

## SPECIES MANAGEMENT PROFILE

*Eubalaena australis* Southern Right Whale

**Group:** Chordata (vertebrates), Mammalia (mammals), Cetacea (Whales and Dolphins), Balaenidae (right and bowhead whales)

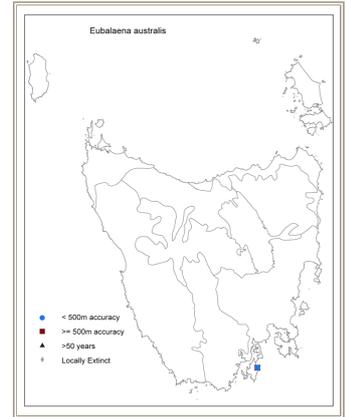
**Status:** *Threatened Species Protection Act 1995:* **endangered**  
*Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999:* **Endangered**

**Endemic:** Migratory

**Status:**



The Southern Right Whale (*Eubalaena australis*) is a large, rotund baleen whale, up to 80 tonnes in weight and 18 metres long. Populations are recovering from past whaling, when this species was hunted to near extinction; however the south-east Australian population is still estimated at around only 600 individuals. Southern Right Whales occur in Tasmania during their migration from summer feeding grounds in the Southern Ocean and the polar front to winter breeding grounds in south-east Australia and then back again. Some whales will give birth in Tasmanian waters. They are typically seen in Tasmania between May and November each year, most commonly in sheltered waters on the east coast. The main contemporary threats to Southern Right Whales are interactions with fishing operations (including entanglement), vessel-strike, acoustic disturbance (e.g. pile-driving, seismic testing, etc.), coastal developments, disturbance and climate change. These threats are of particular concern in aggregation and calving areas and along migratory pathways.



### Key Points

- **Important:** Is this species in your area? Do you need a permit? Ensure you've covered all the issues by checking the Planning Ahead page.
- **Important:** Different threatened species may have different requirements. For any activity you are considering, read the Activity Advice pages for background information and important advice about managing around the needs of multiple threatened species.

### Range and sightings

- The known range of the Southern Right Whale includes the whole of the Tasmanian coastline, including Bass Strait, King Island and the Furneaux group.
- Hot-spots for Southern Right Whale sightings in Tasmania include sheltered waters along the Tasman and Forestier peninsulas, Bruny Island, Mercury Passage and Maria Island, Great Oyster Bay, Binalong Bay, Bridport and Pilot Bay. Whales may occupy an area for a number of days/weeks at a time, particularly females with small calves.

### What to Avoid

- Sudden loud underwater noise
- Entanglement with fishing gear
- Violating vessel and aircraft approach and viewing guidelines (see the NRE Whale and Dolphin Viewing Guidelines)
- Increased vessel traffic
- Underwater lighting
- Disposal or loss of rubbish or fishing gear into the ocean
- Pollutant run-off into the ocean

### Surveying

Key	Survey reliability more info
<b>M</b>	Peak survey period
M	Potential survey period
M	Non-survey period

To ensure you follow the law - check whether your survey requires a permit. Always report any new records to the Marine Mammal Hotline (0427 WHALES).

<i>Eubalaena australis</i>	Spring					Summer					Autumn					Winter								
Southern Right Whale	S	S	O	O	N	N	D	D	J	J	F	F	M	M	A	A	M	M	J	J	J	J	A	A

- Despite their size, Southern Right Whales are not often observed. Sightings usually involve whales floating quietly with little visible above the surface – a behaviour known as 'logging'.
- Whilst most Southern Right Whales are predominately black in colour, a small proportion of individuals are born grey.
- Southern Right Whales are identified by the presence of 'callosities' - whitish patches of roughened skin on the head. It is the only whale in Southern Hemisphere waters with this identifying feature.
- Each Southern Right Whale has a unique callosity pattern; images of which contribute to a catalogue of unique individuals used to track movement of individuals over time and between management jurisdictions.
- Dedicated surveys for this species typically involve aerial grid-based searches or systematic vessel-based surveys using specialist observers.
- Seismic exploration vessels are obliged to carry dedicated Marine Mammal Observers on board and must adhere to strict conditions of practice if whales are sighted.

## Helping the species

- Learn to identify the Southern Right Whale so as to recognise the species. If in doubt, seek expert assistance with identification.
- Report any observations of Southern Right Whales directly to the Marine Mammal Hotline (0427 WHALES). All records of this species provide important information on distribution and abundance.
- Reporting is particularly important if the whale appears to be injured or entangled. This will help facilitate a rapid response from NRE marine specialists.
- Consider the needs of the whole habitat. Preserving a threatened species' habitat is the best way to manage both the species and the environment in which it lives.

## Recreation

- To avoid whales becoming entangled in fishing gear - take care to ensure that no fishing gear is lost or discarded into the ocean.
- To avoid whale entanglement with recreational cray-pot lines - avoid excessive slack in pot ropes. Where possible avoid setting cray-pots in clusters and regularly check pots as per standard fishing practice.
- Collect any abandoned/lost or cut pot lines, rope or fishing gear.
- To avoid disturbance or collision with whales during recreational boating activities, in particular with cows with small calves - keep a watch for signs of whales and adhere to the NRE Whale and Dolphin Viewing Guidelines at all times.

## Commercial fishing

- To avoid whales becoming entangled in fishing gear - take care to ensure that no fishing gear is lost or discarded into the ocean.
- To avoid whale entanglement with recreational commercial cray-pot lines - avoid excessive slack in pot ropes.
- Where possible avoid setting cray-pots in clusters and regularly check pots as per standard fishing practice.
- Collect any abandoned/lost or cut pot lines, rope or fishing gear.
- To avoid disturbance or collision with whales, in particular with cows with small calves - keep a watch for signs of whales and adhere to the NRE Whale and Dolphin Viewing Guidelines at all times.

## Further information

Check also for listing statement or notesheet pdf above (below the species image).

Southern Right Whale National Recovery Plan

NRE Whale and Dolphin Viewing Guidelines

Australian National Guidelines for Whale and Dolphin Watching

Industry Guidelines on the Interaction between Offshore Seismic Exploration and Whales

**Cite as:** Threatened Species Section (2025). *Southern Right Whale (Eubalaena australis): Species Management Profile for Tasmania's Threatened Species Link*. <https://www.threatenedspecieslink.tas.gov.au/Pages/Southern-Right-Whale.aspx> Department of Natural Resources and Environment Tasmania. Accessed on 14/9/2025.

**Contact details:** Threatened Species Section, Department of Natural Resources and Environment Tasmania, GPO Box 44, Hobart, Tasmania, Australia, 7001. Phone (1300 368 550).

**Permit:** A permit is required under the Tasmanian *Threatened Species Protection Act 1995* to 'take' (which includes kill, injure, catch, damage, destroy and collect), keep, trade in or process any specimen or products of a listed species. Additional permits may also be required under other Acts or regulations to take, disturb or interfere with any form of wildlife or its products, (e.g. dens, nests, bones). This may also depend on the tenure of the land and other agreements relating to its management.