

# 2022 IMPACT REPORT



## Making Waves

for Dolphins, Whales and their Environment

Research, Education  
and Leadership  
since 1991

**DOLPHIN  
RESEARCH  
INSTITUTE** 

This 2022 Dolphin Research Institute (DRI) Impact Report highlights the extraordinary commitment of our team and volunteers - all committed to our mission to safeguard the health of Victoria's dolphins, whales and their coastal environment.

The report is a first for DRI and reflects a great deal of thinking about the challenges, approaches and impacts needed to achieve change. The following table provides a high-level snapshot representing more than a year of thinking and dozens of pages of detail to guide our work.

## Four impact areas to drive change



### 1. Dolphins & Whales

#### The challenges

Insufficient long-term knowledge of population health, environmental needs, and human impacts in Victorian waters.

#### Our approach

Critical long-term monitoring and reporting to environmental managers and the community. Including, water-based, shore-based and citizen science research programs.

#### Our impacts

Crucial evidence to guide environmental assessments of proposed actions and decision-making. Reduced human impacts on dolphins and whales.



### 2. Environment

#### The challenges

Ecosystem resilience in the face of coastal pollution and climate change.

#### Our approach

Monitor health of resident dolphins as indicators of environmental health and submit to environmental evaluation and reporting processes. Evidence-based behaviour-change programs.

#### Our impacts

Reduced local coastal pollution and ecosystem resilience through changed behaviours in coastal communities.



### 3. Community

#### The challenges

Stewardship for our southern marine environments and life.

#### Our approach

Marine education, behaviour-change programs, developing the next generation of environmental leaders and marine scientists. Intern and volunteering opportunities.

#### Our impacts

A community that protects and champions our local marine ecosystems and life. Growing numbers of marine leaders and scientists.

### 4. A strong organisation

The Dolphin Research Institute's goal is to become a role model for other for-purpose groups and to deliver much-needed impact on behalf of our communities. We work to take a whole-of-organisation approach to improve our capacity for impact evaluation, partnerships, fundraising, risk management and communication.



Three key things are evident in the report:

1. The synergy in our impact and activity areas: our research informs and enriches education programs, and our education programs provide the impetus for further knowledge.
2. The positive impact we have on the community and the lives of our ambassadors, interns and supporters.
3. The importance of three decades of long-term, integrated programs.

Above all, DRI's work shows that we have a remarkable success story with communities of dolphins in Melbourne's coastal backyard that seem to be thriving.

However, we have no room for complacency in the Dolphin Research Institute's fourth decade. A future with a rapidly changing climate and human population will make our work even more critical.

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Citation Weir J. (April 2023) Dolphin Research Institute 2022 Impact Report . Document Control: 20230404-JW

# 1. Dolphins and Whales



DRI's research program has operated in both bays (Port Phillip and Western Port) since 1991. Its key objective is to obtain basic, non-invasive, long-term and contemporary data on common and bottlenose dolphins and whales in Victorian waters.

DRI is the only research organisation studying these species within this region that also ensures the best possible and current scientific evidence is available to the government and the community to impact conservation outcomes for cetaceans. This approach is integral to DRI's work, and we aim to make more regular releases of reports and updates to catalogues in the future.

The 2022 trial of a Research Fellowship program was pivotal in progressing all aspects of our research program. It was so successful that we extended the role until 30 June 2023 and sought ongoing funding.



## Key outcomes for 2022

### Port Phillip and Bass Coast dolphins

The story of the common dolphins now resident in Port Phillip is remarkable as this species lives in the open ocean everywhere else in the world.

Two highly significant findings flow from painstaking work to improve how we identify individual dolphins, followed by a review of over 50,000 photo-ID images taken between 2005 and 2022. This enabled the two Port Phillip and Bass Coast catalogues to be completed.

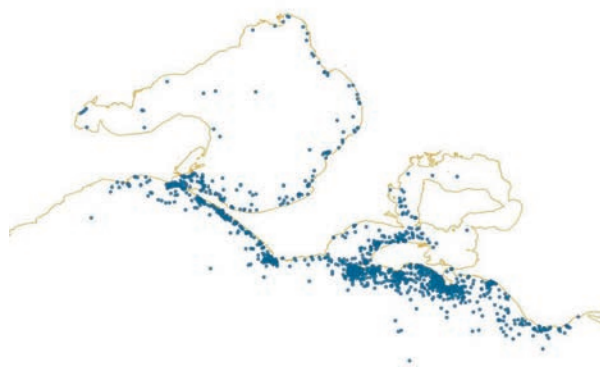
1. Evidence of a third generation of common dolphins being born in Port Phillip since this normally oceanic species entered the bay. Successful calving and calf survivorship has assisted in the numbers growing from fewer than ten in 2005 to over 100 common dolphins 'using the bay' in 2022.
2. The first evidence of common dolphins moving from Bass Strait past Phillip Island to Port Phillip, by the presence of an animal in both catalogues. It suggests that the Port Phillip community is part of a much larger population and is why we say 'using the bay' rather than 'resident'. Future surveys will clarify the extent of residence and migration.

