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Australian Government
Department of the Environment
and Water Resources

2007 The Year of the Dolphin

Did you know that 2007 has been declared the International Year of the Dolphin by the United Nations? The Year of the Dolphin raises awareness about threats to dolphins and what you and your students can do to help protect them.

Visit the Year of the Dolphin official website at www.yod2007.org/en/Start_page/index.html

Dolphin Facts

What is a dolphin?

Dolphins are mammals that live in oceans and rivers of the world. There are around 40 species of dolphins in the world, 21 of which occur in Australian waters. Dolphins are related to whales and porpoises and belong to the group called *cetaceans*.

A dolphin has a streamlined body that helps it swim easily through the water. Dolphins also have a dorsal fin located on the centre of their backs, pectoral flippers and a single blowhole located on top of their heads. Dolphins breathe through this blowhole which they can close to stop water getting in when they are swimming. All dolphins have teeth that they use to eat fish, squid, prawns and starfish.

Dolphins are social animals that live in groups called pods. Pods vary in size from as few as two to as many as a hundred or more. You can often see dolphins around the Australian coastline, sometimes they like to surf beach waves or to ride the wave in front of moving boats (this is called bow-riding).

To learn more about cetaceans and dolphin anatomy visit www.whales-online.org/education/lesson_set1/unit1-1.php

What if I see a dolphin?

If you see a dolphin you can report it to the National Whale and Dolphin Sightings and Strandings Database website: aadc-maps.aad.gov.au/aadc/whales/

Dolphins under threat

Many species of dolphins are threatened by problems caused by humans such as pollution, fishing and habitat destruction. Dolphins can also be threatened by people getting too close to them and disturbing their normal activities (such as eating, resting or mating).

If dolphins are not protected they can die and a species may even become extinct. This happened in China where the Yangtze river dolphin died out due to excessive boat traffic, fishing nets and river pollution.

The Australian Government funds scientific research to learn more about dolphins and their habitats so all Australians can assist in conservation efforts.

Visit www.environment.gov.au/coasts/species/cetaceans/research.html



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FUN FACT

Did you know that the killer whale is actually a dolphin? www.seaworld.org/infobooks/KillerWhale/home.html

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Protecting dolphins

The Australian Government is a world leader in dolphin protection and conservation. The Government protects dolphins in an area known as the Australian Whale Sanctuary. Within the Sanctuary it is illegal to injure, harass or kill a dolphin. For further details see www.environment.gov.au/coasts/species/cetaceans/sanctuary.html

The Government has also developed the Australian National Guidelines for Whale and Dolphin Watching. The Guidelines set standards that allow people to observe and interact with whales and dolphins in a way that ensures these animals are not harmed. Access the guidelines at <http://www.environment.gov.au/coasts/publications/whale-watching-guidelines-2005.html>

It is also important to protect dolphins outside the Sanctuary. In September last year, Australia signed an agreement with eight other countries to protect all cetaceans in the Pacific region. To learn about what the Government is doing to protect dolphins visit www.saveourwhales.gov.au

Steps you can take

You can help protect dolphins in some very simple ways.

- Reduce, re-use, and recycle your rubbish so it doesn't end up in the ocean.
- Encourage friends and family to properly dispose of wastes like paint and car oil at special collection sites rather than pouring them down the drain.
- Don't approach dolphins too closely. In Australia, you are only permitted to get within 50 metres of dolphins if you are in a boat. Often, dolphins are curious and will approach you if you let them.
- Support dolphin research organisations.

Learn more online

You can learn a lot more about dolphins and other cetaceans on the Internet. Here are a few other terrific sites to explore:

www.environment.gov.au/coasts/species/cetaceans/kids.html

(Information about whales and dolphins for kids)

www.environment.gov.au/coasts/species/cetaceans/intro.html

(Free 'Save our whales' wristbands—order online)

www.environment.gov.au/coasts/species/cetaceans/species.html

(A list of all cetacean species in Australian waters, including detailed information on habitat, conservation and behaviour)

www.whales-online.org

(Resources about whales and dolphins)



www.environment.gov.au/coasts/discovery/index.html

(Discovery page—discover more about our amazing oceans with interactive games)



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Make a splash to protect Dolphins...

The greatest threats to dolphins arise from human activities. This unit prompts discussion about the threats facing dolphins and highlights two positive steps that you can take with your students to help protect these gentle creatures.

Curriculum focus

SOSE /Science: Marine environments and ecology
English: Interviewing techniques, Research techniques
Mathematics: Data collection and analysis
Technology: Collation of collected data

Learning outcomes:

Students will be able to:

- recognise threats to dolphins and their environment
- identify strategies for reducing human impacts on marine environments
- recognise the varying degrees of understanding within the community of dolphins and their environment.

The Australian Dolphin Survey

- Encourage students to discover the varying degrees of understanding of dolphins by surveying students from other classes. Use the questions listed on the data collection sheet which can be printed out from the Dolphin Research Institute website www.dolphinresearch.org.au or the Teachers' Toolkit website www.teacherstoolkit.net.au/dolphinsurvey.
- Graph the results from each class. Discuss your findings in class. Email your results to the Dolphin Research Institute to be part of the Great Dolphin Survey. Results are due by June 5th, 2007 (World Environment Day). Australia-wide survey results will be available early in Term Three, 2007.
- Your results will play a major part in a report to be shown to local and state governments about the perceptions of Australians towards marine ecosystems.

Website resources:

www.dolphinresearch.org.au

(Dolphin Research Institute. Research and education organisation dedicated to the well-being of dolphins and their environment. Site contains valuable research and educational resources)

www.yod2007.org/en/Start_page/index.html

(Year of the Dolphin official website)

Discussion questions

1. What are the physical attributes of dolphins and how have they successfully adapted to their aquatic environment?
2. Which dolphin species can be found within Australian waters?
3. What are the main threats to dolphins and their environment?
4. How can we reduce threats to dolphins and their marine environment?

Activities

Species

Investigate the species of dolphins found within Australian waters. How are they distributed? What are the main threats to each species? What is the current conservation status of dolphins within Australian waters?

Threats

Make a collective list of threats to dolphins. How can humans reduce their impact on dolphins and their environment? What actions can we take on land to protect the dolphins' environment? Write a letter to an appropriate government minister or local newspaper voicing your concerns. Take action at school with simple activities like introducing 'rubbish free lunch' days.



ADOPT A DOLPHIN

WHY NOT GET YOUR SCHOOL INVOLVED with the Dolphin Research Institute's Adopt-A-Dolphin program? Your school will receive a kit that includes marine stickers, a ten-page activity book, a certificate, pictures and information on our individual dolphins and details about the current work of our researchers. Additionally, a quarterly newsletter will be sent to your school outlining our latest findings, trips, education programs and fun pages. All this for only \$100 per year! All proceeds go straight into our research and education programs.



DOLPHIN RESEARCH INSTITUTE

The Dolphin Research Institute is a non-profit organisation and your support is greatly appreciated. For more information contact 1300 130 949 or visit our website at www.dolphinresearch.org.au.

