



14th Port Stephens Community Dolphin Census Results



Dear Dolphin Enthusiast

Thank you for participating in the 14th Annual Port Stephens Community Dolphin Census, 13th April 2014.

One hundred and five dolphins were sighted, which included a group swimming within twenty metres of the Shoal Bay shoreline, and another group that were 'leaping very high'! In addition, three to four calves were spotted. Most dolphins were sighted off Tomaree Head (25), alongside the Nelson Bay Marina (14) and in Shoal Bay (14). Two turtles and two osprey were also reported.

Figure 1 shows the total number of dolphins counted and the number of observation points over the past fourteen years. This year we had sixty-one participants spread across forty sites. That is the second lowest number of observation points since the census began. The average number of dolphins sighted over the past 14 years is 90.9 (range of 12 in 2011 to 194 in 2004). In spite of having the second lowest number of observation sites, your 2014 census data count was above average. Most importantly, it is the highest number of dolphins counted during the census since 2010!

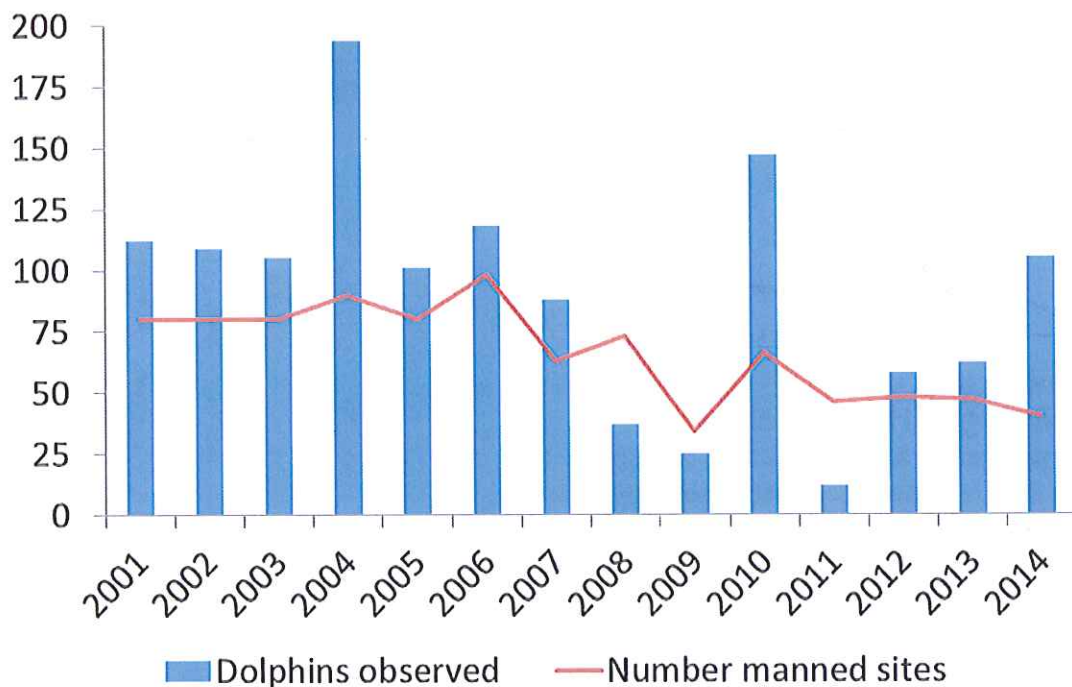


Figure 1: Census results from fourteen Port Stephens community dolphin surveys (blue columns) and the number of annual participants (red line). The 2014 survey returned above average results.

One factor that could have contributed to increased dolphin activity in the Port was the high seas. The first large southerly swells for 2014 was bombarding the east coast, causing turbid and choppy conditions. It is important to be aware of variables like this, which can affect the numbers of dolphins recorded. Heavy rain prior to the survey also may alter dolphin distribution in the Port due to salinity changes.

As expected, the number of observation points around the Port also affects the number of dolphin sighted. Only three boats participated in the 2014 census, and these did not include any commercial operators, who had prior commitments.

While the graph seems to indicate an increase in dolphin numbers, dolphin counts conducted by Macquarie University indicate the Port Stephens population is approximately 100 dolphins. The community Dolphin Census which is completed in half an hour on one day is sensitive to the variables described above.

The voluntary census is invaluable because it is the longest running community dolphin count in Australia and directly supports dolphin conservation and other short term studies conducted by research institutes.

All participants in the 2014 census will be notified directly by post or email of future census days. Alternatively, keep an eye on the local newspapers.

If you have any questions or would like to provide feedback, please contact Hunter Coast Area office on 49848200, or email Ranger Brad Purcell brad.purcell@environment.nsw.gov.au.

Thanks again for your services and we hope that you will participate in the 15th Annual Port Stephens Community Dolphin Census next year.

Yours faithfully,



Andrew Bond
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