Dolphins at risk

Whilst sharks are a dolphin's main predator, humans and their activities also pose a threat to dolphins and their habitat.

In South Australia the dolphins of the Port Adelaide River and Barker Inlet are subject to many human impacts including pollution, stormwater run off, introduced marine pests, entanglements, noise and rubbish.

These impacts not only affect the dolphin's environment, they are affecting our environment too.

Development of the Adelaide Dolphin Sanctuary has commenced. It offers the opportunity for the community, industry and local and state government agencies to focus their energy into collectively managing their interest in the area to minimise the impacts on the resident dolphin population, and the environment around them.

Want to make a difference?

If you use the coast for recreation, do all you can to minimise your impacts. Follow guidelines for protecting the environment and your own safety, respect other users, and take any rubbish home with you.

To help stop rubbish from reaching our oceans - reduce, reuse and recycle where you can. Rubbish can make its way to the oceans where marine mammals can eat or get entangled in it – leading to their injury or death.

When you can, leave the car at home – take public transport, ride a bike or walk. Cars do more than pollute the air – coolant, oil and tyre rubber are left on the road and can be picked up in stormwater when it rains, making their way to the ocean through the drains. We can all do our bit to keep the drains just for the rain, and the seas and rivers healthy.

Like to find out more?

Visit the website:
www.environment.sa.gov.au/coasts/dolphin.html

Send an e-mail
adelaidedolphinsanctuary@saugov.sa.gov.au

Adelaide Dolphin Sanctuary
Department for Environment and Heritage
GPO Box 1047
ADELAIDE SA 5001

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Dolphins of South Australia

Government of South Australia

Adelaide Dolphin Sanctuary

www.environment.sa.gov.au

Dolphins of South Australia

Dolphins are cetaceans (se-tay-shuns). There are about 80 cetacean species worldwide including whales and porpoises. About 44 cetaceans have been observed in Australian waters. Thirteen of these are dolphin species.

South Australia is home to the Common Dolphin, the Indo-Pacific Bottlenose Dolphin and the Short-beaked Common Bottlenose Dolphin.

Dolphins look like fish, but have streamlined hairless bodies rather than scales. Their skin sheds regularly so barnacles or parasites don't get a chance to grow. Tail fins move them through the water, their front fins are used for direction whilst the top fins provide balance. They are strong swimmers, travelling about 5-10 kilometres per hour. Sometimes they can reach speeds of 30 to 35 kilometres per hour.

Dolphins are mammals. They breathe air, give birth to live young, suckle their young on milk and are warm blooded, with a body temperature of about 37^0C.

Dolphins are conscious breathers. They have to be awake or semi-conscious to breathe or they will drown. They regularly come up for air, breathing through their blowhole every 3-5 minutes.

Dolphins eat small fish and squid. Their food is also a source of water as sea water is too salty to drink. Local dolphins grow to about 2.5 metres in length and can weigh about 160 kg.

Depending on the type of dolphin, they live for up to 40 years. Their teeth, which are designed for grasping rather than chewing food, give the best indication of how old an individual is.

Dolphins live in groups called pods. The size and structure of the pods varies depending on age, sex and maturity of the individuals. Most male dolphins are loners or travel in pairs. Mothers and calves have a strong bond and spend many years together.

Dolphins have all the senses humans do such as sight, sound, taste and touch, but very limited smell.

Their eyes are very good at detecting fast moving objects. They have a view field of 180 degrees forwards, backwards and to the side. They cannot see upwards.

A characteristic called echolocation helps them to map out their surroundings. They produce intense short pulses of ultrasonic sound (we hear them as clicks) that bounce off objects in their path. The time taken for the echo to come back gives an indication of how far away an object is from them.

Echolocation is an important feature for navigation and hunting. Research has indicated dolphins have some ability to detect different tastes such as sweet, sour, or bitter. They appear to be using these senses to locate other dolphins, find food, breed and assist with navigation.

A dolphin's sense of touch is used to feel water movements around them, socialise with other dolphins and when breeding.

Bottlenose Dolphins

Bottlenose dolphins are the most common and can regularly be seen in the Port Adelaide River and Barker Inlet and closer inshore in coastal waters of South Australia.

Ongoing studies in the Port Adelaide River and Barker Inlet area have revealed that about 25 to 30 dolphins frequent the area, with over 250 more identified in the area.

Common Dolphins

Common dolphins are found further off the coast of South Australia, as they prefer deeper water. They differ in colour and size to the Bottlenose Dolphin, but share the same interest in playing in the bow wave of boats.