### Western Port dolphins

DRI's Western Port research program focuses on a small community of bottlenose dolphins that interacts with humans, dogs and horses in Somers, Balnarring and Merricks. Our aim to understand how they use this area was interrupted by COVID, preventing shore-based surveys by university interns. About 22 hours of surveys were completed, and 18 community sightings were received.

### Whales

In 2015 the DRI established the Two Bays Whale Project (TBWP) to enlist citizen scientists to help fill a void in knowledge about large whale movement in the region of Barwon Heads to Inverloch. Although our research so far is limited, the TBWP dataset holds data dating back to 1984 and more widely across the coast. The following map shows the cumulative sightings now held, data that is keenly sought-after for environmental assessments.



In 2022, the TBWP received 178 validated sightings of approximately 315 whales across three species – humpback, southern right and killer whales. Forty-six new animals were added to the Victorian Humpback Whale Fluke Catalogue, bringing the total to 246 individuals.

In response to plans for large numbers of renewable and gas energy projects across the Victorian coastline, DRI plans to expand TBWP from 1 to 8 regions. Funding is secured to support the first phase that extends to Cape Otway and Cape Liptrap.



## A story of survival - and detective work

We first sighted Marinna in October 2012 as a very young calf with her mother, Jean (above).

When she was only four, a severe injury to her back nearly ended her short life. The image from 2017 (above right) shows the massive scar left after a year of healing. Marinna's ability to heal - fighting off infection and keeping up with other dolphins - is a testament to her resilience.

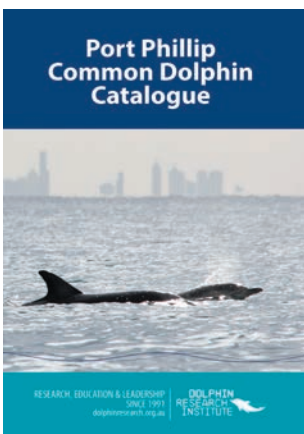
Then in 2021, something incredible happened! Marinna became a Mum! She's shown with her calf in April 2022 (above).

We don't know whether her close call was due to another animal or a vessel.

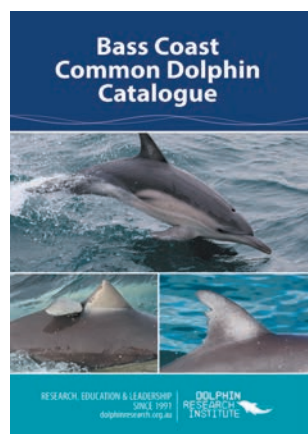
We do know that Marinna's calf is one of the first born into the third generation. We know this thanks to our team's painstaking efforts, analysing tens of thousands of images to track Marinna back to 2012 and her mother back to 2007. Jean is one of the first-generation dolphins that came into the bay.

The success of this community of dolphins provides a positive insight into the health of their environment.

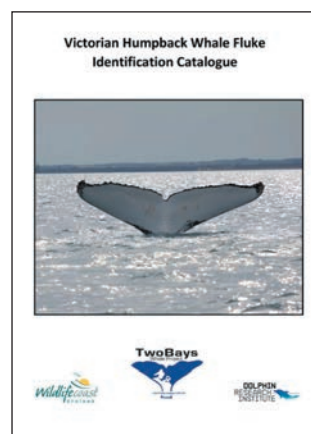
## 2022 publications



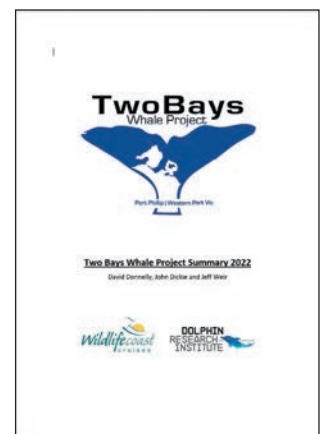
Added 32 dolphins to make 102 in the catalogue. Many re-sightings in surveys suggests this is a smaller community than Bass Coast.



