

Threatened species of the Northern Territory

Humpback whale

Megaptera novaeangliae

Conservation status

Australia: Least Concern

Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999

Northern Territory: Least Concern

Territory Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act 1976

Description

The Humpback Whale is a large (body length of 15-18 m) whale, with extremely long flippers and tubercles on head and lower jaw. It is black above and white, black or mottled below. It frequently raises the flukes when it dives (Reeves et al. 2002), revealing the distinctive 'serrated' tailing edge.

Distribution

The Humpback Whale occurs in all major oceans, mostly in coastal and continental shelf waters. Two main subpopulations occur in Australian waters. One migrates along the east coast, while the other migrates along the west coast.

In the Northern Territory (NT), the Humpback Whale is known from stranding and incidental records, including a beach-washed specimen on the Napier Peninsula, north-eastern Arnhem Land, in 1981¹. Recent records in NT waters suggest a regular southward migration each year around October along the western NT coast².

NT conservation reserves where reported:
Kakadu National Park.

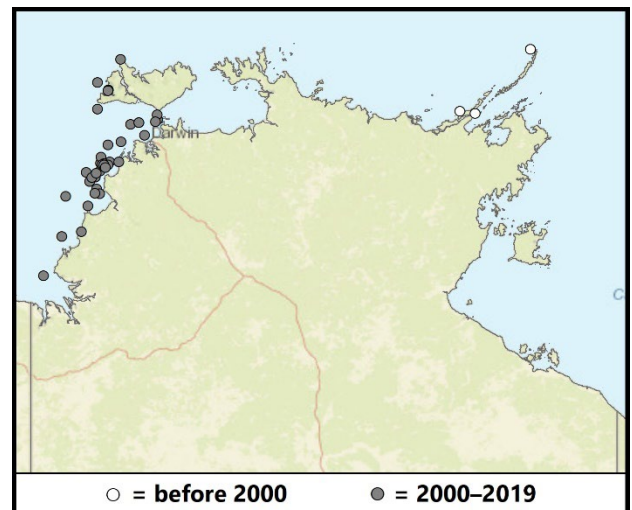


Credit: P. & M. Nicholas/Lochman Transparencies

Ecology and life-history

The Humpback Whale breeds in warm waters at low latitudes, and migrates in summer to higher latitudes. Females give birth to a single calf every two to three years.

Like other baleen whales, Humpback Whales feed by filtering mouthfuls of water containing prey through the baleen plates attached to their upper jaw. The diet comprises krill and small schooling fish.



Caption: Known localities of the Humpback Whale in the NT (nrmmaps.nt.gov.au)

Humpback Whales are usually solitary, but may form small temporary groups. Males in particular may aggregate around females.

Threatening processes

Historically, Humpback Whales declined dramatically due to historical whaling activities. The main contemporary threats to the Humpback Whale include current and future proposed hunting, habitat degradation, reduced food resources and climate change².

Conservation objectives and management

A national recovery plan, which details conservation and management objectives for the Humpback Whale in Australia, was prepared in 2005³. The primary research priority in the NT is to improve knowledge of the distribution, status and habitat requirements of this species in NT waters.

References

¹ Chatto, R., Warnecke, R.M., 2000. Records of cetacean strandings in the Northern Territory of Australia. *The Beagle* 16, 163–175.

² DEH, 2005. Humpback whale recovery plan, 2005–2010. Department of Environment and Heritage, Canberra.