


# Adelaide Dolphin Sanctuary users' guide



Government  
of South Australia

ADELAIDE  
*Dolphin*  
SANCTUARY



There are around 30 resident Indo-Pacific bottlenose dolphins within the sanctuary, with about 400 transient dolphins that visit at various times.

Adelaide Dolphin Sanctuary is supported by the Adelaide and Mount Lofty Ranges Natural Resource Management Board.

[www.naturalresources.sa.gov.au/dolphin-sanctuary](http://www.naturalresources.sa.gov.au/dolphin-sanctuary)

### Volunteering at the sanctuary

Join the *Adelaide Dolphin Sanctuary Action Group* to help monitor and care for these dolphins, and make the Port River and Barker Inlet a safer place for them to live!

#### For more information

visit [www.adsactiongroup.com](http://www.adsactiongroup.com)

phone (08) 8240 0193

email [AdelaideDolphinSanctuary@sa.gov.au](mailto:AdelaideDolphinSanctuary@sa.gov.au)

facebook Ads Action Group



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#### Disclaimer

While every reasonable effort has been made to verify the information in this booklet use of the information contained is at your sole risk. The department recommends that you independently verify the information before taking any action.

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## The Adelaide Dolphin Sanctuary

The Adelaide Dolphin Sanctuary was established in 2005 to protect the resident population of Indo-Pacific bottlenose dolphins (*Tursiops aduncus*) in the Port River and Barker Inlet area and the habitat on which they rely.

It is 118 square kilometres and covers the Inner Port, Outer Harbour, North Haven marina, and stretches north to Port Gawler. Inside the sanctuary you will find mangroves, seagrass, saltmarsh, tidal flats and tidal creeks which provide habitat and food for the resident dolphins.

The sanctuary is part of a busy, living, city port. It contains significant major industries like electricity stations providing power to the city; recreational activities such as fishing and boating; housing estates; and Aboriginal and European cultural and historical points of interest.

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## Dolphins

There are around 30 resident Indo-Pacific bottlenose dolphins within the sanctuary, with about 400 transient dolphins that visit at various times. These dolphins are wild animals and come here to eat, play, socialise and live.

### Dolphin biology

When dolphins are born they are about a metre in length and dark in colour. They tend to be born tail first and breathe within minutes of birth. The Indo-Pacific bottlenose dolphins grow to about 2.5 metres in length, can weigh to about 160 kilograms and live for up to 40 years. Dolphins can dive to depths of more than 500 metres, but they have to surface to breathe through their blowhole every few minutes.

They are often seen in groups known as pods where they hunt, play and protect each other.

Dolphins navigate and seek out food using a process known as 'echo location' where the dolphin sends out a series of clicks through the water, which creates sound waves that bounce off objects.

### The sanctuary dolphins

While the dolphins are a wild population, over the years researchers and volunteers have learnt to identify them. The size and shape of their dorsal fins, or scratches and nicks on their fins can set them apart. Dolphin identification can help researchers monitor the health of the population.

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## Watching dolphins



### Travelling

When dolphins are travelling they move steadily in one direction and at various speeds. They are often in groups and surface at the same time at regular intervals.



### Foraging

When you see dolphins travel in the same direction and come to the surface at different times they are foraging for food. They surface regularly two to three times, then take one long dive.



### Feeding

Dolphins are likely to be feeding when you see them diving in different directions or making sudden bursts of speed. Look for birds circling overhead – they want the fish too!



### Socialising

When dolphins socialise with each other you may see a variety of surface behaviours such as leaps, tail slaps, belly up to the surface, splashing and physical contact with others.



### Resting or logging

Resting dolphins, in small groups or by themselves, stay calmly at the surface, move very slowly or sometimes not at all.

## Other wildlife in the sanctuary

The mangroves and salt marsh within the sanctuary provide vital habitat for juvenile fish. Their roots offer protection from predators and provide a nursery habitat. Stingrays are often found inhabiting the shallow waters and commonly seen species include eagle rays, smooth rays and fiddler rays. Sharks also swim into the area on rare occasions.



Dolphins are not the only marine mammals here. The New Zealand fur seal and Endangered Australian sea lion often haul out at sites after they have spent several days at sea foraging for food. It is important not to disturb these animals as they require lots of rest before they return to sea.



The sanctuary is home to many species of birds including some rare and endangered species. Sea birds such as pelicans can often be seen as well as cormorants, seagulls, ospreys and sea eagles.



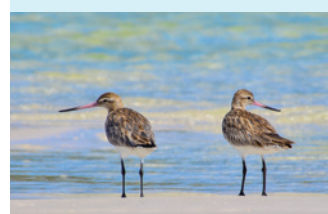
During summer the area is important for tens of thousands of migratory shorebirds which breed in the northern hemisphere and travel over 11,000 kilometres to Gulf St Vincent to feed.

The area is recognised as internationally significant for its birdlife and the state government has committed to establishing an Adelaide International Bird Sanctuary.



