

Southern right whales make a splash

The record numbers of Southern right whales currently gathering at the Head of Bight were last week joined by a pair of humpback whales.

The Southern right whales travel from the Southern Ocean to spend the winter months (May – October) along the Southern Australian coastline calving and mating.

So far this year 53 Southern right calves have been born in the Great Australian Bight Marine Park, at the Head of Bight, about 1000 kilometres west of Adelaide.

Simon Clark from the Department for Environment and Heritage said the Head of Bight was one of Australia's largest and most consistent Southern right whale breeding areas.

"The Southern rights have distinctive white callosities, or raised rough patches of skin on their heads, which can be used to identify different individuals," he said.

Mr Clark pointed out that although the number of Southern rights is now on the increase, the global population of about 12,000 was small compared to the estimated 60,000 to 100,000 that existed before commercial whaling flourished in the nineteenth century.

"Right whales are so named because they were the 'right' whales to hunt," he said.

"Their blubber-rich bodies produce a large amount of oil, they travel at a slow pace and they are buoyant and float when dead.

"Despite being dwarfed by the much larger blue whale, the male Southern right whale has the world's largest testes, weighing up to 1000 kilograms, and is seriously well endowed – its penis can be up to three metres long."

The Australian and South Australian Governments recognised the need to protect the breeding grounds of the Southern right whale and other vulnerable species when the Great Australian Bight Marine Park was established in 1995.

The South Australian Government is continuing its commitment to marine conservation by establishing 19 additional multiple-use marine parks in State waters by 2010.

For photographs of the Southern right whales and their calves contact Angela Gray on 8124 4909 or Gray.Angela@saugov.sa.gov.au

For more information, contact DEH's Coast and Marine Conservation Branch on (08) 8124 4900 or visit www.environment.sa.gov.au/coasts/marineparks.html.

Media contacts

Simon Clark

Senior Community Engagement Officer
Coast and Marine Conservation
Phone 08 8688 3105
Mobile 0418 855 992

Stephen Cox

A/Media Manager
Corporate Communications
Phone 08 8204 9109
Mobile 0423 822 992

www.environment.sa.gov.au



Government
of South Australia

Department for
Environment and Heritage