





# Welcome

We hope you enjoy reading our 2024 Winter Snapshot with positive stories about the impacts your support is helping to achieve.

The spectacular image of two killer whales on the cover of this Snapshot is a first for us. They are toothed whales (Odontocetes), but are also the largest member of the dolphin family (Delphinidae). The Institute now supports the Killer Whales Australia citizen science programs to ensure its longevity (see page 4). Thanks to David Donnelly for the great image.

We proudly present the key results from our main Impact Report on page 2. These significant outcomes, and many more, were made possible by the unwavering dedication of a small team of the equivalent of just five full-time staff! We hope you share in our pride and feel a part of this team, along with the volunteers who have made these achievements possible.

2024 is turning into a year of opportunities and challenges.

One challenge relates to the loss of funding to support a cluster of *'i sea, i care'* schools around Geelong. Ambassadors are missing out because of the costs of running many workshops with schools further away.

We see this also as an exciting opportunity to develop a hybrid version of *'i sea, i care'* that will empower the involvement of distant schools across our coast using online technology. With your continued support and other funding opportunities, we are optimistic about trialling a pilot program in 2025.

Recent government announcements added momentum to Windfarm developments off East Gippsland. We have prepared a position statement that will be kept up to date on our website. Our goal is to provide a reliable source of information and to make clear recommendations to hold the government to account during the approvals process. A summary is included below.

Your support has been crucial to creating a solid foundation we can build on. As we look to the future, we need you more than ever. Please consider supporting our Future Generations Appeal to help us continue our important work.

We wish you and your families the very best.

Jeff Weir OAM, Executive Director

## DRI Position on Proposed Windfarm Developments in the Gippsland Declared Area May 2024



Since 1991, the Dolphin Research (DRI) Institute has worked to ensure a positive future for whales, dolphins, and their environment. As such, the DRI is concerned about emerging impacts on the marine environment, particularly those linked to climate change, which will exacerbate existing human impacts.

Urgent action is needed to mitigate these threats, including renewable energy, but not without the scrutiny of rigorous and independent environmental impact assessments to avoid unintended consequences.

The 1 May 2024 announcement by Victorian and federal governments of six Feasibility Licences to establish offshore windfarms in eastern Bass Strait, with another six to follow, offers a step to address energy transition but also poses significant questions regarding the potential environmental impacts. Our focus is on marine mammals.

The DRI is concerned about a lack of accessible, quality data on cetaceans across the proposed development area – and some of what we do know seems to be changing.

Consequently, the Dolphin Research Institute calls for:

1. Rigorous Environmental Impact Assessments must be required for each windfarm project proposed for east Gippsland.
2. That assessments must address the impacts of construction, operation, and decommissioning and respond to the high-level questions listed in the full document on our website.
3. That credible research regarding windfarms in the Northern Hemisphere are included in assessments.
4. Studies to urgently improve understanding of the ecology of marine mammals in eastern Bass Strait, the potential impacts from vessels and noise, and the cumulative impacts of new and existing risks.
5. Marine Mammal Observers are required to be on board vessels during high-risk actions.
6. Long-term monitoring of cetaceans is maintained beyond the construction phase and across the region beyond the Gippsland Development Area.

Our work to expand the Two Bays Whale Project further along Victoria's coast is a concrete action on our behalf to provide new data across a wider area, on whale movements through our region. This will be contributed to all studies as part of the windfarm approvals process.

Note that this is a summary of a more extensive document that we will update as things change and maintain on our website.

<https://www.dolphinresearch.org.au/windfarms/>

Image above left: A different perspective on wind turbines near Wonthaggi.

Cover image: Killer whales taken by David Donnelly. All images of dolphins and whales are taken under scientific research permit.

## 2023 IMPACT REPORT Key Results



Our 2023 Impact Report highlights three key things:

1. The synergy in our four impact areas of; 1/ Dolphins and Whales, 2/ Environment, 3/ Community and 4/ A Strong Organisation.
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.

