vanuatu Fisheries Department and the Department of Tourism.

