

MCRP Snorkelling Program - Standard Briefing Notes



About Snorkelling with MCRP Inc

For safety reasons we take a systematic approach to our snorkelling events.

Notice

Each week, usually on Wednesday, we will email members about the details of the next Saturday's snorkel – place, expected conditions, etc. This will also be posted on the website.

Before the snorkel

Snorkelling requires an appropriate level of fitness and experience. All MCRP Snorkelling participants must sign the MCRP Activity Participation Form which includes declarations that they are medically fit, and competent snorkelers. Consult your doctor if you have any doubts about your fitness to snorkel. If you have a medical condition which we should be aware of e.g. epilepsy, diabetes please let the snorkel leader know on a confidential basis.

You are also required to sign the attendance sheet which will be available before the briefing.

Gear

You will need mask, fins, snorkel, and a wetsuit. A hood and gloves are also recommended. Talk to fellow MCRP members about gear if you are considering buying. Ask your guides or leader on the day if you have any problems with your gear.

Please check your gear before you attend for wear and tear. Snorkel gear may deteriorate with age and exposure to sunlight.

In summer you will need sunscreen for exposed areas of skin.

Conditions

We will cancel the snorkel if the wind or water quality is unsuitable. You can check weather conditions beforehand at the website links at:

www.marinecare.org.au/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=11&Itemid=155

The Buddy System

We require you to 'buddy up' by arranging a buddy to snorkel with you. This is for safety – it is not easy to keep track of fellow snorkelers and if you only have to look out for one it is much safer. Don't be shy, if you

don't know anyone to buddy with ask loudly and someone will join you, or tell the leader or a guide (who will be wearing yellow swimming caps) and they will help.

This year we have introduced a requirement for buddies to sign a form to indicate who they are buddies with, and recording them entering and leaving the water. Please make sure you and your buddy sign this form.

Buddies are responsible for keeping close contact with each other, so they can help each other in an emergency. If one buddy needs to end the snorkel early, the other must come to shore as well.

It will assist in you keeping track of your buddy if you note a distinguishing feature e.g. yellow fins; blue slash on wetsuit, etc.

Briefing

Before we enter the water the leader will give a briefing about where we go and the route to be followed, safety messages and reports about the expected conditions. It is important for your safety that you attend and listen to this briefing and make sure you understand what has been said.

In the water

Enter over sand to avoid damage to sea grasses, etc. Then wade out to snorkelling depth and then put your fins on. The marine environment is sensitive – please ensure that you have minimal contact with reefs and algal/invertebrate cover. Avoid disturbing growth on rocks or the bottom.

If you are diving below the surface, you should operate on a one – up, one down system, i.e. if you are diving your buddy stays on the surface to watch you and vice versa.

Hand signals are used under water. A ring made with the thumb and first finger means OK. If you are given this signal respond with the same if you are OK. A horizontal hand with palm down rocking back and forth means you are not OK. Hugging yourself means you are cold. Winding your hand in a circle means you are winding up the snorkel and going back.

Reefs can have sharp edges and sharp shells on them – be careful! Some marine animals can inflict injuries such as spiking from urchins. Do not touch anything if you do not know what it is and even if you do be careful. Don't pick up an empty can or bottle as a blue ring octopus (highly venomous!) may live in it.

If you sustain an injury which requires immediate attention, inform a leader or guide and your buddy. If it can wait until you return to shore, let someone know if you require treatment. First aid kits are available.

Cold, tired, cramped or otherwise in difficulties

If you are in difficulties of any sort, let your buddy know. If you are in serious difficulty, let your buddy and the leader or a guide know immediately. We use a float which can keep you afloat if necessary.

If you are cold let your buddy know that you want to leave the water. Both will have to leave. If practical, let the guide or leader know you are leaving. Make sure you sign in when you leave the water.

If you tire, rest. If you need to return to shore, do so with your buddy (sign in).

A calf cramp can often be relieved by holding the end of the fin and pulling the foot up. If still discomforted, return to shore with your buddy (sign in). Changing your swimming style to 'peddling', can also often remove cramp and keep you moving.

Shallow water blackout

It is theoretically possible that snorkelers who dive below the surface may suffer shallow water blackout, which in essence means they faint under water (MCRP has never encountered this in practice).

It is caused by hyperventilation, i.e. too much deep and frequent breathing. It can be avoided by:

1. Before diving, relax and breathe absolutely normally. Do not take a series of deep breaths – this will not increase your capacity to stay under, even if it feels like it does.
2. If excited or anxious about the dive, take extra care to remain calm and breathe naturally.
3. When the urge to breathe comes on near the end of the dive, immediately surface so you have access to air.
4. Rest and breathe normally if diving frequently.