
Guidelines on the Feeding of Wildlife within the Turneffe Atoll Marine Reserve (TAMR)

1. Legal and Policy Basis

These Guidelines are issued in accordance with the **Fisheries Resources Act, 2020** and the **Turneffe Atoll Marine Reserve (TAMR) Statutory Instruments**, which mandate the conservation, protection, and sustainable use of marine resources and ecosystems within Belize’s marine reserves.

They are intended to support enforcement, promote public safety, and preserve the ecological integrity of the Turneffe Atoll Marine Reserve.

2. General Prohibition

The intentional feeding or chumming of wildlife within TAMR is strictly prohibited.

No person shall feed, attempt to feed, or chum wildlife—whether on land, from a vessel, or in the water.

This prohibition applies to all wildlife, including but not limited to:

- Fish
- Sharks and rays
- Turtles
- Crocodiles
- Any other marine or coastal species

3. Definition of Feeding and Chumming

For the purposes of these Guidelines:

“Feeding” or “chumming” means the deliberate introduction, placement, or release of:

- Food or organic matter
- Animal-derived material (including blood, offal, or bait)
- Any natural or artificial attractant

into the marine or coastal environment for the purpose of:

- Attracting or aggregating wildlife
- Facilitating interaction or observation
- Altering wildlife behavior for non-fishing purposes

This definition applies whether the action is direct or indirect.

Exception:

This provision does not apply to the lawful use of bait associated with permitted fishing activities conducted in accordance with applicable laws and regulations.

4. Prohibited Activities

Without limiting the general prohibition, the following activities are expressly prohibited within TAMR:

- Feeding or attempting to feed wildlife by hand or otherwise
- Introducing attractants into the water to draw wildlife closer to persons or vessels
- Conducting or facilitating shark or wildlife feeding dives or tours
- Bringing visitors to locations for the purpose of wildlife feeding or chumming
- Encouraging, promoting, or advertising wildlife feeding experiences

5. Responsibilities of Tour Operators and Visitors

All tour operators, guides, and vessel operators shall:

- Refrain from engaging in or facilitating any wildlife feeding or chumming activities
- Ensure that guests are informed of and comply with these Guidelines
- Avoid any practices that may condition wildlife to associate humans with food

Visitors are similarly required to comply with these Guidelines at all times while within TAMR.

6. Specific High-Risk Contexts

The practice of feeding or chumming is particularly harmful and strictly prohibited in the following contexts:

- During snorkeling or diving activities
- While swimming or wading
- In nearshore areas, especially adjacent to beaches
- From vessels operating in reef, lagoon, or channel areas

7. Rationale

These Guidelines are based on well-established ecological and safety concerns, including:

- **Public Safety Risks:** Increased likelihood of aggressive or unpredictable wildlife behavior
- **Behavioral Alteration:** Disruption of natural feeding patterns and ecosystem dynamics
- **Wildlife Conditioning:** Increased dependency on human-provided food and loss of natural foraging behavior
- **Ecosystem Impacts:** Artificial aggregation of species and imbalance in predator-prey relationships

8. Research Exception

Scientific research involving the use of bait or attractants may be permitted **only under a valid research permit** issued by the Fisheries Department or other relevant authority.

All approved research activities must:

- Follow established scientific protocols
- Minimize ecological disturbance
- Mitigate risks to public safety
- Be conducted under strict supervision and compliance conditions

9. Compliance and Enforcement

Non-compliance with these Guidelines may constitute an offense under the Fisheries Resources Act and applicable TAMR regulations and may result in:

- Fines or penalties
- Suspension or revocation of licenses or permits
- Removal from the Marine Reserve
- Other enforcement actions as prescribed by law

10. Alignment with Conservation Objectives

These Guidelines directly support the management objectives of TAMR by:

- Protecting ecological processes
- Maintaining natural wildlife behavior
- Safeguarding visitor experiences
- Upholding Belize's commitments to marine conservation and sustainable tourism