**DRAGONS BELOW**

# DIVING WITH DRAGONS

## Responsible snorkelling and diving with leafy and weedy seadragons.

Are you planning a dive to see leafy or weedy seadragons? This code describes what you can do around seadragons so as not to harm them or their habitat. By following these simple tips, divers can help protect seadragons and ensure they continue to thrive into the future. If you can plan your dive for both safety AND conservation you will be actively helping protect seadragons and other unique sea creatures.

**GIVE ME SPACE –** seadragons become stressed and can be injured if they are held, touched or chased. Never touch or hold seadragons. A good rule of thumb is to keep at least two metres away, and if a seadragon moves away from you, do not follow it. If you are diving in a group, please be patient and do not crowd around a seadragon. Keep in mind that seadragons are slow swimmers with a small home range.

**PATIENCE PLEASE –** if you remain relaxed and still, the naturally curious seadragon may well come over to you. Never try to encourage the animal to move higher or lower in the water column as this could damage its swim bladder.

**KEEP IT NATURAL –** please give all seadragons a break after a few minutes and minimise the use of torches, camera flash, strobes and video lights.* If you wear a shark shield, keep it well away from seadragons.

**EASY DOES IT –** try to stay neutrally buoyant. Avoid holding rocks, seaweed or jetty piles for support, as this can damage seadragon habitat. Please keep fins well above the bottom, and move gently and slowly to avoid damaging seagrass and seaweeds.

**EXIT WITH CARE** – when you have finished viewing seadragons, swim away carefully to make sure they aren't bumped by fins, tanks, or any other dive gear.

**ANCHORS AWARE! –** anchors can damage habitat, while boat noises and movement can disturb seadragons themselves. This can be avoided by always ensuring boats are moored away from seagrass beds and reefs.

## TOP 📷 PHOTO TIPS

☑ To photograph the whole animal, consider using a wide-angle or mid-range lens as seadragons can grow up to 40 cm long!

☑ Stay still for a few minutes, and your patience could be rewarded by the animal swimming near to you.

☑ When filming or photographing, allow the seadragon to move at its own pace. Never try to "herd" dragons to get a good shot.

☑ If possible, wait until the seadragon is against a dark or solid coloured background to film or photograph it – this will give you the best contrast.

*Note re video lights – while recent research suggests some fish species can cope with flash photography to a certain extent, this research has not been done on seadragons so it is best to be cautious.

## WHAT'S SO SPECIAL ABOUT SEADRAGONS?

Leafy seadragons (*Phycodurus eques*) and weedy seadragons (*Phyllopteryx taeniolatus*) are related to seahorses, but are found only along the southern coast of Australia and in waters off Western Australia. Striped like a tiger, leafy seadragons have a long snout and delicate leaf-like appendages which cleverly camouflage them among the seagrass.

The official marine emblem of South Australia, the leafy seadragon can grow up to 40 cm long and spends its time in seagrass, macroalgae (seaweed) and reefs, and below jetties. Unusually, it is the male seadragon who carries the eggs, with up to 300 tucked into a fold of skin on his tail. The eggs hatch after about nine weeks.

## By following this Code while you dive, you'll be helping protect these unique creatures.
## THANK YOU FOR CARING ABOUT SEADRAGONS AND DIVING RESPONSIBLY!