



Welcome

We hope you enjoy reading our 2023/24 Summer Snapshot with positive stories about the impacts your support is helping to achieve.

The operative words for the past six months are 'change' and 'resilience'.

We farewelled Mandy Robertson, who moved to the Mornington Peninsula Shire Council in a sustainability role after 13 years as our Education Manager. (More about Mandy and Ellie Collins, who steps into the role further down). A special thank you goes out to Jacqui Younger, Russell King, Chris O'Neil and Jenny McLennan, who are supporting Ellie's transition.

We also farewelled Paul Ramadge, the Chair of our Board, to take up a national leadership role as the CEO of the General Sir John Monash Foundation. Paul leaves a lasting impact on our organisation. I thank Marie Ritchie for her support in stepping into the role of Acting Chair as we recruit a new Chair.

In this Snapshot, you will read the exciting news about the 'Williamson Research Fellowship', some concerns we have for V-Nick's new calf, our common dolphins being used as indicators of environmental health and the inspiring work of our *i sea, i care* Ambassadors.

We also raise growing concerns about misinformation. Today's media sees its job as done by taking views from both sides of an issue without testing the merit of what is offered or the expert's credibility. It's hard for the community to see past what looks like arguments between opinions. We intend to take a stronger stand on misinformation that is relevant to our role – so watch this space.

Many find it surprising that we receive little government funding. Three decades have taught us that government funding always stops - so independence is the best long-term path.

Your support has been crucial to creating a solid foundation we can build on. The future needs us to do more - so please support our Future Generations Appeal.

We wish you and your families the very best.

Jeff Weir OAM, Executive Director

A Special Thank You

With mixed feelings, we said goodbye to Mandy Robertson, who left us in September after 13 years as our Education Director to take up a role with the Mornington Peninsula Shire Council in the sustainability and environmental area.

In her time with DRI, she worked closely with about 6,000 Ambassadors, over 100 schools, and our council partners and developed and ran more than 600 workshops. She also delivered education programs to tens of thousands of students of all ages.

Most importantly, she has been a role model and mentor to many young leaders. I was privileged to be present when the mum of an *i sea, i care* Ambassador came to Hastings and thanked Mandy for "improving her family's lives" through the support and experiences her son received in our program.

Mandy was awarded the Dame Phyllis Frost Award in 2021 from Keep Victoria Beautiful and is also a recipient of the Victorian Environmental Educator of the Year Award.

Mandy's enthusiasm and leadership helped develop a loyal education team to deliver outstanding student experiences.

So, on behalf of us all, thank you, Mandy, and best wishes for the next part of your journey.



The Williamson Research Fellowship



THE
HUGH D.T.
WILLIAMSON
FOUNDATION

We are excited to announce the support of the Hugh D.T. Williamson Foundation for the Williamson Research Fellowship Program. This will be for the 2024 to 2026 financial years and will build on the tremendous success of the pilot program, which was only possible because of your support. Ella Hutchinson started in December as the second Fellow and is pictured on the left with Leanne Nguyen, our first Fellow, far right. The generosity of the Williamson Foundation enables an overlap of the Fellows to help the new one get up to speed. This is a great opportunity for early career scientists to gain experience and achieve the types of impact shown on the following two pages.



Large 'Fins' to Fill

Fortunately for Ellie Collins, who takes over the Education Manager role full-time in 2024, she does have enormous fins!

Ellie was born and bred on the Mornington Peninsula. She loves the marine environment, has saltwater in her veins, and has a passion for marine education.

After completing a Biological Sciences and Ecology degree at Monash University, Ellie worked as an environmental educator at the Briars in Mount Martha and with Bayplay, where she coordinated the Reef Watch citizen-science program. Ellie was also a DRI intern during her university studies.

Ellie is working part-time until the end of the year to learn the ropes and get things ready for a wonderful 2024. She is pictured on the research vessel during a recent survey.

Contact Ellie through education@dolphinresearch.org.au about the 2024 education and *i sea, i care* programs.



Combatting Misinformation

It seems that not a day goes by without spectacular headlines in the news about anything from aluminium saucepans and mobile phones to smart meters causing cancer or memory loss – I can't quite remember!

Some call it "Fake News". But whatever you call it, there is a need for trustworthy organisations to question it.

