

# BRITISH DIVERS MARINE LIFE RESCUE VOLUNTEER CODE OF CONDUCT



## Aims

We are a network of trained voluntary Marine Mammal Medics who respond to call outs from the general public, HM Coastguard, Police, RSPCA and Scottish SPCA. We are the primary marine animal rescue organisation in the UK and are not only called upon by other emergency services, but also train their staff. BDMLR is a registered charity and our volunteer rescue teams are on call 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

## Charity

BDMLR is a registered charity, 803438 in England and Wales, and SC039304 in Scotland.

## Health and Safety

All members of BDMLR are responsible for their own safety. You should not undertake any task you have not been trained to do or do not feel confident about. Medics should conduct a dynamic risk assessment before carrying out any rescue. Medics should always remember to avoid the danger areas of the animals they are in contact with, as detailed during the BDMLR Marine Mammal Medic training and in the Marine Mammal Medic Handbook.

## General Volunteer Conduct

BDMLR expects its volunteers to conduct themselves in a professional and courteous manner, which extends to all interactions within the BDMLR community, third-party organisations and members of the public. All BDMLR volunteers should only attend rescues when suitably fit to do so. **Never** attend any BDMLR callout or event if you are unwell, have an injury or are under the influence of alcohol or drugs (legal and/or illegal) or in any state that will impair your judgement and/or ability to follow instructions.

BDMLR aims to provide a healthy volunteering culture where everyone is respected, welcomed and included, and is free of discrimination, harassment, and intimidation for any reason. BDMLR operates a zero-tolerance approach to discrimination and harassment regardless of ethnicity, age, sex, sexual orientation, nationality, religion or belief. This includes harassment in person, online (social media, blogs, forums, messaging apps etc) and via text or email.

BDMLR considers unacceptable behaviour as, but not limited to:

- Any threatening behaviour including: shouting, aggression spreading malicious rumours etc
- Using racial, sexual orientation or ethnic slurs, insults or jokes
- Using threats, mocking, belittling, mimicking, slurs, questions, jokes, statements, derogatory comments or gestures offensive to an individual's character
- Promoting negative stereotypes relating to an individual
- Treating a volunteer less favourably or limiting opportunities
- Declaring or threatening to, what's commonly referred to as 'outing' someone's sexuality or religion against their will
- Deliberate and unwarranted exclusion from rescues and rehabilitation work without due cause
- Using words, actions, and or behaviours to create an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating, or offensive environment for an individual
- Using suggestive or overly personal comments, written or verbally about an individual's physical appearance
- Suggesting or questioning an individual's sexual preferences or personal conduct.

To create and maintain a respectful culture BDMLR will remove individuals found to be acting in a manner unbecoming a BDMLR Medic or representative.

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## Accepting instructions and decisions

At an incident, the most senior experienced BDMLR Marine Mammal Medic will probably take control. This is not always the case, and not necessarily the longest serving Medic, and will be decided upon by the Rescue Coordinator (either Head Office [HO] or Out of Hours [OOH] Coordinator). This senior Medic is responsible for the safety of the animal(s) and the safety of volunteers. This senior Medic will liaise with HO or the OOH coordinator and possibly a veterinary consultant to determine the optimum course of action in the best interests of the animal(s) and Medics at the scene. No other Medic will question any decisions, but if they have a question, comment or suggestion they are encouraged to make them, but **only** at an appropriate time and away from the public and press. All Medics, including senior Medics and coordinators, must remember the ultimate decision by Head Office, Out of Hours Coordinator or veterinary consultant is final. All Medics must also adhere to ALL instructions given by emergency agencies such as HM Coastguard, Fire and Rescue or Police and any instructions or advice must not be challenged.

In the training, we stress Medics should always defer to people more experienced than them. In some instances, this person may not be from BDMLR so remember we work closely with many other organisations and it is vital their input is recognised.

## Contact

BDMLR now uses its Cardskipper app for all emergency callouts. It is your responsibility to ensure your app is operating correctly and notifications are set up correctly. BDMLR understands smartphones are complex devices and notification settings are not always straightforward and are happy to help with settings, but ultimately it is your device, and you should know how it operates. You should ensure BDMLR has your correct email address and phone number and if your phone receives an operating system update it is wise to double check all settings are retained as some updates do cause settings to change.

Medics should not go to an incident without having confirmed with the rescue coordinator they are able to attend. They must also confirm when they arrive and when they have left the scene. This is vital to ensure we are aware of where you are and that you do not turn up at a rescue that may have been called off or ended. Medics should also not leave voicemails or text messages relating to a rescue as these are often not picked up.

If a Medic is alerted to an incident by someone other than BDMLR, they must advise BDMLR Head Office or Out of Hours Coordinator before attending. If you do not, then you are not covered by the BDMLR insurance and we will not be able to advise you of developments or offer assistance and you will be operating outside BDMLR's framework and could become personally liable for any legal proceedings arising from that rescue.

Any injuries to yourself or others that require medical assistance must be detailed in a written BDMLR Accident Form which is available for download from the BDMLR website. It should then be sent to the [accident@bdmlr.org.uk](mailto:accident@bdmlr.org.uk).