Released first Bass Coast catalogue with 93 animals. Few re-sightings in surveys, suggests a much larger community than Port Phillip.



Victorian Humpback Fluke Catalogue - added 46 animals to make 246.



178 validated sightings of 315 whales of 3 species: humpback, southern right and killer whales.

# 2. Environment



The challenges for coastal ecosystems in the face of population and climate change extremes are larger than any one organisation can achieve in isolation. The Dolphin Research Institute’s response is to leverage our key assets of long-term programs and collaborations to achieve the greatest impacts.

- Research findings about the success and health of our dolphins - at the top of the food chain - are shared with environmental managers. Research outcomes are also shared through our education and *i sea, i care* Ambassador Program.
- DRI pioneered using stormwater gross pollution traps in our education programs, and now it is a formal part of the *i sea, i care* Ambassador Program (next page).
- Many *i sea, i care* Ambassadors follow suggestions to join community beach cleanup groups.
- Partnerships with four councils, Catholic Education and Melbourne Water, with the *i sea, i care* Ambassador Program, support their stormwater management work and help to achieve much greater outcomes than possible working alone.

## 2022 Key Outcomes

- Submission of current research data to the Port Phillip Environmental Management Plan reporting team. We also began a process to create an improved and standardised reporting framework.
- Twelve catchment workshops for *i sea, i care* Ambassadors and the messages being shared with an audience of 84,000.
- Aligning our programs with six of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.
- Providing valued input into the City of Kingston’s catchment management strategy.



Alignment of programs to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals





## The products of our lives drain into the sea

Research shows that diffuse pollution from land is one of the biggest threats to coastal environments, with over 90% of the pollutants washed up on beaches coming from suburbia. However, DRI's social research shows that 66% of Melburnians think the rubbish on beaches is left there by swimmers! We don't see ourselves as part of the problem.

We held 12 catchment workshops for *i sea, i care* Ambassadors in 2022. First, they see and smell the refuse emptied from a gross pollution trap on stormwater drains that trap large items in nets before entering the environment. The top image is of artificial wetlands created to capture sediment and

many chemicals that pass through the nets. These systems effectively reduce pollutants flowing to the coast - where they are fitted. Unfortunately, most drains don't have these traps, so everything from our lives in the suburbs gets to the sea.

Ambassadors then go to a local beach to clean up and analyse the litter, with the data contributed to a national database.

Most importantly, Ambassadors share their experiences with their school communities - audiences of 45,000 at assemblies and 84,000 through our *i sea, i care* newsletters. They have done this for twenty-two years.

# 3. Community



Our work with the community is at the heart of DRI's ability to achieve impact. It empowers our ability to influence through education, behaviour change and leadership programs and provides opportunities for volunteers, citizen scientists, interns and donors to contribute to our work. It also creates a synergy between our core activities, research informing and enriching education and our education programs, providing the impetus for further knowledge.

## Education

Education programs complement DRI's impact areas and draw content from our research and messaging on coastal pollution, climate change and sustainability. Our programs link to 24 core goals of the Victorian school curriculum. DRI's education programs have operated from our education centre in Hastings since 2001, providing programs for primary and secondary schools, TAFE, universities, and the community through clubs and events. We work mainly with schools on the Mornington Peninsula and the South Eastern suburbs of Melbourne. During 2022 we made giant steps towards reconnecting with our schools and community groups after COVID and creating new relationships with groups we hadn't seen before.



### 2022 formal marine education programs (Post-COVID):

- Formal education programs with 3,880 children and adults.
- Formalised links to 24 key goals in the Victorian School Curriculum.



### 2022 informal community programs (Post-COVID):

- Informal talks to wide audiences exceeding 2,000.
- Community engagement at 7 festivals with a reach exceeding 15,000.

## *i sea, i care* School Ambassador Program

The award-winning *i sea, i care* Ambassador Program, established in 2001, works to build community stewardship for Victoria's dolphins and whales and their marine environment. We provide motivational and learning experiences with four Ambassadors from most of our primary schools, who work for us in their school communities. We work with four - they work with hundreds.

Ambassadors speak at assemblies and peer-teach classes about their experiences and ways to reduce coastal pollution and live sustainably. Participation assists schools with their accreditation with the Resource Smart Schools Program.

It is a life-changing experience for many Ambassadors and we see some return as university interns.

Below: Ambassadors at their motivational workshop - Pope's Eye in the Port Phillip Heads Marine National Park.







## Life-changing

Being an *isea, i care* Ambassador is a year-long journey of discovery, leadership and personal growth.

