



# Snorkelling

**Good Practice Guide  
Version 1  
2020**

# Snorkelling

*Snorkelling involves the use of a mask and often fins and a snorkel to explore the underwater environment. Most snorkelers swim at the surface although some will explore below the surface while holding their breath for short periods of time.*

*The scope of this Good Practice Guide (GPG) includes normal operation on the surface of the water with occasional short shallow dives and where participants are positively buoyant.\**

*The intended environmental scope is relatively calm and sheltered water where current and swell have no or limited impact. It is intended the setting will allow for easy access to the land or secure floatation where the group can be effectively managed and where all can get out of the water if necessary.*

*This GPG does not cover breath-hold diving or using equipment designed to dive deep. Freediving and Apnea, Scuba Diving, and Snorkelling in conditions outside of the scope of this GPG are likely to be considered Adventure Activities and subject to the Adventure Activities Regulations.*

*\* Positively buoyancy ensures participants will float to the surface if unconscious.*

This GPG covers situations where participants are being directly supervised by a designated leader, guide or instructor and is not intended to cover unsupervised or free-time use.

This guidance is specific to **Snorkelling** and is designed to be used in conjunction with the **General Guidance for Organised Outdoor Activities** and the **Snorkelling Planning Template**.

## Potential value of activity

### SNORKELLING CAN PROVIDE:

- An opportunity to try new activities / have new experiences
- A chance to learn about and experience marine life first hand
- Development of water confidence and water safety skills in the real environment
- An introduction to a lifelong recreational and fun activity
- Environmental experiences leading to instilling caring attitudes and passion for conservation of the ocean
- Enhancing and enriching the school curriculum

*“Most photos are worth a thousand words.  
Underwater ones are worth at least a million.”* Stephen Fink

## Planning considerations

See the [General Guidance for Organised Outdoor Activities](#)

*An activity plan helps to maximize an activity's success and minimizes risk to participants. The Snorkelling Planning Template provides a useful format.*

In addition to the generic planning considerations (see **General Guidance for Organised Outdoor Activities**) consider:

### Assessing the site:

Snorkelling in an open water environment involves the dangers of changing weather, surface conditions, currents and tides.

- Safe operational parameters and boundaries for environmental conditions need to be established.
- Determine the best weather forecasting service to provide relevant information including tide patterns and currents.
- The area for snorkelling needs to be clearly defined so participants know where they can and where they can't snorkel. A dive flag should be displayed to alert other water users. Marker buoys may also be used.
- Areas where there may be large tidal flows, strong currents, large waves, poor visibility or numerous power boats should be avoided.
- Ensure easy access to land or secure floatation is possible allowing all the group to be able to get out of the water if necessary.
- Determine the need for ancillary support such as a vessel or safety kayak.

## Participants

*How to ensure the activities match the participants' abilities and needs.*

In addition to the generic participant considerations (see **General Guidance for Organised Outdoor Activities**) consider:

- Identifying participant's aquatic competency / swimming ability is important before undertaking water activities.
- Assessing the participant's ability and confidence before doing the activity by asking questions about their knowledge and prior experience.
- Sequencing and the progressive development of competence in controlled environments e.g. a swimming pool session before the sea, developing skills and confidence in shallow water before going into deep water.

# Supervision

*The level and style of supervision typically required for this activity.*

## **CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING WHEN DETERMINING THE APPROPRIATE SUPERVISION STRUCTURE FOR SNORKELLING:**

- The need for supervisors to understand snorkelling as an activity, including its risks and challenges.
- There is no one 'ratio' of leaders or supervisors to participants for any given snorkelling activity. Supervision needs vary according to age and ability of the participants, the activity, the location and environmental conditions and the skill and experience of the leaders and supervisors.
- Supervision in a water environment needs to include the ability for direct physical intervention. The question to ask is: *How quickly can a competent leader or supervisor get to someone in the water who needs immediate assistance?*
- When there is more than one supervisor, clearly defined roles and responsibilities should be delegated. This is particularly important when using assistant leaders, accompanying teachers (who are not the activity leader), student leaders or parent helpers. Having leaders and supervisors clearly identifiable, e.g. wearing coloured vests or rash shirts, can be helpful. Participants can use different coloured swim caps or a coloured tie on snorkels for identification purposes.
- Supervision of larger groups of participants is likely to involve supervision from both in and out of the water e.g. a spotter on the shore or on an ancillary vessel.
- Supervisors need to know the nature of the environment they are supervising i.e. where are the deep spots, shallow water, hazards etc. A supervisor in the water needs to be competent in the environment.
- For groups of six or more it is advisable to have someone overseeing and not involved in direct supervision. This person can step into a direct supervision role if a supervisor is required to give 1:1 assistance.
- In addition to having designated supervisors, a supervision structure should include a buddy system of having participants watch out for one other participant or buddy. The "one up one down" rule should apply to duck diving.
- Other factors that will affect the supervision requirements of a group will include:
  - participants with special needs, including behavioural or medical, non-swimmers or non-floaters, English as a second language speakers;
  - environmental factors such as the location and weather.
- On-going risk assessment needs to be conducted to determine if supervision levels needs to be increased. Techniques to increase supervision levels include:
  - staying closer to the participant;
  - instructing the participant to stay in a particular position relative to the leader or supervisor, or another more able participant;
  - stopping and regrouping more frequently;
  - reducing the boundaries of the snorkel site;
  - ability grouping participants.

