



Southern Right Whales Factsheet

Organisation for the Rescue &
Research of Cetaceans in Australia



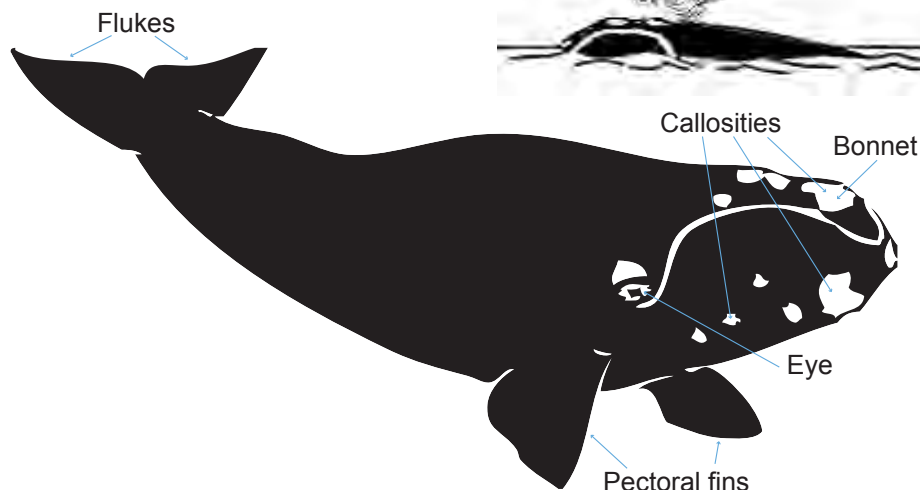
In the early history of New South Wales the Southern Right whale was a mainstay of the colony's export industries. It was considered the 'right' whale to hunt because it swam slowly, floated when killed, and yielded high quantities of oil and baleen (whalebone). The whales were plentiful and ships would stay for a while after bringing convicts to the colony to let their captains hunt these whales.

By the 1840s the Southern Right whales numbers had been diminished resulting in the collapse of the whaling industry. Populations of Southern Right whales have been recovering ever since. Today, scientists estimate that there are only approximately 7000 Southern Right whales remaining. However, there are positive signs that indicate that the populations in Australian waters may be increasing at approximately 5-7% annually.

Southern Right whales are protected throughout Australia and are listed as a threatened species under the NSW Threatened Species Conservation Act.

Features:

- Dark skin, with irregular white patches on the throat and belly.
- A rotund body which tapers to a relatively narrow tail stock.
- Flukes which form a wide triangle with a notch in the middle.
- Large, broad pectoral fins which have a rectangular/paddle shape.
- Large, narrow head with a highly arched mouth.



- A series of natural growths called callosities on the front of the rostrum or head. The largest of these callosities is called the 'bonnet'. Callosities are also found on the whale's chin, on the sides of the head, on the lower lips, above the eyes, and near the blowholes.

Southern Right whales are baleen whales. They don't have any teeth, and feed by filtering food through 220-260 baleen plates which hang from each side of their upper jaws. The baleen is up to 2.8 m long, and each plate is fringed by long, fine, greyish bristles.

Southern Right whales can grow to approximately 17m long and weigh up to 100 tonnes. At birth their length ranges from 4.5m to 6m.

What do Southern Right whales look like?

All baleen whales have two blowholes; in toothed whales the two have merged into one.

The Southern Right whale's two blowholes remain separate producing a distinctive V-shaped blow, a cloud of vapour exhaled when the whale surfaces to breathe.

Close up you can see Southern Right whales:

- Rolling forward to dive, until only their tails stick out of the water. This is called a fluke-up dive.



- Raising their heads out of the water to look around. This action is called a spy hop.
- Lying near the surface with one or both of their pectoral fins above the water. Sometimes they will be suckling their young.

When and where can you see them?

Southern Right whales visit southern Australia during the winter months and they are increasingly found in NSW waters.

The whales are often seen in very shallow water including estuaries and bays. They have even been known to swim in the surf zone. During these times they are not known to strand.

Sometimes you'll even be lucky enough to see mothers and calves together. They may play for a few hours or days in the same location and it's important not to disturb them at these times. The calf is learning the life skills it will need before it returns to the Antarctic. The mothers can be very protective of her young.

Facts:

Length: Adults: 14m to 18m
Calves: 4.5m to 6m at birth

Weight: Adults: up to 80 tonnes
Calves: 1 to 1.5 tonnes at birth

Gestation: 11 to 12 months

Weaning age 11 to 12 months

Calving interval: Generally 3 years

Physical maturity:
Age: unknown

Length:
16m (males slightly less than females)

Sexual maturity:
Age: 8 to 10 years

Length: 12m to 13m

Mating season: July to August

Calving season: June to August

Cruising speed: 3km/hr

Blow pattern: V-shaped bushy blow, up to 5m

Protected: Since 1935

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Please report all marine mammal sightings and incidents

24 hour Hotline – (02) 9415 3333