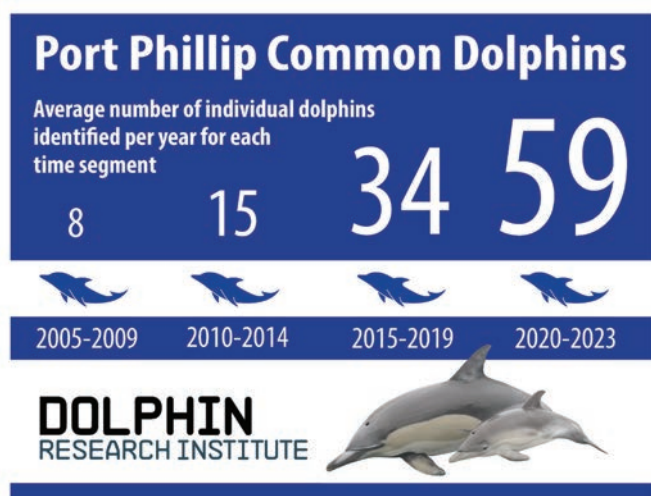
Above all, DRI's work shows that we have a remarkable success story with communities of dolphins in Melbourne's coastal backyard. However, we have no room for complacency and flagged concerns with the government. A future with a rapidly changing climate and human population will make our work more crucial than ever.

## 1. Dolphins and Whales

### Port Phillip and Bass Coast dolphins - outcomes for 2023

Two highly significant findings:

1. Evidence of six calves of the third generation of common dolphins born in Port Phillip with consistent growth of the community.
2. Concern for the welfare of several PPB dolphins.



### Whales

1. The Two Bays Whale Project received 178 validated sightings across three species – humpback, southern right and killer whales.
2. 46 new flukes were added to the Victorian Humpback Whale Catalogue.
3. The whale season in 2023 was 187 days compared to 113 days 2021.
4. The number of whales sighted in 2023 per 100 hours of effort was 14, compared to 33/100 hrs in 2022 and 43/100 hrs in 2021.  
(More years of data is needed to understand these patterns).

## 2. Environment

1. Submission of dolphin research data to the Port Phillip Environmental Management Plan as a key indicator species.
2. Twelve catchment pollution workshops for *i sea, i care* Ambassadors and the messages shared with an audience of 84,000.
3. Aligning our programs with six of the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

## 3. Community

### Marine education programs

- Formal education programs with 7,158 children and adults.
- Formalised links to 24 key goals in the Victorian School Curriculum.



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

- 8,500 Ambassadors since 2001.
- 84,000 audience circulation of our *i sea, i care* Newsletter (4 a year).
- 22,000 P-2 children peer-taught by Ambassadors.
- More than 47,000 volunteer hours contributed by Ambassadors.

### 2023 Intern Program

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

### 2023 Citizen Science

- PodWatch - 162 total sightings of dolphins and whales.
- Two Bays Tracker - 244 hours, 8 people, 33 humpback, southern right and killer whale sightings.
- Western Port Pod Surveyor - 96 hours surveyed, 25 sightings.
- Port Phillip Pod Surveyor - 112 hours surveyed, 24 sightings.

## 4. A strong organisation

**Williamson Research Fellowship Program.** The Hugh D.T. Williamson Foundation committed funding to secure the program for three years.

The full impact report is available on our website.





The ABC News headline of 4 May, “How killer whales move around Australia now better understood, thanks to citizen science project”, featured an interview with our Research Officer David Donnelly discussing the significant impact of the Killer Whales Australia Project that he has been spearheading since 2000.

The feature quotes Isabella Reeves, a PhD candidate at Flinders University, who is studying the genetics of killer whales in Australia, “Within Australia, we wouldn’t actually understand a lot about the ecology and distribution without this citizen science data”.

We are very lucky to have David in our small



team. His passion and talent for bringing people together are the keys to the success of the Two Bays Whale Project and Killer Whales Australia. He is also crucial to our core work on dolphins.

David is also quoted as being excited at seeing the next generation of scientists emerging – and looking forward to them taking over the programs to ensure they can contribute for the decades ahead.

David is pictured with our Williamson Research Fellow, Ella Hutchinson, in the field. Ella is helping David with the Two Bays Whale Project.

The Dolphin Research Institute is pleased to host the Killer Whales Australia program and support David to ensure its long-term success.

We will share more about killer whales in the future. But for now; did you know that killer whales are the largest members of the dolphin family?

The full article can be found at: <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2024-05-04/killer-whales-orcas-australia-citizen-science-project/103765712>



## Update on Squiggly

In the last Snapshot we shared our concerns about a dolphin we called Squiggly, with a spinal deformity called scoliosis (above - left). Squiggly is V-Nick’s fifth calf and was born in the first half of 2023. Our concern for the calf was raised following a survey in November when although it was keeping up with its mother, images suggested the deformity was worsening.