In recent months, we have seen growing opposition to offshore wind farms, with protesters in Southern NSW quoting evidence that 400 whales would die every year! This is not based on research but on claims about wind farms in the US, where so-called documentaries and even forged research journal articles have been cobbled together to oppose wind farms. The US National Ocean and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), a highly trustworthy and credible organisation similar to our CSIRO, clearly reinforces that there is no evidence to link whale deaths to wind farms in US waters.

The challenge is that fighting a war against misinformation takes our collective eyes off the questions that need to be addressed. Questions about the impacts of offshore wind farms during their planning, construction, operation and decommissioning need to be answered.

Our response is to expand our Two Bays Whale Project further around the coast to fill knowledge gaps about whales through Bass Strait. It is one of the most important things we can do.

The other is calling out misinformation...



Why We Conduct Research

Our research aims to fill knowledge gaps to support environmental decision-making – to have an impact.

Primarily, our work is essential monitoring, so when environmental managers want to know if they have a problem, we can advise them. The story of V-Nick’s calf, Squiggly (next page), was shared with wildlife managers as soon as we were confident about what we were seeing.

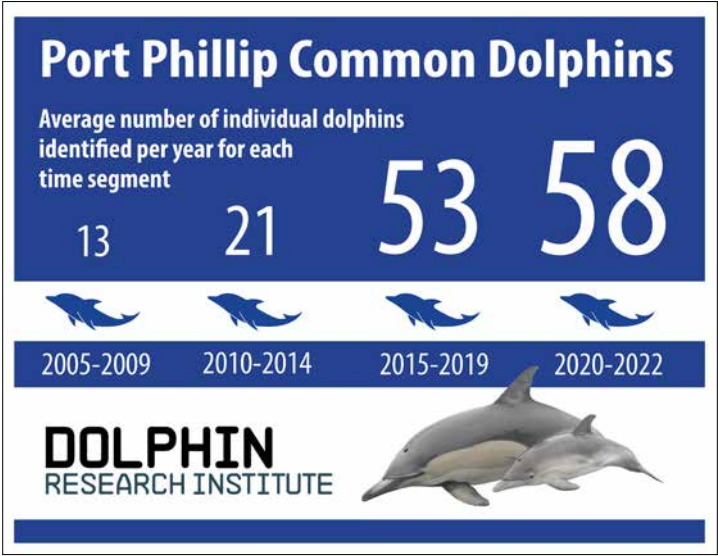
This work is important as dolphins are at the top of the food chain, so their success tells a story about their environment.

The graphic (right) summarises nearly two decades of surveys and many thousands of hours of analysis to show the status of Port Phillip’s common dolphins. The graphic shows the average number of individuals we identified yearly in five-year blocks. We use the five-year average because there are natural fluctuations from animals moving in and out of the bay, and our methods changed over decades due to supporting a PhD student, resourcing and COVID. We can show with 100% certainty the number of individuals we photo-ID from surveys each year.

These numbers show a remarkably positive trend for Port Phillip’s common dolphins, especially when you add the three generations born in our bay.

An important application of our work is to contribute our data to the annual Port Phillip Environmental Management Plan Reporting process so that it embeds our best understanding of the common dolphins in the bay. The lower graphic is taken from the report for the 2022 financial year, recognising that our dolphins have a “Good” status.

We will pick up any changes and promptly inform the environmental managers. This is an essential point of difference for our research as many researchers will sit on their data until it can be published in a



peer-reviewed journal, which takes years and usually results in the work being dated, especially with the rapid changes to the environment we are seeing. We do understand the importance of peer- review and have a network of colleagues we use to review our reports. In due course, some results of our work will be published in formal scientific journals.

Two Bays Whale Project

DOLPHIN RESEARCH INSTITUTE

The spectacle of a whale the size of a bus propelling itself out of the water is a reminder of the need to protect these powerful creatures.

The image was captured by Barb Wallace off Wilsons Promontory during a whale-watching trip with Wildlife Coast Cruises, a partner in the Two Bays Whale Project. Barb is a citizen scientist with the Two Bays Whale Project that has captured whale sightings in the region from Barwon Heads to Inverloch since 2015.

The project’s geographical coverage was extended in 2023, and we want to acknowledge the support of ConocoPhillips to expand the project. Analysis of the 2023 season is underway and we will share the 2023 season report with you as soon as it is available.