### What you can do!

- Shorebirds need to feed and rest to reach a critical body weight for their return migration. Please keep away from a seabird breeding colony or areas where large numbers of shorebirds are roosting.
- If nesting birds are disturbed it can result in eggs or chicks being crushed by panicked birds or leaving them at risk of predation or overheating from exposure to the sun. To help prevent this, please avoid the area just above the high tide mark on beaches between September and March, as this is favoured nesting habitat for Red-capped Plovers, Oystercatchers and Terns.
- When birds behave erratically, fly in circles, squawk or perform a 'broken wing display' they are feeling threatened. Please just move on if you see this behaviour.
- Avoid landing at popular roosting sites such as sand spits and mudbanks.



## Risks and threats

### Marine litter and entanglement

Marine debris is harmful and impacts on marine wildlife. It can be fatal if the litter is eaten or if the animals become entangled. Discarded fishing gear in particular poses a high threat to dolphins within the sanctuary. There have been a number of dolphins which have become entangled by fishing line, nets and rope. You can help by putting all rubbish in the nearest bin.

### Harassment and disturbance

There have been incidents of intentional harm, illegal feeding, chasing and harassment of dolphins. These actions are against the law and can incur significant penalties.

### Disease

Just like humans, dolphins can also be affected by harmful disease. Diseases known to affect dolphins include pneumonia, pox, morbillivirus and other viruses. Dolphins can also suffer skin lesions, sun burn and fungal infections.

### Habitat degradation and pollution

The sanctuary faces threats to its mangrove communities, seagrass beds, estuarine riverine system and tidal flats. Habitat loss and degradation is a primary threat to many species on land and at sea. Habitat can be lost in many ways including physical removal; by pollutants and nutrients; invasion of pest plants and animals; and by the effects of turbidity and sedimentation.

Human activities include dredging, boat-generated wave action, anchoring, bait digging, illegal rubbish dumping, human foot traffic, industrial discharges, stormwater runoff, construction of wharves and shore reclamation.

Natural Resources AMLR is working with other agencies and stakeholders to manage these threats.



### Vessel strikes and noise

Vessel strikes are a threat to marine mammals around the world and risks are higher when vessels move at high speed. Collisions with vessels can injure or kill dolphins. Young, sick or stressed animals may be more vulnerable to vessel strikes due to inexperience or ability to avoid the vessel. Boat operators are reminded to adhere to the speed limits in the Port River and Barker Inlet, and to maintain the regulated approach distance (see page 9 for details).

You can further decrease your impact by installing a propeller guard on your outboard.

Noise produced by boating and shipping may also be a disturbance to dolphins in the sanctuary. It is important to give dolphins their space and never engage in chasing or circling the animals.

*You can further decrease your impact by installing a propeller guard on your outboard.*



*Marine mammals are wild animals and may use aggression to defend themselves if they feel threatened.*



## Please keep your distance

Marine mammals are unique and play an important role in our marine ecosystem. Whales, dolphins and seals are wild animals; they are not accustomed to people and sensitive to human interaction. Inappropriate human interaction can cause distress, injury and abandonment of young. People who get too close to marine mammals are also putting themselves at risk of serious or fatal injury. Please only observe these animals from the appropriate distance.

Disturbing marine mammals can impact through:

- disruption to feeding, foraging, migrating, suckling young, breeding and resting
- displacement or avoidance of areas important for survival such as breeding and foraging areas, calving and nursery sites, haul-out and resting sites
- reduced reproductive success
- increased mortality rates
- stress and injury.

Disturbing marine mammals can also be dangerous for people and lead to serious or fatal injury. Marine mammals are wild animals and may use aggression to defend themselves if they feel threatened. When observing marine mammals it is important to know how to recognise whether it is being disturbed.

Take a look at the list below and if you see the animal behaving in this way, please move away immediately. If disturbed a marine mammal may:

- show vocalisation, trumpet blows or changes in acoustic behaviour
- make efforts to move away from a vessel or the area
- make rapid changes in direction or speed of swimming
- chase and/or bite
- breach water and tail slap
- breathe more rapidly
- suddenly move and lift its head in response to interaction.

## How close is too close?

**In the water:**

- Jet-skis and other 'prescribed vessels' must not move closer than 300 metres to any marine mammal.
- Other vessels, including motorised vessels, sail boats, kayaks and wind surfers, must not move closer than 100 metres to whales and no closer than 50 metres to other marine mammals.