We have been asked about the possibility of intervening to help Squiggly. by capturing the calf and performing surgery. It’s worth noting that capturing a dolphin to remove an entanglement has been successfully done by the Institute in Port Phillip. However, deciding



whether to intervene in a dolphin’s natural condition is complex. To the best of our knowledge, such intervention has never been attempted before and not something we would support because of the risks involved.

Documenting the resilience of individuals in this dolphin community provides an insight into their health, which reflects the health of their environment.

During a survey in February 2024, we managed to capture a heartening sight of V-nick and Squiggly side by side (above-right). We also saw them again on the 18th of May and Squiggly seemed to be doing very well and now nearly 12 months old. We will keep you informed of any developments.

# Two Bays Whale Project

DOLPHIN RESEARCH INSTITUTE

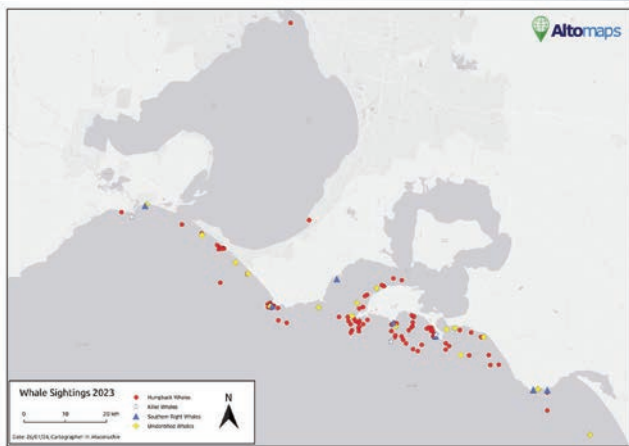


In 2015, the DRI, with Wildlife Coast Cruises, established the Two Bays Whale Project (TBWP) to enlist citizen scientists to help fill a void in knowledge about large whale movements in the region of Barwon Heads to Inverloch. The TBWP dataset holds data dating back to 1984 and more widely across the coast.

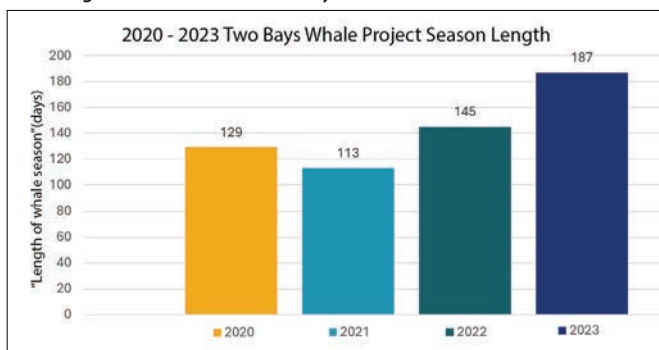
TBWP is a contributing partner with the Southern Hemisphere Whales and Climate Project.

DRI is expanding the TBWP from 1 to 8 regions across the Victorian coastline in response to plans for many renewable and gas energy projects. Funding from ConocoPhillips supported the extension in 2023 east to Cape Liptrap and also added some locations in other regions. Further expansion and collating historical data into an overarching report will be completed in 2024.

The following map shows the of validated sightings for 2023, showing 152 sightings across three species: humpbacks, southern right whales, and killer whales. This compares to 177 sightings in 2022.

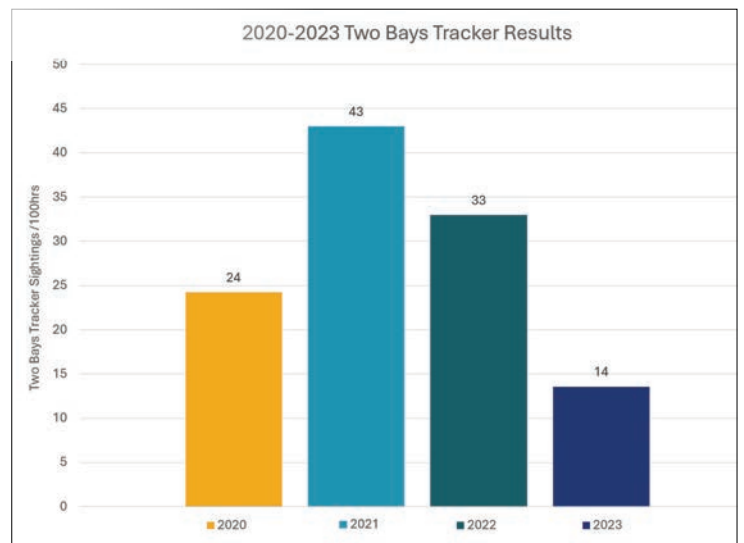


The “whale season” length in days for the main migration through the Two Bays Region is shown below. The duration was shortest in 2021 and longest in 2023 with 187 days.



