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## HHR Newsletter 2016/4 - Season Summary

1 message

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HHR October-December Newsletter 2016

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## Humpbacks & High-Rises

Whale Tails 2016/4

This is our quarterly newsletter bringing you a summary of the urban marine mammal world. Facts, Stories and Events. Join us on the largest mammal migration on earth!

### *Quarter Summary*

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*One of the many newborn calves sighted on the Gold Coast in 2016.*

### [Season Summary](#)

**What a year!** The 2016 whale season was our most intensive survey season so far.

During 109 survey days between June and November, HHR volunteers covered over 330 survey hours surveying 669 individual whales. Just to give you an example of the endless counting of various behaviors by our dedicated volunteers, we counted 14361 blows. In addition we observed a minimum of 600 dolphins on 48 occasions, 1 Hammerhead shark, 3 unidentified sharks and 18 turtles. The surveys were done by over 50 trained volunteers.

Thanks to a dedicated HHR social media team our outreach through Facebook with currently 2041 followers and our Instagram account with 2095 is constantly growing. HHR also presented research outcomes at various [conferences](#) and published in international journals throughout 2016.

We are the largest and only marine mammal monitoring program in south-east Queensland. I like to take the opportunity to thank our interns Parissa, Karolina, Tasha and Gina for their outstanding support in 2016. In addition HHR supported a successful Honours project on strandings and continues to support a Master and PhD research project.

I urge you to [support our](#) work. We have no funding or government support and rely

on you. We need people who care about our marine life in south-east Queensland waters.

Over the years I have met many wonderful and amazing people through my volunteering for HHR. People that have inspired me to continue despite all obstacles. On this note I like to end the year with a quote from Margaret Mead "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."

Wishing you all a very Merry Christmas and Happy New Year! May the whales be plenty and our dolphins joyful.

Olaf Meynecke  
President HHR



*One whale and 13 boats! Lots of boat traffic and breach of regulations are becoming a regular occurrence in the Gold Coast bay.*

### Traffic Jam

There is an ever increase in boats and motorised vessels in south-east Queensland. HHR as expressed strong concerns about this trend many years ago. The combination of rising number of whales and rising number of boats is leading to

trouble. [A boat in northern NSW](#) was hit by a whale and sank. Such accidents can be avoided and with over 5 years of detailed behavior data on whales we have the evidence how this can be achieved in the future. The big problem is that humpback whales are using calm and shallow waters for resting and breeding and these areas are also used by recreational vessels. We have therefore started the documentation of vessels breaking the laws. In particular jet skis were approaching whales and circling them closer than the required 300m distance.

Boat traffic is also an issue on a larger scale with many whale species using similar routes as the [main shipping routes](#). Collision with marine mammals can be avoided and HHR is proposing a new project for 2017 in south-east Queensland to address this issue.



### [Calving Craziiness](#)

There were many newborn calves again the Gold Coast bay and some of them born south or within the Gold Coast bay in the June and July period. HHR is currently supporting a research project that analyses multiple years of mother and calf sightings and we have detected a trend of calves sighted being very young in recent years. We also encountered more competitive behavior and courtship behavior in the Gold Coast bay in 2016.

The number of new born calves which are animals around one to four weeks of age are increasing and this year is likely to see another peak. In 2013 and 2014 during July and August we observed a total 34 neonates. Between 15 and 20% of all pods observed during this period had a calf. Considering there are likely at least 5 000 to 6 000 humpback whales using the Gold Coast bay resulting in an average of about 2 000 pods. An estimated 250-350 neonates per season using or being born in the Gold Coast is therefore a realistic assumption.

This would be a drastic shift from what the Gold coast bay original was for humpback whales - from a resting to a breeding ground. This would have implications for

protection and management as business as usual and increasing unregulated boat traffic could result in injuries and avoidance behavior.



### [Record Whale entanglements](#)

We had record numbers of whale entanglements during the 2016 whale season and sadly there were little opposing reports by the main stream media to call for a change. The strategy works and not many people seem to care about the constant death and injury inflicted to marine life on the Gold Coast. The total number of officially reported whale entanglements in Gold Coast shark nets stands at 5 and in addition there were some reports of animals that freed themselves. Just after we predicted high risk on strandings and entanglements in early October a number of incidents occurred including a stranding of a [mother and calf in Moreton bay](#).

