



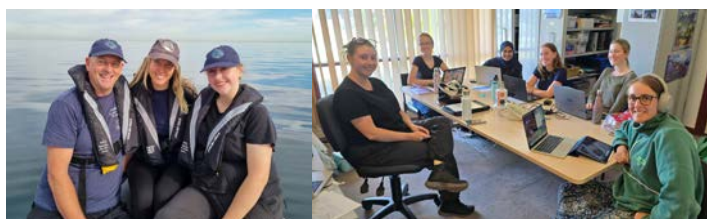
Welcome

We are excited to share our Winter Snapshot, showcasing important research and citizen science outcomes, and inspiring **'i sea, i care'** Ambassadors.

People are at our heart. Our staff, volunteers, interns, collaborators and our supporters, like **you**, all make our work possible. Now for 34 years!



All together at our Christmas lunch (above).



Dave, Ellie & Ella (on the water) & Ella with interns (above)

I want to also mention our voluntary directors who give their time to guide our organisation for the present and also to prepare for the future with our **Vision 2030**.

As you read this Snapshot you will see what is possible through collaboration:

- The Humpback Whale Feeding and Calving Paper.
- The Two Bays Whale Project which **more than doubled the number of reported sightings in 2024**.
- The Dolphin and Whale Distancing campaigns
- The **'i sea, i care'** program where councils, schools, teachers, students, parents & indigenous owners all make a wonderful program work.

At the time of writing, council cost-cutting is putting our award-winning **'i sea, i care'** program at risk with a **black hole in funding for the next financial year**.

Council partnerships with **'i sea, i care'** have been crucial to our program's success and at the same time achieving councils' goals for school and community education about protecting our coasts.

We will do our best for our schools for the rest of 2025.

It's now all in jeopardy. Which makes your support of our Future Generations Appeal even more urgent.

Please give what you can before June 30, to make the most of your donation and tax return.

It's crucial that our children are not let down.

Kind regards and thank you,

Jeff Weir OAM, Executive Director

Victorian Renewable Energy Terminal (VRET)

Plans to develop a terminal in the Port of Hastings to service the construction and maintenance of windfarms planned for Bass Strait must go through a rigorous environmental assess process. DRI is represented on the Community Reference group and will keep you informed as things progress. We will share updates through our e-Bulletins and will develop a living post on our website.

The site is: <https://renewableenergyterminal.com.au/>

Name Our Cover Dolphin

The leaping dolphin on the cover is currently known as #89 - so needs a name - especially in such a prominent location! We are inviting people to suggest names through our website: <https://www.dolphinresearch.org.au/name-a-dolphin/>

Our model for change works through four impact areas with our programs working in synergy to achieve impact goals: The four impact areas are highlighted on the following pages and are: 1/ Dolphins and Whales, 2/ the Environment, 3/ the Community and 4/ a Strong Organisation. The following program areas (and more) are delivered by a dedicated team of volunteers and approximately five FTE staff.

**PORT PHILLIP
COMMON DOLPHIN
PROJECT**



**Two Bays
Whale Project**
DOLPHIN RESEARCH INSTITUTE



i sea i care
AMBASSADOR



**DOLPHIN
RESEARCH
INSTITUTE**



**School
EDUCATION**

**Community
EDUCATION**

**Dolphin and Whale
DISTANCING**

**Western Port
POD SURVEYOR**

**Port Phillip
POD SURVEYOR**

Cover image: Port Phillip common dolphin #89. All images of dolphins and whales are taken under scientific research permit.



More Than a Migratory Corridor: Humpback Whale Feeding and Calving in Bass Strait

This paper provides evidence that, besides being a migratory corridor for east Australian humpback whales, Bass Strait is potentially an important feeding and calving habitat for the species.

The data presented were gathered from multiple sources and represent a multi-organisation collaboration between the Dolphin Research Institute, Fathom Pacific, Wildlife Coast Cruises and ConocoPhillips Australia. Integrating scientific survey data and contributions from citizen science projects – historically underutilised or inaccessible data – demonstrates the value of using all available information to assess the biological importance of regions such as Bass Strait to large cetaceans.

Figures 2 and 3 from the report show sightings during the northerly and southerly migrations.



Figure 2 from the report shows validated sightings of humpback whales during their northerly migration recorded by Two Bays Whale Project Citizen Scientists and Wildlife Coast Cruises, from 2015 to 2024.