The graph in the right column shows the Two Bays Tracker program data with timed surveys at 8 locations. 2022 and 2023 had fewer sightings per 100 hours of surveys compared to a peak in 2021 of 43.

The patterns seem to be changing, with longer seasons and fewer whales picked up close to shore but we need more data to be certain.



In 2024, we will continue to expand TBWP across Victoria and also bring more historical data into our analysis. We are optimistic that these actions, along with another year of data, will help our understanding of the variability and potentially changing patterns shown in the data to 2023.

What is clear is that the TBWP provides a crucial record of the presence of large whales in our region that is not available elsewhere. It is important we maintain and expand this program in the years ahead.

**Join us at the Island Whale Festival 5-7 July**  
Phillip Island (see last page and our website)





## A Year of Discovery and Giving Back

The first half of our *i sea, i care* Ambassadors' year is a journey of personal growth, overcoming fears, and discovering their roles for the rest of the year. Their transformative trip with Torie and crew on Moonraker Dolphin Swims immerses them in the water with seals, sea dragons, and for the fortunate ones, dolphins! This experience, often the first time on a boat for many, is life-changing for some. (Images: Ambassadors with Ellie and Jacqui who drive *i sea, i care* (above) in the water (below)).

Next they are trained as peer educators and given lesson plans and resources (opposite). It's inspiring to see these young leaders blossom in confidence and passion for their roles during the year.

We work with over 500 Ambassadors. During 2024 they will volunteer over 25,000 hours and peer teach over 40,000 children in their school communities. They are truly heroes!

Our program faced a challenge this year after funding to support our Geelong cluster of

Ambassador schools was cut. We don't want to let these schools down, but distance is a costly challenge. We are talking with the schools and considering some ideas to keep them involved and potentially open up opportunities for more distant schools to join *i sea, i care*. Thank you to our loyal *i sea, i care* partners.







Galaxy A15 5G



Images: Ambassadors training as peer educators (above left and right), Education team - Georgie, Chris and Chloe at a community event (right), Rocky Shore education program (lower right), and secondary students collecting data for their science program (below).





# FUTURE GENERATIONS APPEAL



Squiggly with her mother V-Nick

It's a joy to share the latest news that Squiggly, now nearly 12 months old, seems to be coping well with the spinal deformity we reported last year. This is an excellent indication of their resilience, V-Nick's success as a mother, and the health of their environment—so it's very important to monitor these dolphins and update wildlife managers.

Your loyal support allows our small but dedicated team to achieve all you see in our Snapshot—and more—with only the equivalent of five full-time staff, plus volunteers. And remember, we receive no ongoing government funding.

By contributing to the Future Generations Appeal, you have the power to ignite change and build on our proven programs, fostering a hopeful future for our dolphins and whales, and future generations of young leaders and scientists.

Your donation is a beacon of hope.

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

new program empowering distant schools to contribute.

Together, **we aim to raise \$60,000 in our Winter Future Generations Appeal**—generous donors have already committed \$40,000. Your contribution, no matter the size, is a vital part of this collective effort.

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, we extend our heartfelt gratitude to you, our cherished donors, for your unwavering support and commitment to our cause.

Thank you.

Jeff Weir OAM, Executive Director.

The QR code takes you directly to our appeal page



## THANK YOU Mum's Day!

Thank you to the generous businesses and bidders who supported our online Mother's Day Auction. Together, with another fundraiser linked to PEDRO'S Constructions, we raised nearly \$4,000. Thank you all.



**Come and join us at the the 2024 Island Whale Festival.** We will be at Cape Woolamai Lifesaving Club running Spot-A-Whale and other education and careers programs. There are activities all over the island with the hub in Cowes. Booking and all links: <https://www.dolphinresearch.org.au/dri-iwff/>

## Thank You To Our Valued Supporters



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This document is available as an e-book to consider the environment and maximise our audience. When we do print copies to reach all our audiences we use paper stock that is PEFC and Carbon Neutral Certified.

All dolphin and whale images are taken under the authority of a Scientific Research Permit from the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action.