



**Advisory Note 4**  
**Snorkel Trail Guidelines**

*Prepared by Outdoor Recreation NI on behalf of the Blueway Partnership*

## Snorkel Trail Guidelines

The following are suggested criteria for a coastal snorkel trail, as provided by Comhairle Fo-Thuinn (CFT), also known as the Irish Underwater Council. These guidelines assist in the promotion of snorkelling trails amongst all participants; however, the focus for Blueways should be Grade One Trails.

These guidelines assume that best use will be made of existing infrastructure, rather than incurring significant expense in new-build or costly investment.

### Snorkelling Trail Grades

The following are guidelines regarding the potential grading of a snorkelling trail:

GRADE	LENGTH	DEPTH	CONDITIONS	LEVEL
Grade One	Less than 1km	Less than 2 Metres	No Current	Beginner
Grade Two	Less than 3km	Between 2-5 Metres	Some movement	Intermediate
Grade Three	More than 3km	Greater than 5 Metres	Tidal Currents	Advanced

### Access and Egress

- Entry and exit to and from the water should be possible at all stages of the tide, either via steps, a slip or across a beach.
- Entry and exit to and from the water should also be possible at all stages of water flow conditions for river or lake snorkels.
- Avoid using entry and exit points that pass over seaweed covered rocks.
- If a working pier is being used, entry and exit should be well away from the working area of the pier or harbour.
- Avoid any outfalls where there is a possibility of contaminated water is entering the watercourse.

### Design and Length

- Because snorkelling attracts mixed age groups, ensure that the trail is suitable for all levels of experience in the first instance, or if possible identify shorter routes for those less experienced.
- Ideally the trail should be circular – thus avoiding long walks in wetsuits. However linear ‘out-and-back’ trails, such as snorkelling along the coast to a point and back, or up to a marker buoy and back, are also feasible. The advertised trail length of these types of linear trails must include both the out and back elements.
- Because snorkels involve complete emersion, the time spent snorkelling will be very much dependent on temperature conditions. It is best to plan for snorkels that last no longer than 45 minutes.
- The typical trail should be no longer than 1km.
- Longer snorkelling opportunities can be identified for more experienced snorkelers, and advice on the appropriateness of these routes should be sought from CFT.
- Exit points along the trail should be clearly identified, both on promotional material, and through the use of appropriate trail signage.

- The trail should avoid crossing deep water areas (deeper than 2 metres), and areas prone to tidal movement.
- Ideally there should be a good range of marine life observable along the trail.
- Try to identify entry and exit points that have interesting features close by, this is to keep up interest while getting ready.
- Identify and describe the main plants and animals that are likely to be seen along the snorkel in supporting information materials.

### **General**

- If the trail makes its way through and around islands and islets, consider preparing a simple sketch map to show the main topographical features along the route.
- Where the trail is being developed for a festival or a similar event, consider buoying-off the trail to mark the way.
- Each snorkel trail will require a risk assessment.

### **Legislation**

- Ensure that all entry and exit points are on public land.
- Ensure that snorkel trails are not close to or over sites that are protected for archaeological reasons, or sites that require a license to explore.

### **Parking**

- All trails should have ample parking on public space at the trailhead. Ideally, this should be a public car park or a pier, with public toilet facilities.