

Researchers share concerns about the impacts of boats harassing whales in Port Phillip Bay

Scientists from the Dolphin Research Institute are worried about boaters disturbing whales following recent sightings of humpback whales in Port Phillip Bay.

MELBOURNE, VICTORIA, AUSTRALIA, June 29, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Scientists from the [Dolphin Research Institute](#) are worried about boaters disturbing whales following recent sightings of large whales in Port Phillip. Humpback and southern right whales migrate to our waters during their northern migration, and each year, some pass through Port Phillip Heads and enter the bay.



Humpback whale tail slap off Mornington, Port Phillip, Melbourne. Image Credit: Georgie Puschner.

This 'whale season,' the Institute's Two Bays Whale Project has confirmed three sightings of humpback whales in our bay. Today, two mature humpback whales thrilled onlookers as they swam past Seaford, Frankston, Mornington, and Mount Martha. These reports come from the Institute's dedicated citizen scientists, who contribute important sightings of large whales migrating through Victorian waters each year.

"We are very concerned about the welfare of the whales if boaters approach too closely," said Jeff Weir, the Institute's Executive Director.

Boats should not deliberately approach large whales closer than 200 meters, and Jet Skis should maintain a distance of at least 300 meters. Penalties for violations can reach thousands of dollars.

There is also a safety element for the vessels, as these whales likely weigh more than fifty times the average pleasure craft!

The Dolphin Research Institute has established a 'Whale Distancing' Program to assist boaters in acting responsibly. "It's like a Neighbourhood Watch for whales," Weir said. "We want to foster a strong and caring community of boaters, so that, just as we look out for our neighbours on land, we will also watch out for our neighbours in the water."

Recently, the Two Bays Whale Project has received numerous reports of humpback whales, killer whales, and southern right whales near the coasts of the Bellarine and Mornington Peninsulas and Phillip Island.

It is a privilege to have these remarkable visitors in our waters. However, many patterns appear to be changing, so recording as much information as possible about whale movements and behaviours each year is crucial. Additionally, this knowledge should be made publicly accessible, a commitment the Dolphin Research Institute upholds on behalf of its citizen scientists.

The Dolphin Research Institute recently published a whitepaper that offers new insights into the role of Bass Strait for whales. Titled "More Than a Migratory Corridor: Humpback Whale Feeding and Calving in Bass Strait," the report highlights the significance of Bass Strait as a location for humpback whales to feed and nurse during their migration. This new information is essential to the environmental approval process for various projects planned in the Bass Strait area.

The Dolphin Research Institute receives no ongoing government funding, relying on community and philanthropic support for its 34-year history. Members of the public can report sightings, commit to Whale Distancing and support the Institute's [Winter Appeal](#) at:

www.dolphinresearch.org.au

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Images are available on request. Please cite Georgie Puschner for images.

END

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