



## Humpbacks & High-Rises Newsletter 2011

### *Season Summary*

Here a quick summary of HHR efforts in numbers. We have collected over 50 individual fluke pictures and at least an additional 1000 photographs of whales (behavior, scaring, peduncle). We have collected more than 30 movement tracks, have had nearly 100 survey days where we gathered behaviour data and collected water density profiles on 30 occasions.

### *Media*

HHR launched its [website](#) with the beginning of the whale season this year thanks to [iOnline](#) and started blogging on [Facebook](#) on the 7<sup>th</sup> June. Since then we made over 50 entries covering news and events about marine mammals and now reached 136 followers. We have produced a media release about surfing whales observed to do so just off Main Beach in October and we have been featured in the Gold Coast Bulletin with an article on feeding of humpbacks whales in the GC. HHR members provided statements to the community on Channel 7 and Channel 9 News. A presentation was given by HHR President Olaf Meynecke about the Gold Coast as an important resting area for mothers with calves at the 2nd International Conference for Coastal Zone Management in Arendal, Norway. We are also proud to announce the release of a video documenting our boat surveys which will be available online soon.

### *Events*

Our first AGM was held in January and was the beginning of our organisation. Council members met twice in March and April to organize the upcoming whale season. The season was officially opened with a presentation by Wally Franklin from the [Oceania Project](#) on the 26<sup>th</sup> May. It was a well received presentation that gave us all courage and vision to continue. The whale season midterm break was highlighted by our “Under the Sea – Party” on the 26<sup>th</sup> August. With over 100 guests, amazing dress ups and donations this event was a great success and will be organised for 2012. Our year finished on the 9<sup>th</sup>



December with our AGM and an X-treme screening of footage taken during the Crittercam deployment campaign 2011.

### *Whale Cam (Crittercam)*

Between September and October we have had a number of days on the water to try deploying Crittercam. Thanks to the generous support from





Ecoforce we were able to approach whales on 6 days. Weather conditions and some issues with equipment were holding us back. However, the experience we gained for next season and the amazing moments we had with the whales made it all a worthwhile experience. We were mugged by a mother and calf that made a curtain of bubbles around the boat (maybe testing if we could be food?), we saw a calf surfing in the break in 5 m depth at Main Beach and we recorded a mother calling for its calf. This made us forget that we lost our Go Pro on the first day. We are looking forward to successful deployments in 2012.

#### *White Whale News*

It seems Migaloo is getting more and more competition. Up to 5 white



whales were suspected to migrate along the east coast this season. A white whale that was washed up on Palm Island was not Migaloo. Migaloo was instead spotted near Fraser Island in June and a new white whale was sighted in the Whitsundays in September.

#### *Whale strandings and incidents*

This year's strandings and incidents of humpback whales reached a sad record. The total head count for fatal beaching of humpback whales on the east coast is 23 but we are still

collecting information and the number may well increase. In average we see 4



strandings a year at the east coast. The stranding that had most attention was a 1-2 week old calf 200m at Surfers Paradise in the first week of August. It was clear that a calf at this age would not survive without its mother's milk for more than 12 hrs. However, the



animal was pushed back out to sea and needed to be euthanised the next day when it became stranded again. Another whale stranded earlier in June at Main Beach. So far 8 were counted for NSW, 8 for Tasmania, 1 for Victoria and 6 for QLD. Incidents include a boat strike near North Straddie at the beginning of the season and an anchor line entanglement at Fraser Island. Increasing numbers of dead whales is not a good sign (even though some officials like to think so). Until we know the animals actual





health status we can not call their death natural.

#### *HHR action*

HHR President Olaf Meynecke is involved in the development of a national fluke database funded by the [AMMC](#). Olaf has also provided a submission of statements to the Federal government on whale [watching regulations](#). A study supported by Sea World Whale Watch on how humpback whales use the Gold Coast will be published early next year and will set a new era for the Gold Coast humpback whales as we are determined to provide our gentle giants with a safe passage.

#### *HHR outlook 2012*

We are setting our targets high for 2012. We will try to double our survey days and fluke pictures output and hope to welcome other whale watch operators joining our good cause.

We will be testing new research equipment including acoustic devices and develop a method to screen the health status of stranded whales.

Our next publication will be on whale strandings and aims to provide a spatial analyses of 30 years of marine mammal strandings on the east coast of Australia.



#### *HHR acknowledgement*

HHR council like to thank everyone for their support and interest in our

first year - in particular Whale Watching Gold Coast, Ecoforce, National Geographic, Griffith AERC and GCCM. Special thanks also go to our dedicated volunteers and internships. We are hoping to grow strong together in 2012. Wishing you all a wonderful Christmas and a great start into the New Year!

