



**Contact: Christine Brammer**  
808-224-6444

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
August 31, 2012

**Sanctuary Reminds Hawaii Ocean Users to Follow Whale Protection Rules**  
**First whale of the season spotted near Honokohau Harbor**  
**marks an early beginning to whale season**

The first confirmed sighting of a humpback whale yesterday in waters off the Big Island marks the beginning of whale season in Hawai'i and it may even be the earliest humpback sighting to be documented in recent history. Ocean recreation tour companies Atlantis Submarines, Captain Zodiac, Kona Diving Company and Wild Hawai'i Ocean Adventures observed an adult humpback whale surfacing off Honokohau Harbor. With the arrival of humpback whale season in Hawai'i, ocean users are reminded to keep a safe distance from these annual visitors to the Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary.

Endangered humpback whales are protected in Hawai'i. Federal regulations prohibit approaching within 100 yards of whales when on the water, and 1,000 feet when operating an aircraft. These and other regulations apply to all ocean users, including vessel operators, kayakers, paddle boarders, windsurfers, swimmers and divers throughout the Hawaiian Islands.

"It's important for everyone to be extra vigilant during whale season, for their own safety and the protection of the animals, and this year whale season seems to be starting early" said Justin Viezbicke, Hawai'i Island Programs coordinator for the sanctuary.

Humpback whale season in Hawai'i generally runs from November through May, although whales may be encountered in limited numbers during other months. More than 10,000 humpback whales winter in Hawaiian waters each year.

Boaters are reminded to post a lookout at all times throughout the year, not just when whales are visiting our waters. An extra set of eyes scanning the waters ahead and to the side of a boat can prevent collisions with marine life, obstructions, divers and other vessels.

The whales attract wildlife enthusiasts, but they also pose safety hazards to ocean users when the 45-ton marine mammals surface, breach or slap their massive tails or flippers. Vessel-whale collisions can also result in death or injury to boaters and whales. Whale calves are vulnerable to vessel strikes because they are difficult to see as they rest just under the surface. Young whales also must surface more frequently.

Ed Lyman, marine mammal response manager for the sanctuary, said ocean users such as those that reported the whale sightings are a "great resource" in helping monitor humpback whales in the sanctuary. "By locating distressed animals, reporting and providing the initial documentation and assessment on the animal, ocean users are the foundation of our conservation efforts," Lyman said.

If you come across an injured or entangled marine mammal, please maintain the required safe distance and call the NOAA Marine Mammal Hotline at 1-888-256-9840 immediately, or the U.S. Coast Guard on channel 16. If reporting a suspected approach zone violation, please call the NOAA Fisheries Enforcement Hotline at 1-800-853-1964. Additional guidelines and safety tips can be found at <http://hawaiihumpbackwhale.noaa.gov>.

The sanctuary is administered by a partnership of NOAA's Office of National Marine Sanctuaries and the State of Hawai'i through the Department of Land and Natural Resources (DLNR). The sanctuary works to protect humpback whales through research, education, conservation and stewardship. Join us on [Facebook](#).

NOAA's mission is to understand and predict changes in the Earth's environment, from the depths of the ocean to the surface of the sun, and to conserve and manage our coastal and marine resources. Join us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and our other [social media channels](#).

DLNR's mission is to enhance, protect, conserve and manage Hawaii's unique and limited natural, cultural and historic resources held in public trust for current and future generations of visitors and the people of Hawaii nei. Join us on [Facebook](#).

**On the Web:**

Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary: <http://hawaiihumpbackwhale.noaa.gov>

NOAA Office of National Marine Sanctuaries: <http://sanctuaries.noaa.gov>

State of Hawai'i Department of Land and Natural Resources: <http://hawaii.gov/dlnr/>