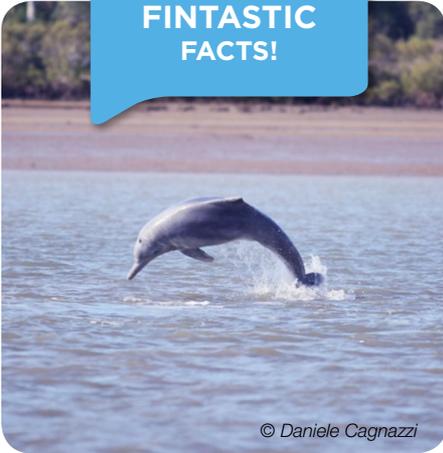


Dolphins

Fact Sheet



FINTASTIC FACTS!



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1 Sound is very important to dolphins. They use echolocation as well as a range of sounds like clicks, whistles, and burst pulsed sounds to communicate with each other and to navigate around their environment.

2 Unlike humans, dolphins have to think to breathe! They come to the surface of the water and breathe through the blowhole on top of their heads, not through their mouths like us.

3 Dolphins don't sleep! It is thought that they rest one half of their brain at a time – so that they don't forget to breathe.

4 Dolphin calves are born tail first! The mother and sometimes an aunt will help the calf to the surface so it can take its first breath.

5 Dolphins are very smart and use different hunting techniques to catch different prey in different areas.

Get to know the Dolphins of the Gladstone region

Do you know that dolphins are a type of whale? The waters around Gladstone are home to two species (or types) of coastal dolphin: the Australian humpback (*Sousa sahulensis*) and the Australian snubfin (*Orcaella heinsohni*).

Dolphins are mammals

Dolphins are mammals, which means that even though they live in the water, they are similar to humans in that they:

- breathe air
- are warm-blooded
- give birth to live young
- suckle their young (mothers produce milk to feed their calves)
- have hair (small whiskers on their beak).

Although the Australian humpback and snubfin dolphin have a lot in common, they are pretty easy to tell apart. The humpback dolphin is grey with white on its sides (called flanks) and has a long slender snout (called a rostrum). The snubfin dolphin is a pale to dark brown colour and has a shorter, rounded snout and fins.



Australian humpback dolphin
© Daniele Cagnazzi



Australian snubfin dolphin
© Guido Parra

Unique species!

Scientists first described Indo-Pacific humpback dolphins in 1765, and this species can be found as far away as the Arabian Sea and southern China. A study in 2014 showed that those found in Australia are a separate species that live only in Australia (and possibly Papua New Guinea). They are now named Australian humpback dolphins.

The Australian snubfin dolphin, which is only found in Australia, was first described as a unique species in 2005 – before that, they were thought to be Irrawaddy dolphins, a dolphin species found in south and south-east Asia.

Biology

Both species can live to over 30 years of age and only begin breeding at around 9 years for females and 11 years for males. Dolphins are excellent parents and calves will stay with their mother for at least three years before going off to explore the oceans on their own.

Favourite foods

Dolphins are carnivorous and like to eat fish, cephalopods (like squid and octopus), and crustaceans (such as prawns or crabs).

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Laws look after us

Both the Australian humpback and snubfin dolphin are listed as 'Near Threatened' in Queensland under the *Nature Conservation (Wildlife) Regulation 2006*, which means it is illegal to hurt or kill these species and that the Queensland Government works to protect their habitat.

This is important as scientists think there are only small populations of both species in the Gladstone inshore area, maybe less than 100 of each.

While both dolphins are listed on the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* as migratory, giving them some protection, there is still a lot of data that needs to be collected before they can be listed as threatened or near-threatened species, which is what many experts believe should happen.

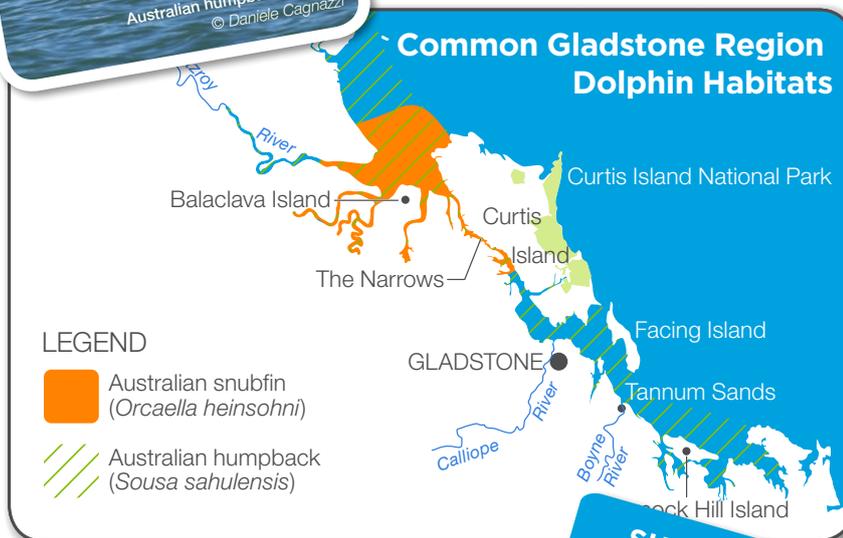
Small home ranges

Because of the variety in their diet, you could find either species grabbing a bite to eat around mangroves, out in the harbour, or near local reefs, but they each have areas that they prefer near Gladstone, as shown in the map below.

Both the Australian humpback and snubfin dolphin prefer to stay within a specific home range of about 300km² – about half the size of Curtis Island!

Prevent a sad dolphin tale

- Boat propellers and anchors can damage seagrass meadows and coral reefs that provide habitat for dolphin food sources.
- Noise from vessels may interfere with dolphins' communication signals, disorienting them or separating calves from their mothers.
- Because they live, eat, and play close to the coastline, inshore dolphins are at greater risk of coming into contact with humans or harmful human pollution like rubbish and chemical run-off.



SHOWING CETACEANS WE CARE

Ways to look after us!

- It might look like fun in the movies, but dolphins won't always ride the bow of boats, so please don't get too close or chase them – they could get hurt. Going too fast around dolphin habitats can lead to accidents and injured dolphins – so remember to always **go slow for those below!**
- Remember that drains lead to the ocean – always dispose of your rubbish in a bin and never pour chemicals down a drain!
- Cat poo can kill dolphins! Cat faeces can contain a parasite that causes brain swelling in dolphins and you should never flush your cat's waste down the toilet.
- If you come across an injured dolphin, call 1300 ANIMAL to report it, noting location and any identifying features.



Find out more

Capricorn Cetaceans Project
www.capricorncetaceansproject.com

Queensland Department of Environment and Heritage Protection
www.ehp.qld.gov.au

World Wide Fund For Nature (WWF)
www.wwf.org.au



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