## Vehicle use

Incident response and relays of animals do **NOT** give Medics any special dispensation from road traffic laws and all medics **MUST** adhere to speed limits, driving laws and parking restrictions. BDMLR Medics are not permitted to display emergency vehicle lighting and drive in a manner that puts other road users in danger. BDMLR or other vehicle signage does not provide any legal protection and BDMLR will accept no responsibility for any convictions and fines you may receive.

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## Duty of Care

It is essential that all Medics understand that under the Animal Welfare Act it is a legal requirement they have a duty of care towards any marine mammal they attend as 'temporary care'. They should always aim to administer basic first aid to alleviate or reduce any suffering and/or distress when feasible in line with BDMLR guidance.

## Complaints Procedure

Please see separate document on the BDMLR Website entitled [Complaints Procedure](#).

## Disturbance

Marine mammals are sensitive to disturbance and noise. Therefore, noise, disturbance and contact must be kept to a minimum, to reduce stress. All dogs must be kept under control, preferably on a lead and kept well away from any marine mammal. Tactfully reminding owners that the animal we are rescuing may carry a disease that could be passed to another mammal (zoonotic disease) will often help here. If there are problems with members of the public, finding someone in a recognisable uniform to help with control is advised and Medics are not advised to enter into any action with the public that may escalate.

Also note, Medics should **not** bring dogs to rescues or have them in the vehicle when transporting seals to another area or to a rehabilitation facility or as part of a relay.

## Manual Lifting

Care should be taken while lifting heavy objects as per BDMLR training and, if possible, it should not be attempted without assistance. Medics can find lifting guidelines in the current Marine Mammal Medic Handbook too.

## Personal Protection Equipment

All personnel must be wearing appropriate PPE for the incident they attend. Onshore rescues require suitable clothing (tough trousers, tops and footwear) for weather conditions and rugged terrain. A dry suit (preferably) or a well-fitting wet suit (if appropriate for the weather conditions) and suitable footwear must be worn if entering the water. No personnel will enter the water without wearing a life jacket or buoyancy aid. It is essential that all personnel wear gloves while touching any equipment or any marine mammal. Certain diving gloves or those with rough faces should **not** be used on animals – they should either be replaced with vinyl or rubber gloves, or covered with the same. Personnel must wear face masks when working with any live cetaceans and follow current BDMLR PPE guidelines.

## Personal Belongings

All personnel are responsible for all their own personal belongings, this includes jewellery (which will need to be removed before participating in a rescue), mobile phones, cameras, etc. Claims against BDMLR for damage or loss of personal equipment, especially through negligence, will not be accepted.

## Food and Drink

No personnel shall be allowed to eat or drink in the vicinity of any marine animal. Designated eating areas will be allocated somewhere away from the beach for more involved, longer, rescues. For your own safety you should always clean your hands with anti-bacterial cleanser before handling food or drink and never eat or drink while wearing gloves that may have been contaminated. As mentioned above **NEVER** consume alcohol/drugs or any substance when attending a BDMLR callout that may impact your judgement, decision making and/or physical abilities in any way.

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## **Euthanasia**

Medics must understand and accept that unfortunately it is not always possible to save all marine mammals and that euthanasia is sometimes the only humane option. Euthanasia will only be carried out by a qualified vet if it is drug induced euthanasia, or if it is by shooting then will only be carried out by a licensed firearms user. This will only be actioned following veterinary advice.

## **Marine Mammal Medic Handbook**

It is advisable to take a copy of the handbook with you to rescues, both for your own reference and for an attending vet. You should also remember to record details on the MARC recording sheet for cetaceans and the Seal Assessment sheet for later reference. It is suggested that you photocopy these, along with the Seal Bites Letter, for use at a rescue rather than writing directly in the Handbook. All of the assessment sheets and letters are available for downloading from the website.

## **Fundraising**

Any planned fundraising activity must be approved by BDMLR Head Office prior to being made public. The location of all collection boxes/cans must be recorded and a list provided upon request. These boxes/cans remain the property of BDMLR and should be checked at least monthly. All funds raised must be paid in full to BDMLR within 30 days of collection. Any grant or funding applications need to be checked and authorized by BDMLR Head Office.

## **Use of Public Forums/Facebook/Twitter/Whatsapp etc.**

While BDMLR encourages people to use social media platforms to spread the good word of the work we undertake, no volunteers should use these to question what went on during a callout or decisions that were made. They should also not be used in a slanderous nature towards other organisations or individuals or areas within BDMLR and should not be used as a stage for arguing back and forth between individuals. Only positive comments should be entered on a public site and any concerns or questions should be shared by e-mail or telephone conversations with BDMLR representatives. This is particularly important if you have a valid concern or even general query – the people who have the correct answers aren't always watching Facebook or forums.

Group chats about BDMLR activities [using applications such as Whatsapp/Facebook messenger and Snapchat etc] should be set up and administered by BDMLR management only. You are not permitted to set up private groups and discuss BDMLR activities and the General Volunteer Conduct above applies to all chat groups and private messages.

## **General media contact**

Medics must consult with BDMLR Head Office or the Out of Hours Coordinator regarding any media interest in BDMLR activities (rescues, fundraising etc), to ensure a suitable and accurate statement can be provided. Medics are not to publicise ongoing rescues by any means, as it may draw unnecessary attention which could negatively impact the situation.

*This Code of Conduct was updated on 17/01/2025*

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