Figure 3 from the report shows validated sightings of humpback whales recorded during their southerly migration by Two Bays Whale Project Citizen Scientists and Wildlife Coast Cruises from 2006 to 2024.

The use of diverse data sources has revealed new understandings of humpback whale ecology in Bass Strait and highlighted the region's role in feeding and calving behaviours that were previously not documented.

Figure 5 from the report shows validated records of feeding behaviour in the region.

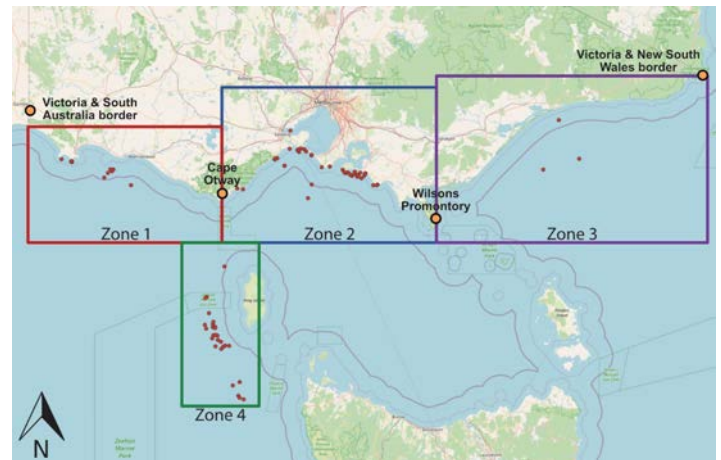


Figure 5 from the report shows validated sightings of feeding humpback whales recorded by Two Bays Whale Project Citizen Scientists, Wildlife Coast Cruises, and surveys by Fathom Pacific for ConocoPhillips from 2015 to 2024.

These new understandings should be integrated into environmental assessments, policy development, and offshore management decisions.

With the number of proposed offshore development projects increasing, these new understandings must be incorporated into the assessment processes associated with offshore developments. This new information should also be included in future species conservation assessments to assign appropriate conservation statuses.

Collaborative approaches that combine formalised scientific research with validated citizen science contributions will be key to accelerating information gain and improving the knowledge of cetacean distribution and behaviour in the Bass Strait region. Open sharing of contemporary data will allow the best available scientific information to be applied for conservation and management.



The full report can be read on our website - search for humpback or follow:

<https://www.dolphinresearch.org.au/more-than-a-migratory-corridor/>

Two Bays Whale Project

DOLPHIN RESEARCH INSTITUTE

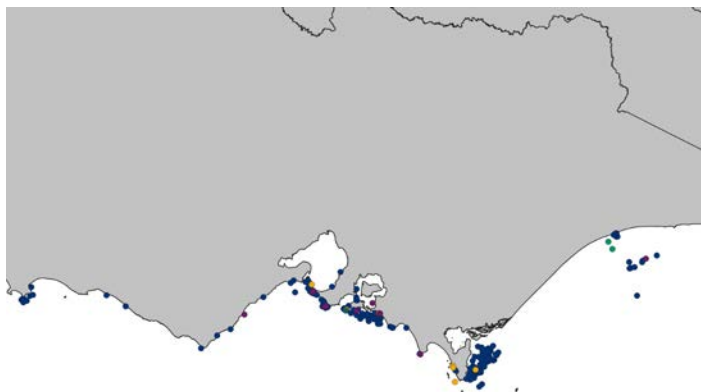


In 2015, the DRI, with Wildlife Coast Cruises, established the Two Bays Whale Project (TBWP) to enlist citizen scientists to help fill a void in knowledge about large whale movements in the region of Barwon Heads to Inverloch. The TBWP dataset holds data dating back to 1984 and more widely across the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

The following map shows the validated sightings for 2024, with **333 sightings across five species:** humpback, southern right, blue, brydes and killer whales. This compares to 152 sightings in 2023.



The above map shows the validated sightings of five confirmed species of large whales in 2024 (94% are sightings of humpback whales).

We often mention 'validated sightings' - what does it mean?

Validated means that we have reliable evidence of the presence, time, and date of every sighting entered into the Two Bays Whale Project database.