Entanglements: 14th October Coolangatta, 4th October, Gold Coast, 28th September Broadbeach, 20th September Moreton Bay, 20th August Currumbin, 10th July Main Beach, Gold Coast.

In [NSW more shark nets](#) were put into the ocean and a calf that was dragging a large net just offshore in northern NSW on the 30th September was not further reported by the media or assisted in its distress.

Entanglements are not accidents but predictable incidents that reoccur every year, at the same places and same conditions. However, you can stop this by supporting our [Stop whale entanglement letter](#) and request alternative methods to be put in place and developed. Do you know a business on the Gold Coast that would like to endorse the open letter? Please, send us an [e-mail](#).



### [Fluke Matching](#)

We have flukes and that is no fluke. Thanks to a number of HHR interns our fluke database has grown to almost 5000 flukes covering the past 6 years. All flukes are from the Gold Coast bay and we are starting to analyse the catalogue for matches. The good news is that everyone can help. Our catalogue will soon be accessible through [Zooniverse](#) an open platform for citizen science projects.

One of our first fluke matches is an individual first spotted in the Gold Coast bay on the 28th August 2015 and then again just one day later on the 29th August this year. Humpback whales are known to visit the same places at very similar times. This individual has a very distinctive black fluke. Soon people can start sponsoring our whales.

If you have a good fluke image, please, send it to us!



### [Fair Whale Celebration](#)

With 2016 being our 5th year since founded in 2011, we are celebrating. Join us at Burleigh Heads Surfclub on the 22nd December. Our AGM starts at 6pm and drinks/nibbles at 7pm with our award ceremony. It will be an informal get together to meet like minded ocean lovers, surfers, beach goers, mermaids and marine nerds. Everyone welcome. Details can be found on our [event page](#).

There is a lot to celebrate and much to talk about for 2017. HHR wants to support a plastic program to prevent and reduce impacts of marine debris and plastic and we are planning to get our own research vessel.



### [Whale Tails](#)

*by Holly*

"It just hit 12noon and I was surrounded by excited faces as we watch four whales majestically swim through the ocean, just offshore from Point Lookout, North Stradbroke. We were accompanied by a mother and her calf, an escort and a very wild bull. There was tension in the water, as the mother was trying to escape a bull from mating with her. Each time the calf surfaced, you could hear the exhaustion in its blow, from trying to keep up with its mother. The scenario carried on for a length of time, as we watched the splashes along the surface wondering what exactly was going on underneath. We decided to put the hydrophone into the water, immediately after hearing the distressed sounds of a female and her calf, my heart sank. The sensations were omnipresent. It was the first time I had heard a humpback whale. At that exact moment of purity, I could feel the emotion of each individual. I felt I understand their vocals. They were just like us, battling their own challenges. Nature is our core of existence; it is so easy to be able to connect with another species, regardless of their size, colour and biological make. If it breathes, eats and sleeps, we are the same. It is impossible not to want to protect these beautiful animals as they need our help to live a safe and healthy life. There is no hierarchy of species, we are all surviving on this earth together. If we are as much of the earth as they are, why don't we strive to protect one another. If the ocean dies, we die."



### *Upcoming Events & volunteer opportunities*

Get ready for an exciting 2017 whale season. Join us as a volunteer and make a difference for our marine life.

- Take part in our whale surveys and register your interest by sending an e-mail to [science@hhr.org.au](mailto:science@hhr.org.au)
- Help with a sausage sizzle at Bunnings on the 15th January 2017
- Come to our clean up Australia day on the 5th March 2017
- Want to be part of the core team and get the real deal? Join our dedicated team that runs HHR at our monthly general meetings. Held at the end of each month. Next meeting end of January 2017.

HHR relies on the interest, support and good will of people who feel that protecting marine mammals and learning about them is important. We are honest, independent and stand for the well being of our natural wonders and a sustainable whale watching industry. Our ongoing work entirely depends on donation. Please, consider [donating for whale research and protection](#).

## HELP URBAN MARINE MAMMALS

You can support whale protection and research in south-east Queensland; a small donation goes a long way.

[DONATE NOW](#)

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