**If a marine mammal approaches your vessel:**

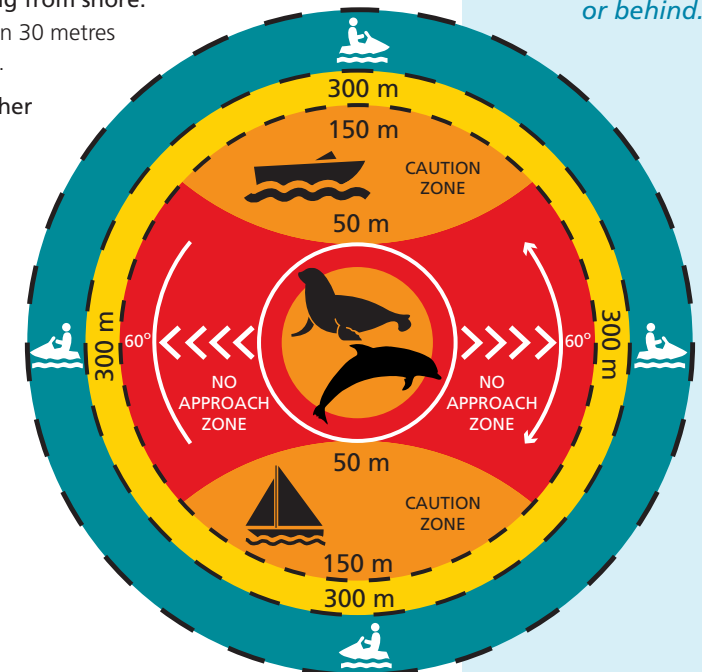
- put your engine in neutral and let the animals come to you
- do not engage propellers until they move off
- if you have to continue course, move away from the animal in a straight course, make no sudden movements and do not exceed 4 knots
- if an animal is bow riding on the wave your vessel created, maintain direction and speed.

**Swimmers and viewing from shore:**

Do not move closer than 30 metres to any marine mammal.

**Special rules and further restrictions exist for:**

- distressed, stranded or entangled (300 m for whale and 150 m for all other marine mammals)
- marine mammal calves and pups (300 m for whale and 150 m for all other marine mammals)
- commercial tour operators and other activities.



*Never approach a marine mammal from their front or behind.*

*This information is intended only as a general guide. Detailed information about your obligations regarding dolphins and other marine mammals, can be found in the relevant legislation.*

## Feeding or harassing

Marine mammals are sensitive and can be disturbed by noise, lights, touching and feeding. Please be aware that you are not allowed to touch or feed them, or engage in other activities that may impact on the animal's wellbeing. Do not dispose of any material into the water if a marine mammal is present or is likely to eat the material.

### Feeding wild dolphins:

- can spread disease, create poor nutrition and disrupt young animals from learning how to hunt effectively
- can cause the dolphins to get entangled, trapped or struck by a boat or propeller
- can alter their natural behaviour, making them more aggressive and encourage them to hang around boats which increases their chance of boat strikes.

### What you can do!

1. never feed wild dolphins – it's harmful and illegal
2. responsibly dispose of, or reuse leftover bait
3. reel in your line if dolphins are near
4. change locations if dolphins show interest in bait or catch
5. release catch quietly away from dolphins
6. recycle fishing line
7. stash your trash.



## Report injuries and incidents

The behaviour of a marine mammal can be difficult to interpret at times leading to a mistaken belief that the animal is in need of help even though it is exhibiting normal behaviour. For example seals resting on a beach after a week out at sea foraging, fin surfing or displaying a raised flipper when thermoregulating are normal behaviours.

### Report a marine mammal sighting when you see:

- stranded dolphins
- entangled marine mammals
- animals exhibiting poor body condition and severe injuries i.e. ribs or hip bones showing, significant wounds to limbs where bones are exposed
- animals found in a dangerous location i.e. in a location where the animal may be at risk of injury or the animal may injure people
- a deceased dolphin.

### When reporting an injured marine mammal please note:

- the type of marine mammal (whale, dolphin, seal) and species if known
- the location of animal
- the size of the animal and age (pup, calf, juvenile, adult)
- its body condition
- the extent of injuries (location on body, etc.)
- if there is any entanglement and its nature (location on the body and type of entanglement material)
- the animal's behaviour (is it moving, what other behaviour is it exhibiting?)
- if possible take photos.

**For marine mammal emergencies within Adelaide contact: 0427 556 676**





*The Adelaide Dolphin Sanctuary was proposed by members of the local community who became concerned about the safety of the dolphins and the quality of their environment.*

## Managing the sanctuary

### Legal protection

The Adelaide Dolphin Sanctuary was proposed by members of the local community who became concerned about the safety of the dolphins and the quality of their environment. Widespread consultation showed a strong desire in the community to protect the dolphins leading to the *Adelaide Dolphin Sanctuary Act 2005*.

The ADS Act contains six clearly defined objectives:

1. protect the dolphins from physical harm
2. maintain, protect and restore key habitat features
3. improve water quality
4. ensure the interests of the community are taken into account
5. promote public awareness of the importance of a healthy environment to the prosperity of the area
6. promote the principles of ecological sustainable development.

Natural Resources Adelaide and Mt Lofty Ranges is responsible for managing the sanctuary and implementing the ADS Management Plan which sets out how the state government intends to achieve the actions identified within the ADS Act.

### Rangers

Rangers and other Natural Resources staff patrol the sanctuary regularly to ensure that any breaches against the ADS Act and the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1972* (Protected Animals – Marine Mammals Regulations 2010) are thoroughly investigated and addressed.



## Speed limits in the sanctuary







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