

## INTERIM VISITORS' MINIMUM IMPACT CODE FOR HEARD ISLAND

The Australian Antarctic Division is responsible for the management of the Territory of Heard Island and McDonald Islands. The primary purpose of management is to preserve and manage the Territory so as to protect the environment and indigenous wildlife of the Territory.

This code of conduct has been developed to give guidance on effective ways of minimising the impact of visitors on the Territory, while allowing permitted activities to proceed. The code should be read in conjunction with the requirements of the plan of management or other relevant documents.

### **Quarantine**

One of the principal values of the islands of the Territory is the absence of introduced species. Introductions of exotic species have seriously degraded the environmental quality of other subantarctic islands and have compromised their scientific value. In order to maintain the current pest-free status of Heard Island visitors must ensure that all personal effects and equipment are free from potential contaminants such as seeds and insects. This can be achieved by:

- ensuring that footwear is scrubbed clean;
- vacuuming clothing (especially pockets and cuffs); and
- checking and cleaning other equipment that is taken ashore (such as camera bags, tripods and all items which come in contact with the ground).

Landings usually occur at either the Atlas Cove/Corinthian Bay area or in the Spit Bay area. Use of these sites localises the impacts of the landings.

### **Food products**

Some food products present a potential threat to the ecology of the islands as they may harbour pests or diseases. These threats include:

- avian diseases (such as Newcastle disease) which can be carried in poultry products; and
- insects, insect eggs, or larvae (such as diamond-backed moth) carried in fresh fruit and vegetables.

As a result no poultry products, fresh fruit or vegetables may be taken ashore without a specific permit to do so.

### **Waste disposal**

Inappropriate rubbish disposal may endanger the wildlife and compromise the experience of visitors to the Island. Unless otherwise permitted, all rubbish must be removed from the Territory. As there are no toilet facilities ashore short term visitors are advised to use toilets on the ship prior to landing. Human wastes generated on the Island should be disposed of below the high water mark.

### **Visitor activities**

Heard Island is the subject of scientific studies in the fields of biology, geology, meteorology, archaeology etc. Visitors must not interfere with wildlife, rocks, scientific apparatus, or the remains of previous human occupations unless permitted to do so.

There are no defined walking tracks or routes. In the vicinity of the landing areas there are extensive vegetation communities which are vulnerable to disturbance. As well, the Territory is one of the key breeding areas for burrowing petrels. Both the vegetation communities and the bird nesting areas are extremely vulnerable to disturbance. Where possible visitors should walk on vegetation - free areas and away from the burrowing petrels.

### **Movement around wildlife**

The apparent tameness of the wildlife is a somewhat superficial impression and scientific studies have shown that animals may be under stress even when they show no obvious reactions to human presence.

Unless otherwise specified in a permit it is important to observe the following behaviour around wildlife concentrations:

- give all animals the right of way - wild animals, particularly seals, are extremely sensitive to movement and a person's height above the ground in relation to their size;
- approach no closer than five metres to all wildlife - remember that the subantarctic summer is the animals' time for courting, mating, nesting and rearing young, leaving them vulnerable to predators. In addition, disturbance has the potential to cause young animals to be abandoned;
- do not touch any wildlife - such action can jeopardise the bond between parent and off-spring;
- avoid surrounding any animal during viewing - it is important not to cause animals undue stress or alter their natural behaviour;
- keep noise to a minimum - disturbance of nesting seabirds can lead to exposure of eggs to cold, sunlight and predators; and
- feeding of wildlife is not permitted.

