**** **Seabirds-and-Seals – The Noss Boat** ****

**Environmental & Sustainability Policy 2023**

Seabirds-and-Seals is a well-established Shetland based marine wildlife and photography boat tour business which plays an important role in the Shetland Tourism sector and a job we do with great passion. Ever since the early days of Seabirds and Seals, we have been committed to operating our tours in a responsible manner. Our business is wildlife tourism and run by passionate nature-lovers for those with an appreciation of the natural world. We have a passion for conservation and the need to ensure the long-term protection of species and habitats. We advocate working with local communities and leaving a positive impact on the destinations we visit and this has always been a fundamental part of our business. We are committed to providing a good quality of service, whilst minimising the environmental impact of our activities. As part of our commitment we are ‘Green Tourism’ Accredited – our journey towards sustainability. We have a strong business ethos and do everything we possibly can to be eco-friendly and environmentally aware. Our aim is to create sustainable tourism by respecting the local sea and shore-based environment. We adhere to high standards of economic, environmental and social policy and practice in our interactions with clients, staff, core suppliers and partners, as well as the wider social and ecological environment. We look after our clients to the best of our ability and supporting them on the vessel in personnel safety and creating a respect for the marine environment. Our onboard skills training, aims to develop confidence and competence and we have extensive briefing of our safety and environmental procedures to our crew. Our ‘Green Tourism’ contact for our business is Co-Owner Marie Leask, she is responsible for monitoring our green policies/action plans, attending online seminars and suggesting ways in which we can improve to minimise our environmental impact. Please get in touch if you would like to see our Green action plan or with any queries at all through the website contact page, we also appreciate feedback on our environmental friendly practices.

Our trips start/finish close to the bus station, this makes it easy for our guests to travel to our departure location in Lerwick by public transport. We encourage this wherever possible, with links to public transport provided on our website. Our vessel boarding and disembarkation times, where possible, tie in with the bus timetables as well as links to local bike hire shops and with electric vehicles becoming increasing on the island, we have a link on our website to where the various charging points are on the island.

We deliver our tours with great knowledge and most importantly with great passion – all crew members are Shetland born and bred, with a lifetime knowledge of the sea, nature, history and local heritage around us, each have their own unique speciality. Our crews are hand-picked and all who sail with us are committed to environmental sustainability which is a major criterion in joining our team. In fact, often they come up with new ideas on how we can further reduce our impact. Our co-owner Marie has a qualification through Napier University on Tourism Leadership/Management – leading the way for Shetland Tourism. Our cruise itineraries take in the coastline and islands of Bressay and Noss National Nature Reserve. We provide fun, educational and engaging commentary with great enthusiasm to suit all interests and ages. Each passenger has their own headset so they don’t miss out on our great knowledge of all the different species we point out along the way, from seabirds to cetaceans, our rich marine environment, biodiversity, geology, history and local heritage, sharing many stories along the way. Due to our vessels huge platform and always minimum two crew on each tour, there is always time for the social aspect, to ensure everyone is having a great time and being well look after. On our Supreme 3-hour tours, we are able to share our great knowledge on the underwater world. We provide educational on-board activities for our younger sailors, relating to the wildlife, geology and local history that we encounter on our tours. Always an expert trained guide on all our tours, delivering our message about the importance of protecting our environment and making memories that will hopefully last forever.

As a local Wildlife Tourism business with 30 years of experience, we continue to lead the way for responsible boat-based ecotourism. At all times we follow the Nature Scot Marine Wildlife watching code and we are also WiSe Accredited operators, proudly adhering to strict protocols to minimize disturbance to marine wildlife. We have membership with National conservation organisations and work annual with local organisations. We currently have membership with RSPB and Marine Conservation Society. We promote both organisations on our vessel through leaflets and we promote pin badges provided through RSPB which has a suggested donation, we raised a staggering £1208 for them throughout our 2022 season, receiving a certificate of thanks. As well as our scheduled tours, we support SOTEAGE(Shetland Oil Terminal Environmental Advisory Group) by carrying out their seabird monitory surveys around Shetland waters. We also work in collaboration with NaturesScot to assist them with their annual seal surveys, as well as other boat-based monitoring/activities. We are also involved with ‘The Seawatch Foundation’ in their Orca Watch programme – the aim of Orca Watch is to collect as much data as possible on the whales, dolphins, porpoises in the waters around Caithness and North Sutherland, Orkney and Shetland. There is a local WhatsApp group called Shetland Cetecean Sightings and Shetland Orca Sightings on social media. Our guests on our scheduled tours love the sociable and informal way they gain wildlife knowledge, which then fires their own passion for protecting the environment. They like getting involved and help with cetacean sighting that are reported to the local WhatsApp group and social media, then onto Orca Watch, providing statistical information for their vital work. We have noticed that our guests are also very interested in protecting the environment and are happy to contribute suggestions and receive information. On all our tours we encourage responsible and sustainable tourism which outlines how our passengers can support the environment whilst visiting the area as well as our own commitments.