# Assessing an Activity Provider's Competence

**IN THE SITUATION WHERE AN EXTERNAL OPERATOR IS BEING CONTRACTED TO PROVIDE THE ACTIVITY, IT IS APPROPRIATE TO ASK FOR EVIDENCE OF:**

- The safety management system the operator has for the activities being provided.
- If the activity is covered by the Adventure Activity Regulations, the provider must be registered with Worksafe as an adventure activity operator.

## Leader competence

*The experience and knowledge required by those running the activity, both for normal operation and for managing emergencies. What competence other assistant leaders should have should also be considered (e.g. where parents or other adults are helping the person run the activity).*

### Skills and knowledge

The simplest way to evaluate competence is to look at the qualifications they hold. Asking questions of potential leaders and having them provide examples of training or experience as part of their answer allows you to assess their experience and knowledge. It is also appropriate to ask for references to confirm the information they provide.

**SPECIFIC LEADER COMPETENCIES RELEVANT TO SNORKELLING AND ENVIRONMENTS COVERED IN THIS GPG INCLUDE:**

- Very confident in the water, including can comfortably swim 200m unaided, have an understanding of rescue techniques, and must have snorkelling experience.
- Good knowledge of the area and sea conditions.
- Effective group management skills of a group in the water, including in both normal and emergency situations.
- Knowledge of the equipment being used and technical snorkelling skills.
- Knowledge of sequencing and progressions to build participants' confidence and competence.
- Knowledge of the site / location being used e.g. entry, exit and access points, weather forecast, depth, tide, water quality and how to source this information.
- Good judgement and decision making in changing situations e.g. weather, currents.
- In addition to a current first aid qualification specific knowledge of drowning, CPR, shallow water blackout, hypothermia and any other site or location specific issues e.g. jellyfish stings, sharp rocks / shells.
- Knowledge of appropriate environmental and cultural practices for the site / location e.g. toileting, seafood gathering.
- Knowledge of marine biodiversity and conservation.

## IF USING ASSISTANT LEADERS, THE MINIMUM COMPETENCIES FOR THESE WOULD BE:

- Good swimmers (can swim 200m).
- Confident in the water environment the activity is being held in.
- Snorkelling experience if possible.
- Ability to listen to instructions.
- Ability to assist the leader in the management of the group in the water in normal and emergency situations.

## Relevant Qualifications

The following qualifications contain a component relevant to Snorkelling:

- A first aid certificate
- Snorkel or SCUBA certificate from a recognized dive trainer agency e.g. PADI Freediver course
- Relevant instructor qualifications e.g. SSI Snorkeling Instructor
- NZQA Unit Standard 28436 v1 Level: 5 Credits: 6 Instruct and assess client snorkel dives in open water
- New Zealand Certificate in Aquatics - Specialised Swim & Water Safety Teacher (Level 4)
- New Zealand Certificate in Aquatics – Senior Pool Lifeguard (Level 4)
- Surf Lifeguard Award
- A lifesaving qualification such as Bronze Medallion.

## Resources and equipment

*Consider what equipment and resources are required to ensure the activity can be run safely. The participants may be required to bring this, or it may be provided to them.*

### Participant

*What each participant would need to bring to the activity*

- Swimwear and towel
- Personal clothing suitable for the weather conditions for after the activity
- Personal medication (EpiPen, asthma inhaler), sunblock
- Sufficient water and food



## Group

*Recommended equipment that may be made available to the participants for the activity*

- Masks, snorkels, fins
- Wetsuits
- Buoyancy / floatation aids e.g. PFDs, body boards or rescue craft
- Spare warm clothing / emergency blanket
- Site map and information e.g. emergency evacuation information
- Activity specific operating procedures
- First aid kit
- Dive flag
- De-fog
- Clothing to identify leaders and supervisors e.g. vests or rash shirts, or different coloured swim caps to identify participants

## Leader

*Equipment that should be carried by the leader or that the leader should have easy access to*

- A whistle
- Communications device (e.g. cell phone fully charged for use on land)
- A dive knife
- Group medical and contact information

## Exemplars

*Examples of good practice*

Experiencing Marine Reserves <https://www.emr.org.nz/index.php/about-emr/snorkelling>

*“Life looks better underwater”* Anonymous

## Further support

*Places to gain more information from*

- Experiencing Marine Reserves <https://www.emr.org.nz>
- Dive Activity Safety Guideline (ASG) – Support Adventure <https://www.supportadventure.co.nz/assets/Dive-ASG-v1.2.docx.pdf>
- Worksafe – Occupational Diving Good Practice Guidelines (April 2020) <https://worksafe.govt.nz/topic-and-industry/occupational-diving/occupational-diving-forms-and-guidelines/>
- Snorkel safety- A guide for workers – Workplace Health and Safety Queensland [https://www.worksafe.qld.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0009/79326/snorkel-safety-guide.pdf](https://www.worksafe.qld.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0009/79326/snorkel-safety-guide.pdf)
- Be safe be seen – swimmers, snorkellers, divers, spearfishers and boaties – Maritime NZ <https://www.maritimenz.govt.nz/magazines/lookout/issue-29/issue-29-6.asp>
- Water Safety NZ – Free diving and snorkelling safety <https://watersafety.org.nz/Free-diving-and-snorkelling-safety>
- NZ Underwater Safety <https://www.nzunderwater.org.nz>
- Maritime NZ – Safety Guidelines for commercial vessels involved in swimming operations <https://www.maritimenz.govt.nz/commercial/safety/safety-management-systems/adventure-activity/documents/Commercial-swimming-operations-safety-guidelines.pdf>
- Australian/New Zealand Standard 2299.3:2003 Occupational diving operations Part 3: recreational industry diving and snorkelling operations

*“Ko au te moana, ko te moana ko au – I am the sea, the sea is me”*

