

# Environmental Guideline on Undersea walk



## Department of Environment

This environmental guideline on undersea walk provides guidance to ensure that all environmental issues are duly taken into consideration by the prospective developers.



## 1.0 Background

Undersea walk/ helmet diving is a recreational activity wherein:

- *a person walks on the sea floor with the assistance of an overhead helmet and a hose connected to a free flow supply of fresh compressed air provided from the air compressor or cylinder found on a pleasure craft or platform and engage in a guided tour on the seabed to view marine life in its natural habitat.*

Undersea walk/helmet diving is associated with environmental issues, namely:-

- Siting of activity
- Disturbance to marine life
- Solid waste

## 2.0 Objectives of the guideline

This guideline is meant to ensure that prospective developers:-

- adopt appropriate mitigating measures.
- comply with provisions of relevant laws/ regulations/standards.
- adopt eco-friendly practices to optimize use of resources.

## 3.0 Applicable Legislation

Undersea walk does not warrant a Preliminary Environmental Report (PER) Approval or an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Licence.

### Note:

- 1) *The prospective developer shall ensure compliance with all provisions as per the Tourism Authority Act 2006, such as licensing of tourist enterprise businesses, registration/licensing of skippers, provision of appropriate safety equipment amongst others. He/she should also comply with the existing guideline for helmet diving/undersea walk, as prepared by the Tourism Authority.*
- 2) *According to Part III of the Fisheries and Marine Resources (Marine Protected Areas<sup>1</sup>) Regulations 2007, the prospective developer shall not build or place any structure (dam, jetty, pier and dock among others) in a marine protected area<sup>1</sup> unless he holds the required permits.*

## 4.0 Siting of activity

- (i) The proposed site and the defined trails for undersea walk/helmet diving should have the prior approval of the Ministry of Ocean Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping.
- (ii) The exact GPS coordinates of the platform should be submitted to the Ministry of Ocean Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping.
- (iii) The sites for carrying out undersea walk/helmet diving should be in accordance to the requirements specified in the “*Guidelines for helmet diving/undersea walk*”, prepared by the Tourism Authority.
- (iv) The site selected should be outside a marine protected area.

## 5.0 Mitigation of Environmental Impacts

### 5.1 Disturbance to marine life

The installation of undersea walk platform, boating activities and helmet diving may affect the water turbidity and cause damage to corals and the seabed ecosystem. Marine life can also be disturbed either when helmet divers get too close, make too much noise or cause disturbance while carrying out undersea

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<sup>1</sup> The Marine Protected Areas in Mauritius are Blue Bay Marine Park, Balaclava Marine Park, Poste Lafayette Fishing Reserve, Poudre d’Or Fishing Reserve, Trou d’Eau Douce Fishing Reserve, Port Louis Fishing Reserve, Grand Port Mahebourg Fishing Reserve and Riviere Noire Fishing Reserve.

walk. Necessary precautions should be taken by the operators, monitors and helmet divers to ensure that the marine ecosystem is not adversely impacted.

Mitigating measures include:

- The promoter should carry out baseline study prior to start operating and shall monitor the site and submit report on the state of the marine environment on a quarterly basis to the Ministry of Ocean Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping.
- Operators and monitors should sensitize and provide clear instructions to helmet divers on necessary precautions to be taken to minimize disturbance to marine life.
- Monitors should ensure that divers keep a reasonable distance away from marine species so as not to disrupt their natural habitats.
- No coral should be removed or broken or translocated or introduced.
- No marine organism should be removed from the site.
- No marine organism, dead or alive, should be imported to site.
- Fish feeding should not be allowed.
- The hose used for supply of breathing air should not damage corals and other marine animals.
- The platform for undersea walk activities should be anchored on sandy bottom devoid of corals, seagrass bed and seaweed.
- The anchored platform should not be displaced.
- The platform should be cleaned/ maintained / serviced out of the lagoon at a setback distance of more than 100 m from the High Water Mark.

## 5.2 Solid waste Management

During boat transfers to the undersea walk platform, domestic solid wastes such as food wastes, disposable containers/cutlery, PET bottles and packaging wastes are generated by helmet divers.

Mitigating measures include:

- Domestic solid wastes from boats shall be collected in bins and disposed of on land as per the recommendations and satisfaction of the Local Authority.
- No wastes should be dumped at sea.

## 5.3 Other mitigating measures

- Provision for adequate parking for helmet divers.
- Undersea walk/helmet diving activities should strictly be within normal working hours (8.00 a.m to 17.30 p.m) as per the “Guidelines for helmet diving/undersea walk”, prepared by the Tourism Authority.

## 5.4 Eco-friendly Measures and Sustainability

Undersea walk operators should be environmentally conscious and adopt eco-friendly measures and technologies such as rain water harvesting for the cleaning of boats and other facilities.

- Note:** - 1. *Ministries and authorities responsible for tourism and fisheries as well as the Commissioner of Police (National Coast Guard) need to be consulted prior to embarking on the project.*
2. *Fire clearance from the Mauritius Fire and Rescue Service is required as regard to the safe storage of the oxygen cylinders.*

Copy of this guideline is available at the Department of Environment and on the website of the Ministry at <http://environment.govmu.org> and the government's portal at <http://www.govmu.org>