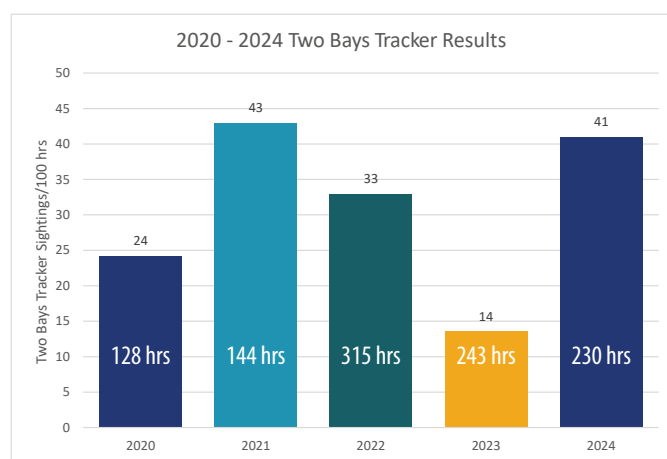
'Reliable evidence' requires a photograph, video, or report from regular and trusted contributors, where we can confirm the species, date and time, and sometimes the GPS location.

It doesn't need to be an award-winning photo; images from a phone are fine. This will help us ensure that every sighting is 'valid' and not counted more than once.

Your sightings and images are best reported through our PodWatch web app on our website. You can save PodWatch to your home screen.

You can rest assured that your privacy is very important to us, and we never share personal information.

An important part of TBWP since 2020 is the Two Bays Tracker Program, where trained observers undertake timed whale surveys at eight coastal vantage points like Cape Schanck. This permits research effort to be accounted for and standardised to the number of sightings per 100 survey hours.



The above graph shows the Two Bays Tracker results for 2020-2024. The hours surveyed are shown in white, a total of 1060 survey hours by dedicated volunteers who we thank profusely.

Last year we questioned if we were seeing a downward trend but the sightings per hundred hours picked up in 2024. Our surveys are only a sub-sample of whales fairly close to shore so perhaps in 2023 the whales didn't come in as close?

The above data shows the importance of long-term research to understand the variability and limitations of your study before you draw conclusions about patterns.

We also host the Victorian Humpback Whale Fluke Identification Catalogue. Forty flukes were added to the catalogue in 2023, growing the number to 286. We are still analysing flukes from 2024 but **are now well over 400 individual whales** we can identify from Bass Strait!

In 2025, we are continuing to expand TBWP across Victoria and will update the Humpback Whales in Bass Strait White Paper.

TBWP provides an unique and crucial record of the presence of large whales in our region.



No - you are not seeing double or the result of some creative AI. These candidates for Australia's synchronised swimming team are Port Phillip common dolphins #34 (front) and #13 (rear), both with their young calves.

Welfare Concerns

In May this year we believe there were eleven common dolphin calves in Port Phillip that were so young that they are still dependent on their mothers - a time when they are especially vulnerable to stress.

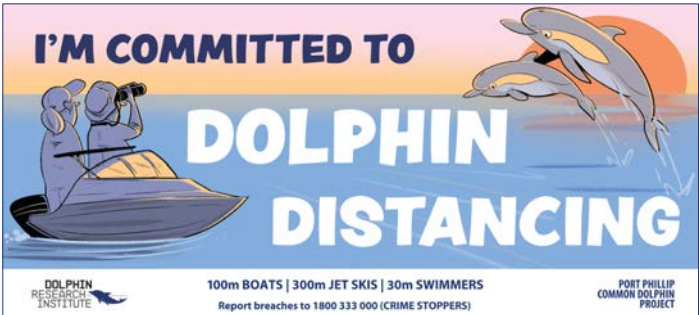
It is why we decided to take action by reporting a particularly blatant case of harassment witnessed by our research team to the Office of the Conservation Regulator.

It's a shared waterway and we often witness people in vessels see dolphins and slow down or stop, and then let the dolphins swim off, without following. That's fine.

It's not fine to repeatedly change direction and persistently approach dolphins, causing mothers with young calves to stop nursing or for both mums and calves to needlessly expend energy to avoid a threatening vessel.



When you are on the water please don't approach closer than: Vessels (100m dolphin, 200m whale). Personal Water Craft (300m dolphins and whales). Please help by committing to Dolphin or Whale Distancing to create a community of boaters who do the right thing. It's like Neighbourhood Watch for Dolphins and Whales. Go to our website.



**Join us at the Island Whale Festival 11-13 July
Phillip Island (see our website)**



Main: Ambassadors ready to swim with seals at Chinaman's Hat. Inset: Ellie receiving her award from Sheena Watt MP, Member for Northern Metropolitan Region.