We have a refreshments stop on each of our tours with no plastic cutlery, plates or staws and we have a recycling system in place onboard the vessel as we strongly support this. We support our local community by buying supplies locally for our refreshments stop on each tour and in particular ‘Fairtrade’. All food and drink onboard is sourced locally to keep the carbon footprint to a minimum and also because no finer provisions can be found elsewhere. We are very fortunate to have a wide variety of wonderful produce available. We plan, budget and buy according to avoid waste, we try to avoid buying products with excessive plastic packaging. We advise on our website that we cater for dietary requirements and always carry gluten free provisions, but when booking to let us know of any dietary requirement and we will be sure to accommodate and source locally. On our website we encourage our guests to take along reusable water bottles to try and veer away from plastic and advise that we also have ones available for sale with our own branding. During our refreshments stop, we switch the engines off and everyone finds this stop a great highlight as it still offers plenty of wildlife/photography opportunities, as well as the social aspect and we continue to share stories on all that surrounds us. We find this stop gives our passengers the opportunity to ask as many questions as they wish, they may ask about local produce, places to visit etc. We are very strongly committed to the culture and heritage of our local communities. Our cruise itineraries take in the coastline and islands of Bressay & the famous Noss National Nature Reserve. We are committed to the local communities which we engage with, their way of life, culture and heritage, which adds enormously to the positive experience our guests have whilst on our tours. We are very much committed to working with local businesses and communities to ensure we bring benefits which helps the local economy. We promote this well by encouraging our guests to visit our local cafes/restaurants, this promotes the use of fresh and local ingredients. We advise on how to get about the island, directing them to bike hire shops, public transport and show them on the map, the different electric charging points on the island as this is becoming ever more popular with visitors to our beautiful island. We share with them about the ‘local what’s on’ for festivals etc, we like for our guests to be able to experience a true flavour of the area and an opportunity to meet the locals.

We are an ever growing business and work in collaboration with many other wildlife/photography tour businesses and holiday operators from all over the globe, as well as local within those same categories who all share our vales on being environmentally aware. We also have a strong belief in working together and supporting local businesses, charities and organisations. For example, we work in collaboration with two local businesses where our customers can experience the use of fresh/local produce and everyone who joins our tours, receives a 20% token to use at either of those establishments. We make use of the services of the local marina, shops, guides and services such as chandleries etc. We work in collaboration with a local organisation called ‘Ability Shetland’ – our vessel is wheelchair accessible onto the boat and ideal boat for anyone with mobility issues. We partner with local organisation ‘Ability Shetland’, where we can organise a wheelchair or other support from them to make a trip with us as comfortable as possible, for anyone who requires any mobility aids. We also have a published accessibility guide on our website – ensuring everyone has the opportunity to experience nature. We have a strong belief that nobody should be discriminated against, for which we have an Equality, Diversity and Inclusivity policy in place.

We are heavily involved with community clean ups – carrying out beach cleaning known locally as ‘Da Voar Redd Up’ and in our local area where we stay and promote this through our different social media channels. Whilst at sea, we do sometimes encounter plastic, netting, ropes and any other floating rubbish. We have had to free gannets who can easily become tangled in bits of rope.

As most of our bookings takes place online and we depend on word of mouth, we have very little paper waste and we always recycle what we do use, both when on the vessel and whilst at home, which is also our based office where we do all our administrative duties. At home we minimise the amount of energy we use and always looking at energy saving methods, we use LED lights both at home and on the vessel. As our tours take place during daylight hours, there is no need to have the lights switched on inside the cabin.

As part of our sustainability journey and our green action plan, we will be calculating and offsetting our carbon footprint. A Carbon Footprint calculator created by CO2balance.com will work out how energy efficient you are in terms of carbon emissions, as well as calculating the footprint of your travels. Monitoring our carbon footprint is a very important factor in helping to understand the impact of our behaviour on global warming.

We have a cleaning and maintenance schedule in place, all engineering done by our skipper who is a qualified marine engineer, very handy when owning a boat tour business. All cleaning materials are environmentally friendly and sustainably sourced where possible. When refuelling or doing any oil changes, we keep onboard at all times, fuel/oil absorbent mats to absorb any accidental spills. We have an accessible toilet on deck level, with eco-friendly antibacterial hand sanitizing gels, recycled toilet paper/towels and we provide biodegradable hygiene bags. We encourage our passengers to use those instead of flushing paper down the toilet – we have a sign advising to use hygiene bags provided to dispose of any waste/sanitary items as in doing so, it blocks the toilet – we always mention this during our safety briefing.

We use our own Seabirds-and-Seals Noss Boat Tours merchandise and products. We have this for sale onboard the vessel and on our online shop. We have our Sustainability Procurement Policy in place to help our business in being committed to ensure that the goods and services that it purchases, is manufactured, delivered, used and disposed of in an environmentally and socially responsible manner. We also ensure that they deliver long term value for money for the company and our customers as a whole. Our products range from eco-friendly clothing to recycled greetings cards and notebooks. We have added to our range of products for sale for our 2023 season following a recent Green Tourism Champion course and now have reusable water bottles. All younger sailors who joins our tours, receive a FREE eco-friendly activity pack.

Our vessel ‘Seabird’ was chosen for our cruises because she boasts magnificent Yanmar engines, which is known worldwide for economy and reliability. The engine is also perfect for economical cruising and good for the marine environment. The engine is ‘keel cooled’ which means there is no overboard discharge from the cooling system and therefore no possibility of heavy metal contaminants entering the ecosystem. Through this careful choice of engines fitted to the boat, it means that while she is capable of achieving 22kts of boat speed, we instruct skippers to run all tours not exceeding 16.5kts. This represents a 25% reduction in boat speed with the corresponding reductions in emissions, noise, wake effects, environmental impact and fuel usage. All fuel usage is recorded in our log book which is kept onboard at all times, so that fuel consumption can be tightly monitored. In our log book we also record number of passengers on each of our scheduled tours/charters, engine hours for fuel/oil changes and water usage. There is masses of space on the deck for stowing passengers own bicycles, this encourages guests to explore the waters we visit and also onshore ‘under their own steam’, thus causing no pollution through their activities. Our season operates from April through to October and during the Winter months our boat is out the water the rest of the time, only relaunched when asked to do survey work. This minimises the impact on fuel and our local wildlife.

**Thank you for reading our Environmental & Sustainable Policy.**

**Policy Reviewed:** 01.02.2023

**Reviewed By:** Marie Leask – Green Tourism Leader

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