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# Diving Code of Conduct

## Protecting the corals

With requirements and recommendations for the pre-dive briefing

Cold-water coral habitats are among the most vulnerable habitat types in Norwegian waters. They grow very slowly — often only a few millimetres a year — and even minor damage can be irreversible on a timescale of several hundred years. Diving in or near coral areas therefore calls for particular care.

***‘ A good dive leaves no trace. ’***

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*Where the underwater adventure begins*

## Pre-dive briefing (before the dive)

At coral sites internationally, the pre-dive briefing is standard practice and often a formal requirement when diving near vulnerable reefs. This applies to both tropical and cold-water systems, and is strongly recommended in Norwegian waters as well.

**The pre-dive briefing must, as a minimum, cover:**

- Where coral occurrences are located within the dive site
- The prohibition on touching corals and making bottom contact
- The requirement for good buoyancy control and satisfactory trim
- An assessment of current, visibility and depth — and the associated precautions
- Guidelines for photo and video diving near corals
- The procedure for accidental contact or for observing damage

**A pre-dive briefing is particularly recommended:**

- ✔ On a first dive at the site
- ✔ For guided dives, courses, and photo or video dives
- ✔ In areas with strong currents, at greater depth or where conditions are difficult to assess

## Before the dive

- Plan the dive with regard to known coral occurrences and local current conditions
- Check that all equipment is firmly secured and streamlined — avoid dangling hoses and loose accessories
- Agree on the division of roles, communication and abort criteria
- Make sure every diver has precise buoyancy control
- Consider carrying out a buoyancy check at the surface before descending

## During the dive

- Keep a good distance from corals and coral-covered surfaces — use your eyes, not your hands
- Avoid all contact with the seabed, walls or marine growth
- Pay particular attention to fin placement and downward fin strokes
- Adjust the dive continuously as current and visibility change
- Abort the dive immediately if your control is not satisfactory

## Photo and video

Documenting corals is valuable, but requires additional discipline. Proximity to the subject must never come at the expense of environmental considerations.

- Stabilise yourself in the water column — never against the seabed or a wall
- Avoid stirring up sediment, which can smother coral polyps
- Use lighting with care — avoid prolonged illumination of corals
- Prioritise documentation over proximity — use zoom rather than swimming closer

## This is not permitted

- ✖ Touching, moving or damaging living corals or coral structures
- ✖ Standing, sitting or resting on reefs, coral blocks or coral-covered surfaces
- ✖ Attaching lines, ropes, anchors or equipment to the seabed or corals
- ✖ Leaving lead weights, line, tape, batteries or other equipment in coral areas

## If damage is discovered

Corals that are already damaged should not be subjected to further disturbance. Documentation is the most important contribution a diver can make.

- Do not attempt to repair the damage or move fragments
- Document carefully: note the position and depth, and take a photo or video if possible
- Report the observation to the relevant authority, the dive leader or the management body

**Technical basis**

International practice in protected coral areas shows that the pre-dive briefing is among the most effective single measures for reducing diver-caused damage. In cold-water systems this is particularly important, since the low growth rate makes the corals especially vulnerable — a destroyed colony may need several hundred years to re-establish itself.

*Good planning and a clear pre-dive briefing are our most important safeguards.*

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