My Favourite Day at Work

You might think that winning a Victorian Marine and Coastal Award would be the highlight of Ellie Collins' first 18 months leading our Education and **'i sea, i care'** Ambassador Programs.

Well, it was - until a week in March!

In the first week of March, Ellie took Ambassadors from four Dandenong region schools out on Moonraker Dolphin Swims for their first and motivational experience with **'i sea, i care'**, preparing them for their leadership role in 2025.

Most had never been on a boat, let alone snorkelling in deep water. They were all very nervous.

Ellie reassured them, but based on her experience as a snorkelling instructor, she expected that many would hesitate to put their face down and only last about five or ten minutes before wanting to return to the boat.

She could not have been more wrong!

Every student stayed in the water the whole time. They kept their faces down, laughed into their snorkels, saw fish, and swam with seals and other marine life.

Ellie had to drag them out of the water!

They were also lucky enough to see about ten dolphins up close from the boat.

It was a life-changing experience for these young people and a wonderful start to their year of environmental leadership.

Their next time Ellie sees them is for their peer-teaching workshop (see next page).

Last year's award recognised that since 2001, our 9,500 Ambassadors have engaged nearly two million people.

I wonder if some of our 2025 Ambassadors will return to us as University Interns in about eight years. Quite a few do.

We'll let you know...



A Year of Doing Good...

The first two terms for our '*i sea, i care*' Ambassadors are the most challenging, overcoming the fear of deep water, and public speaking; things that turn the legs of many adults to jelly!

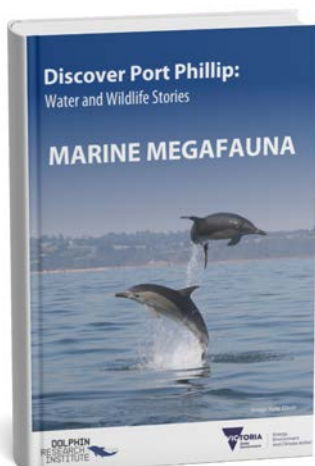
Not only do they all survive but they grow with new skills and self confidence - and beaming smiles (right).

Once trained as peer teachers, they work in their school community to educate their next generation, who then also want to be ambassadors (top image).

Our Ambassador schools are concentrated around eastern Port Phillip, from Sorrento to Tooradin and up as far as Lysterfield (see coverage map).

Next term they will see and SMELL the rubbish cleaned from the stormwater system that is often flushed from our suburbs into our bays and they will meet coastal rangers and indigenous elders.

We work with more than 500 Ambassadors - they work with over 40,000 in their school communities!



Launch of Discover Port Phillip eBooks

The first of five free ebooks in our **Discover Port Phillip: Water & Wildlife Stories** is now live! These ebooks are a collection of short stories spotlighting the incredible marine life and environments of Port Phillip. Each story includes links to local citizen science programs, conservation projects, and ways to get involved — helping to build a community that values and actively protects our precious Bay.

Dive into the fascinating world of Marine Megafauna below. More to be released soon!

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

FUTURE GENERATIONS APPEAL



June with newborn calf May 2025

It is disheartening to share that our beloved **'i sea, i care'** program is at risk following council cutbacks, which have created a funding black hole for the upcoming year.

'i sea, i care' has helped our councils achieve their environmental education goals for schools and the community, offering benefits far outweighing their investment. At the same time, the funds helped to grow our program to reach nearly two million people over 23 years and benefit 9,500 young leaders.



We must not let our children down.

With the **program now in jeopardy**, your support of our Future Generations Appeal is now even more urgent.

Our goal is to raise \$120,000. We are grateful to generous donors have already committed one third.

Through your donation, you have the power to give certainty to **'i sea, i care'** schools, and also to our other programs that are at risk of being scaled back.

Together we will foster a hopeful future for our whales and dolphins (like June with her new calf above), as well as nurturing future generations of young environmental leaders and scientists.

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.

Jeff Weir OAM, Executive Director.

PS: Please give what you can before June 30 to make the most of your donation and tax return.

The QR code takes you directly to our appeal page



Thank You To Our Valued Supporters



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Dolphin Research Institute | 03 5979 7100
PO Box 77 [Western Port Marina] Hastings Vic 3915
www.dolphinresearch.org.au | admin@dolphinresearch.org.au
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