The number of wind farms and other projects proposed for Bass Strait makes it crucial to understand the movement of whales through our region during the past three years.

The Two Bays Whale Project provides the only long-term record of these movements and we will ensure it is contributed to the approvals process for these projects.



Excitement Turns to Concern

“V-Nick has a new calf!” came from an excited Leanne after trawling through thousands of survey images from July. You see, V-Nick is the first common dolphin added to the Port Phillip catalogue 18 years ago and had her first calf in 2009; we think this is her fifth.

What’s remarkable is that V-Nick’s second calf (#41) gave birth in February, **which makes V-Nick’s new calf younger than her grand calf!**

Later, Leanne showed me some images of V-Nick’s calf from a survey in September with what looked like large lumps on both sides of its body. We became concerned as in 30 years, we hadn’t seen anything quite like it.

Then, on a survey in early November, we were able to observe and photograph the calf more closely and realised that its back was distorted. It’s called scoliosis and is obvious in all the images on this page once you know what you are looking at. Leanne named the calf ‘Squiggly’.

Scoliosis is known in dolphins and whales, with cases reported worldwide. There seem to be three leading causes: congenital, where they are born with it, from disease, and injury from humans and other dolphins. Some dolphins with this condition are reported to cope well and even reproduce. Some don’t survive.

We have seen different deformities in bottlenose dolphins in Port Phillip and the Gippsland Lakes but never in our common dolphins.

We believe that Squiggly’s condition has worsened since September, and we will monitor their progress and keep the wildlife managers and you informed.



The images show Squiggly keeping up with mother (top), it suckling (middle) and the clear lateral distortion (bottom).



A Year of Discovery and Giving Back

During the last two terms our *i sea, i care* Ambassadors created connections between our lives in the suburbs and the health of waterways and coastal waters.

They also learn from local indigenous leaders about their heritage and the local environments.

The looks on faces tell us much about the impact of our programs. The smiles after the coastal workshop with rangers and indigenous

leaders, and a BBQ lunch (above, opposite top-left and lower), the faces hidden from the smell of the gross-pollution washed off our streets (below), or the concentrated faces, trying to make fire with the tools of traditional owners.

This year more than 500 Ambassadors volunteered 25,000 hours, Peer-taught over 20,000 youngsters and were coastal leaders to more than 85,000 children and adults.

We thank them and their parents and teachers whose leadership brings *i sea, i care* to life.

Also, a huge thank you to our loyal council partners that underpin *i sea, i care* in their areas. Also to Melbourne Water and Parks Victoria for working with our Ambassadors on the workshops we see on these pages.





FUTURE GENERATIONS APPEAL



The story of V-Nick's calf, Squiggly, adds another chapter to the lives of Port Phillip's dolphins. But this is far from being a dolphin 'Soap Opera' tracking the success of mothers and calves is a critical part of monitoring the health of their community and the ecosystem they rely on.

We are also concerned about other dolphins: one missing calf that should still be with its mother and one young dolphin covered in skin lesions. This reinforces that while our dolphins seem to be doing well, we have no room for complacency.

Future generations face the threats of climate extremes and human population growth, making long-term monitoring crucial for the early detection of issues already being seen in other states and around the world.

The common thread that runs through all our work is the focus on creating a lasting impact and working in the community to develop the next generation of young environmental leaders and scientists.

Donating to the Future Generations Appeal will give us the power to build on our proven programs to achieve change.

Over the next three years, we aim to permanently fund two Research Fellowships and double the number of Ambassador schools.

We aim to raise \$20,000 in our Summer Appeal - \$10,000 is already committed by a generous donor. Every gift will take us closer to achieving our goal.

We promise to strive to achieve a lasting impact on behalf of you and all our donors, and the communities we serve.

On behalf of everyone at the Dolphin Research Institute, thank you for your support.

The QR code takes you directly to our appeal page



THANK YOU Ambassadors!

Leadership is one of those things where you know it's working when your students start to develop their own ideas. That's common for our *i sea, i care* Ambassadors who last year contributed over 25,000 volunteer hours through their leadership role.

Thank you to all our Ambassadors.

A Big Auction THANK YOU

We are humbled and grateful to nearly 100 local businesses who donated goods and services - especially in these unsettled times - for our recent online auctions.

The auctions are driven by loyal volunteers with a bit of help from staff.

Of course, nothing would happen without your interest to bid on items - thank you.

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