Peer teaching is a vital part of an Ambassador's job. We train four Ambassadors in each school, and they work with hundreds, collectively reaching close to 20,000 early-grade students every year with stories of Victoria's marine treasures.

Public speaking is one of the biggest fears for most adults, so it's little wonder that peer teaching is both a challenge and a growth opportunity for many of our ambassadors.

At a recent workshop, one very shy Ambassador was so anxious about presenting that she burst into tears. Our team and other Ambassadors supported her and found a way to keep her involved.

Once back in her own school, she gradually gained confidence.

Not long after, when the same Ambassador realised her Mum had arranged an appointment clashing with her group's peer teaching session, she changed the appointment so she didn't miss out! A great win that we understand had knock-on effects on her wider classwork.

A crucial part of our program is that it gives students who aren't natural leaders a chance to develop into their roles as Ambassadors.

Guess what? Most of the younger students want to become Ambassadors when they reach grade 5 or 6, which also helps to create the next generation of inspired young leaders.

It is life-changing for some Ambassadors. We see them return as university interns.

## *isea, i care* School Ambassador Program numbers in 2022 (post-COVID)

- 8,000 Ambassadors since 2001.
- Nearly 500 new Ambassadors from 91 schools (Sorrento to the Yarra Valley and down to Torquay).
- 62 Ambassador workshops.
- 45,000 engaged by Ambassadors speaking at their school assemblies (3 a year).
- 84,000 audience circulation of our *isea, i care* Newsletter (3 a year).
- 22,000 P-2 children peer-taught by Ambassadors.
- More than 25,000 volunteer hours contributed by Ambassadors.

# 3. Community



This area of community engagement and leadership relates to our programs that help to develop future scientists through internships and the inaugural Research Fellowship position. These programs and our citizen science programs support community involvement and contribute to our research programs, especially the Two Bays Whale Project (TBWP) and the Western Port and Port Phillip studies.

Another initiative in 2022 was creating an Intern Director role on our board in partnership with the Master of Environment and Sustainability degree at Monash University. The goal is to add diversity to board discussions and to help develop the next generation of directors. The first position will be for the 2023 calendar year.

## 2022 Intern Program (Post-COVID)



- 9 interns hosted, contributing ~1,000 formal hours + volunteer time.
- Contributed to the Western Port Study, data analysis, content creation, IT, benchmarking DRI behaviour-change and citizen science programs.
- Students from Monash, Melbourne, Deakin and Federation Universities.



2022 Summer Intern, Jasmyn Bink (Jaz) from Monash University (at left). Jaz shared her experience and the outcome of her major project. Here is a little bit of what she said:

*"I have seen more growth in myself in these past two months, personally and professionally, than in my whole time at university."*

*"It has reinvigorated my passion for science and zoology."*

Jaz delivered a project on behaviour-change principles to strengthen our Dolphin Distancing campaign, working closely with our Research Fellow, Leanne. She also contributed to the Western Port study and did additional volunteering.



## 2022 Citizen Science (Post-COVID)

- PodWatch - 270 total sightings of dolphins and whales.
- Two Bays Tracker - 315.5 hrs, 9 people, 162 humpback, southern right and killer whale sightings.
- Western Port Pod Surveyor - 21.8 hours surveyed, 5 sightings.
- Port Phillip Pod Surveyor - 24.8 hours surveyed, 4 sightings.



## Inaugural Research Fellowship

We proudly introduce Leanne Nguyen as the recipient of our Inaugural Research Fellowship. As a nine-year-old, Leanne dreamed of becoming a Marine Scientist. Her dream has come true.

Leanne is an outstanding young scientist who recently graduated from Monash University with an Honours degree focused on studying little penguins.

Together with her colleague Ella, they discovered the evidence for the three generations and the movement between Port Phillip and the Bass Coast. Our experiment with the fellowship concept has been so impactful that Leanne's position was extended to mid-2023.

As we expand our fundraising activities, our dream is to appoint more fellows who will become an integral part of the future of the Institute.



**Dolphin Distancing** is a DRI initiative initially launched just before COVID hit in 2019 and relaunched in 2022.

Rather than the usual signs on boat ramps, media releases, calls for more policing, or blaming and shaming, we are taking a new approach that is a world-first for behaviour change around dolphins and is known to have worked in other situations.

It's like 'Neighbourhood Watch' for dolphins and whales.

Boaters are invited to commit to Dolphin Distancing and receive a sticker to proudly display on their vessel, reinforcing their pledge and triggering reminders.

We want to change the social norm by building a community of boaters who do the right thing and know when to report harassment to authorities.

