

Statement regarding the ongoing Harassment of Wildlife at Sea, with particular reference to the Bottlenose dolphins (*Tursiops truncatus*): Call for Immediate Action to Safeguard this Protected Marine Species

Honourable Ministers Mr Jo Etienne Abela, Dr Miriam Dalli, Mr Chris Bonett, Dr Anton Refalo, Parliamentary Secretary Dr Alicia Bugeja Said and Commissioner for Animal Welfare Mr Elliot Magro,

The undersigned are writing to you with urgent concern regarding the worsening situation in Maltese coastal waters with regard to the ongoing and increasing incidents of harassment to the bottlenose dolphin (*Tursiops truncatus*) community. Dolphins are being increasingly disturbed by sea users including but not limited to jet-ski, speed boat, private boaters, and kayakers in different parts of Malta, but more so in the areas off Delimara and Saint Paul's Bay, sites within or directly adjacent to marine SPAs and SACs in the Natura2000 network, where there is a high overlap between dolphin populations and leisure craft traffic.

Several boats are frequently observed being steered too close to dolphins and attempting to feed them with commercially fished fish in an area that serves as a feeding ground for the population of bottlenose dolphins living in Maltese waters. Moreover, on multiple occasions EcoMarine Malta has encountered jet skis and boat users chasing and harassing the dolphins in this area. The observed behaviour falls unambiguously within definition of deliberate harassment prohibited under ACCOBAMS¹.

This repeated disturbance causes chronic stress, disrupts feeding and energy expenditure, and displaces dolphins from critical habitat, with long-term consequences for the health and survival of the population. Permitting this disturbance goes against Malta's local and international legal obligations to conserve and protect cetaceans in our waters².

¹ "Deliberate pursuit, encirclement and repeated close approach at high speed", refer to the Supporting Document: Evidence, Legal Framework, and Recent Incidents of Bottlenose Dolphin Harassment in Maltese Waters

² EU Habitats Directive (Council Directive 92/43/EEC), Marine Strategy Framework Directive (Directive 2008/56/EC — MSFD), EU Nature Restoration Regulation (Regulation (EU) 2024/1991 — NRR).

Official reports have been submitted to the responsible authorities since 2022, yet to date no action has been taken to enforce the ACCOBAMS Code of Conduct³ or to hold anyone responsible for the dangerous and unethical behaviour.

This also threatens Malta's reputation as a sustainable tourism destination. Malta markets itself as committed to marine conservation, yet witnessing boats chasing or feeding dolphins sends the opposite message, undermining the credibility of that image with the very visitors it is meant to attract.

Our Demands For The Protection Of Protected Marine Species

We, the undersigned, call upon the Ministry and all relevant regulatory bodies to take immediate and decisive action.

Specifically, we demand:

1. The introduction of a legally binding reduced boat speed limit of 5 knots in areas around the fish farms and in all areas known to be regular cetacean habitats.
2. A legally binding code of conduct, monitoring and enforcement, training requirements for commercial boat operators, education and communication on respectful behaviour.
3. Formal action against operators and individuals reported for harassing dolphins and other wildlife at sea, with prosecution under applicable EU and national law.
4. The mandatory briefing of jet ski rental clients on wildlife protection laws and minimum approach requirements, with operators held liable for clients' conduct.
5. The introduction of mandatory modules on marine ecology, wildlife conservation, and the legal obligations towards protected species — including cetaceans — as a compulsory component of the nautical licensing curriculum for all watercraft operators, commercial and recreational alike. Compliance with these principles should be assessed as part of the final nautical licensing examination, ensuring that no watercraft operator may obtain

³ Agreement on the Conservation of Cetaceans of the Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea and Contiguous Atlantic Area; refer to the supporting document



a licence without demonstrating a basic understanding of their legal and ethical obligations towards marine wildlife.

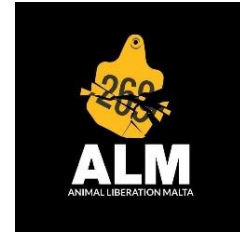
6. The introduction of a reporting system for all cetacean sightings and incidents by commercial operators, feeding a national database.

Endorsed by



Tide/Breakers.





Signatories

	Organisation	Organisation Representative	Position within Organisation
1	EcoMarine Malta	Patrizia Patti	Founder
2	Malta Ranger Unit	Camilla Appelgren	Chief Patrolling Ranger
3	EcoMarket	Suzanne D'Amato Gautam	Founder
4	Global Mindset Development	Viviana Premazzi	CEO & Director
5	Wave of Change	Bernice Casha	Administrator
6	Climate Friendly Travel	Dr Hans Friederich	Registrar
7	Aquatic Resources Malta	Dr Francis Fabri	CEO
8	Ritual Dive	Emily	
9	Marine Connection	Liz Sandeman	Co-founder
10	Žibel	Bettina Nardelli	Policy officer
11	Discover the Blu	Timothy Zammit	Director & Marine Biologist
12	Association for Abandoned Animals Sanctuary	Rosalind Agius	Sanctuary Administrator
13	Science in the City	Maissa Ezaraoli	Administrator
14	Tide Breakers	Marketa Schusterova	Co-founder
15	Moviment Graffiti		
16	Malta Rock Climbing Club	Andrew Warrington	President
17	MC Adventure	Andrew Warrington	Managing director
18	Nature Trust Malta	Vincent Attard	President
19	LIFE OASIS	Antonia Scicluna	Representative of LIFE OASIS
20	Friends of the Earth Malta	Annalise Falzon	Educator/Project Assistant
21	Animal Liberation Malta		
22	Individual	Vincenzo de Cancellis	PhD candidate
23	Malta Chamber of Scientists	Alexandra Bonnici	President
24	Malta SPCA		
25	Sharklab Malta	Mahailee Parker	Science officer
26	BirdLife Malta	Justine Borg	Marine Policy Officer
27	Ecological Marine Solutions Ltd	Carmelita Guarrera	Managing Director
28	Malta Environment Foundation	Sara Mizzi	Executive Director