



Diving Officer advice note

Diving with a camera

**Diving with a camera is fun,
but brings responsibilities**

Introduction

Underwater photography and videography are fun and rewarding aspects of diving that many members enjoy. However, taking a camera underwater brings with it significant responsibilities. When using a camera divers can become highly focused on the camera to the detriment of safety and of the marine environment. This advice aims to help ensure that members are able to enjoy underwater photography in a safe, responsible and fair way. It sets out some things to consider when using a camera underwater, or when managing dives where divers are using cameras.

**Safety must be the top
priority**

There are no hard and fast rules about diving with a camera. It's often going to be a question of balancing differing priorities. But the guiding principle is that safety must always be the top priority. When diving your first priority is your safety. Your second priority is the safety of your buddy. Your third priority is the safety of the underwater environment. Your photography always comes below these.

Diving with a camera

Wait until you're a Sports Diver

There is a lot to learn when you start diving—many new skills and combinations of skills. Using a camera underwater takes a great deal of focus, and it takes focus away from the core skills that keep you safe. You should ensure that you have fully mastered the basic skills of diving before taking a camera underwater. Ideally you should be a Sports Diver, which is the minimum required qualification for undertaking the BSAC Underwater Photography Skills Development Course.

Consider doing the Buoyancy and Trim Workshop

Good buoyancy is key to good photography. It is also vital for keeping you safe, and preventing damage to the marine environment. It is very easy to lose focus on your buoyancy when using a camera. The better your buoyancy, the better your photographs will be, the safer you will be, and the better protected the marine environment will be. Consider doing the BSAC Buoyancy and Trim Workshop if you plan to use a camera underwater. It is an excellent course that everyone could benefit from—but photographers especially.

Be aware of your environment

The key to being a safe, responsible photographer is to be aware of what's going on around you at all times. It's hard. It's very easy to lose track of your environment when you are focused on framing that perfect shot. But remember, the photograph comes after the safety of you, your buddy and your environment. Know where your buddy is. Know where your fins are, and what you might kick with them. Know what is happening around you. Never get lost in your camera.

Let others in too

Remember you're probably not the only one who'd like to photograph that critter. Don't hog it, let others have a chance.

Follow the Green Fins best practice advice

Green Fins is an international programme that promotes environmentally sensitive diving. They have produced a useful guide, *Environmental Best Practice for Underwater Photographers*, which is attached to this note. It's a good idea to make sure you are familiar with it and follow it at all times.

Buddy pairing considerations

Avoid buddying inexperienced divers with photographers

Like it or not, photographers have a tendency to get lost in their photography. If you have a diver on your trip who is inexperienced and may need looking after, consider carefully whether a photographer is the best choice for their buddy.

Buddying photographers together may not be ideal

Conventional wisdom is to put the photographers together—they like to go slowly and spend a lot of time looking at things. But as a Dive Manager you should consider whether it may be safer to avoid buddy pairs where both buddies are likely to be highly focused on their cameras.

Instructing and cameras

Consider whether carrying a camera is appropriate when instructing

As an instructor, use your judgement to assess your students' needs and weigh these against the risks that using a camera may introduce. Each situation will be different. Make it part of your risk assessment for the dive.



**GREEN
FINS**

ENVIRONMENTAL BEST PRACTICE FOR UNDERWATER PHOTOGRAPHERS

As an operator that cares about our ocean, we ask all underwater photographers to help protect the beautiful underwater ecosystems they visit by following these best practices:

DO

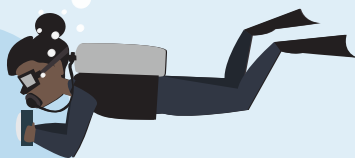
✓ **Secure your equipment (e.g. gauges, regulators etc.):** so they do not trail over reefs and cause damage

✓ **Assess the situation before approaching:** and position yourself and your camera without touching the reef



✓ **Practise buoyancy control, hovering and photography skills:** before diving with the camera. Advanced buoyancy skills prevent damage to the marine environment

✓ **Be still and patient:** so the subject will not be scared away; this will give you the best opportunity for a longer, positive encounter that lets you take a great shot



✓ **Learn to fin slowly backwards:** so you can move away from the reef without causing damage

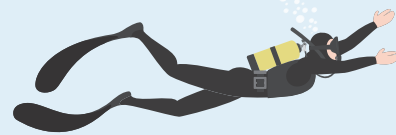
✓ **Be careful with your torch on night dives:** so as not to disturb nocturnal behaviour or wake sleeping fish

✓ **Tip guides who follow best practice:** and let them know you appreciate their care for the environment

DON'T

✗ **Don't fixate over a particular species:** you'll have better dive experiences and guides may feel pressured to move or touch marine life if they think you're only interested in specific creatures

✗ **Don't touch, manipulate or chase marine life:** don't use hands or other equipment (e.g. pointer sticks) to move marine life for a clear shot. Any manipulation can cause severe stress



✗ **Don't touch or hold onto corals:** for support or move or break corals to get a clear shot

✗ **Don't take too many shots of an animal:** limit to taking 5 photos with flash per diver. Excessive use of flash will scare and stress marine life



✗ **Don't invade an animal's space (e.g. cleaning stations):** getting too close will cause your subject to flee. If animals show signs of stress by hiding, changing colour or trying to swim away, move on to another subject

✗ **Don't stir up sediment:** by maintaining neutral buoyancy or gently lowering the tip of your fins down onto the sand if needed

If you notice anyone not following these guidelines, please report the incident to your dive shop manager or contact the Green Fins team at info@greenfins.net