By the end of 2022, we achieved over twenty yacht, lifesaving and other groups around Port Phillip and Western Port, a collective buy-in by over 2,000 people.

**OUR DOLPHINS  
DESERVE  
A FAIR GO**

**HELP US SHOW BOATERS  
HOW IT'S DONE BY  
COMMITTING TO  
DOLPHIN  
DISTANCING**  
A Dolphin Research Institute initiative

100m (boats) | 300m (jet skis) | 30m (swimmers)  
Report breaches to 136 186

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RESEARCH | EDUCATION | LEADERSHIP  
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[www.dolphinresearch.org.au](http://www.dolphinresearch.org.au)

## 4. A strong organisation

The Dolphin Research Institute's goal is to become a role model for other for-purpose groups and to deliver much-needed impact on behalf of our communities. We will work to take a whole-of-organisation approach to improve our capacity for impact evaluation, partnerships, fundraising, risk management and communication.

March 2022 marked DRI's thirty-first anniversary and our first glimpse of what a post-COVID world would mean to our community, organisation and programs. Like many organisations, we are still working through the challenges of remote working, staff and client illness and increases in the costs of living.

We did our best to turn COVID lock-downs into an opportunity to build capacity, innovate and delve into 'impact thinking' – refining our view of what we do and why. The four impact areas, stronger synergy of programs and capacity-building projects flowed from using the years of turmoil as an opportunity. Our extraordinary staff, board and supporters made this possible.

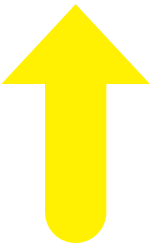
### Key organisational outcomes for 2022

- Two significant capacity-building projects:
  - Renewal of our website to a new WordPress platform to improve functionality, security and future stability.
  - Migration of our core database to Salesforce Not-For-Profit Success Pack and integration across our systems. (A Helen Macpherson Smith Foundation grant supported the Salesforce and WordPress projects).
- Maintaining key partnerships with four councils, Canadian Shipping Lines (Aust), Kiss Print Services, Midland Insurance Brokers, Salesforce, Google and Microsoft.
- Developing more formal partnerships with Monash University (Master of Environment and Sustainability) and Fathom Pacific (Marine environmental consultants), Destination Phillip Island (Island Whale Festival).
- Establishing the Research Fellowship Program for young career scientists to build research capacity.
- Securing funding to expand DRI's Two Bays Whale project to two additional segments of Victoria's coast.
- Bringing the Killer Whales Australia citizen science program into DRI's core research - to ensure the long-term viability of this important program.
- Succession planning and renewal of board directors and establishing an Intern Director role for a Monash University Master of Environment and Sustainability student.
- Progressing Major Gift and Corporate Partnership programs as significant elements to our diverse revenue mix.

Thank you to our key partners and our loyal supporters, some have been with us for over 30 years!



# Future plans



By 2026  
100%  
growth  
on 2022



Education for  
10,000 p.a.



1,000 *i sea, i care*  
Ambassadors p.a.



500 citizen  
scientists



20 interns and 50 vessel  
surveys per year



50,000 volunteer  
hours per year

## Resourcing

Subject to ongoing  
strategic review and  
potential role-sharing

Roles	2023	2024	2025	2026
Development Officer		→		
Ongoing Research Fellowship	→			
Additional Education Officer		→		
Second Research Fellowship		→		
Behaviour Change Officer		→		

## “We will always strive to achieve lasting impact”

In presenting the Dolphin Research Institute’s 2022 Impact Report and plans for the next four years, we are, despite societal challenges thrown up by the pandemic, resolute about the enormous opportunity ahead of us to strengthen Victorians’ shared stewardship of dolphins and whales.

The joy that comes from caring for dolphins and whales is at the heart of DRI. So many of our volunteers and donors tell us that supporting DRI makes them happy. The same is true for the thousands of schoolchildren who take part in our education programs.

We know that a lot more needs to be done to fulfil our mission. Our plans focus on creating lasting impact to benefit dolphins and whales, their environment and the Victorian community. We plan to scale up field research and citizen science, and double our number of *i sea, i care* schools and education programs.

With your support and leadership, we will also build capacity to support this growth, including nurturing young leaders, scientists and educators.

Our promise to you is that we will always strive to achieve lasting impact, to make the most from your support, through innovation and leadership.



Paul Ramadge  
Chairman



Jeff Weir OAM  
Executive Director

# Thank You For Helping to Make Waves...



Thank you for 30  
years of support!

**Chairman**  
**Board**  
**Executive Director**  
**Relationships Manager**  
**Education Director**  
**Research Officer**  
**Honorary Associate**

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