

Port Stephens Community Dolphin Census 2012

Dear Dolphin Enthusiast

Thank you for your interest in the Port Stephens Community Dolphin Census. The 12th annual census was held on 6th May 2012.

Fifty eight dolphins were sighted, which included a group of forty counted off the ocean beach near Hawks Nest. Locations where most dolphins were sighted inside the Port centred on Corlette and Jimmy's Beach.

A graph of the results showing the total number of dolphins counted and the number of observation points over the past twelve years is attached.

When comparing the annual results, it is important to be aware of the variables which can affect the numbers of dolphins recorded. Choppy water conditions due to strong wind and/or swell can make it difficult to spot dolphins. Heavy rain prior to the survey 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. This year we had 64 registered observers, however only 48 returned results. The number of boat based observers has declined significantly from the earlier years of the census.

Large pods of dolphins, sometimes numbering over 100 are observed during some annual surveys, usually off the ocean beach near Hawks Nest. These observations explain the higher totals that have been observed in 2004 and 2010.

While the graph seems to indicate a reduction in dolphin numbers, dolphin counts conducted by Macquarie University, which were conducted over 15 days annually between 1999 to 2002 and 2006 to 2010, indicate a more consistent count of approximately 100 dolphins within Port Stephens. This partly reflects how the community Dolphin Census which is completed in half an hour on one day, is sensitive to the variables described above.

Nevertheless, the community census is valuable in raising community awareness and involvement in dolphin conservation, and to supplement other research conducted by universities which is often restricted to shorter terms of three to four years.

All participants in this year 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 Laurence Penman on 49848253, or email laurence.penman@environment.nsw.gov.au.

Thanks again for your participation.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Michael Murphy', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the left.

Michael Murphy
Hunter Coast Area Manager
Hunter Region
3/7/09