

# Coastal Dolphin Research Project



Northern Territory Government

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## HOW TO IDENTIFY COASTAL DOLPHINS

There are 3 types of small dolphins you could see in the coastal waters of the NT. One of the most reliable ways to tell them apart is by looking at the different shapes of the dorsal fin and head.



**Australian snubfin**



**Indo-Pacific humpback**

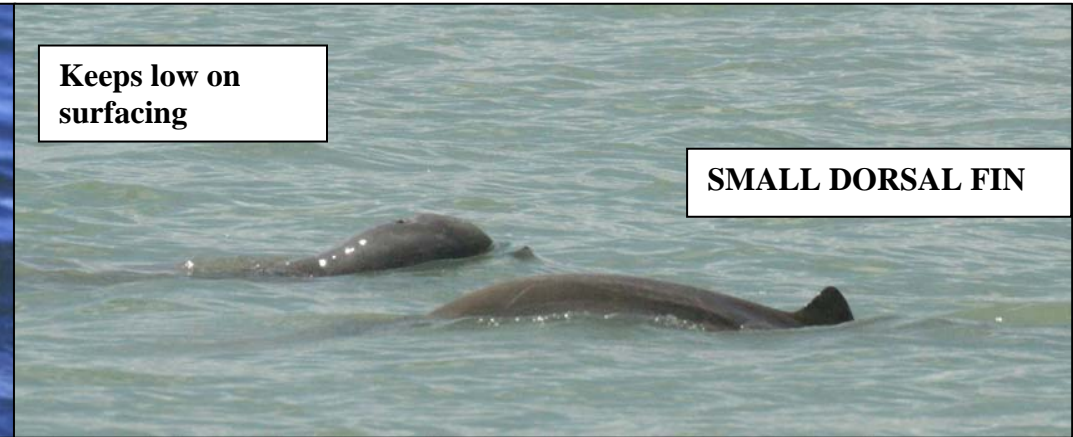


**Indo-Pacific bottlenose**

**Identifying the Australian snubfin dolphin (*Orcaella heinsohni*)** (used to be called Irrawaddy Dolphin)



(Photo Guido Parra)



(Photo Carol Palmer)

**Found:** coastal and shallow waters; northern Australia / Papua; **Length:** 1.5 – 2.2 m; **Weight:** 100 – 150kg; **Color:** Whitish / Light grey /but can appear to be dark

**Appearance:** Blunt/big round head and small triangular dorsal fin – can be confused with the Dugong but the Australian Snubfin has a dorsal fin. Slow moving and usually occurs in groups of 1 – 12 individuals. On surfacing keeps low and has slow, rolling behavior. Shy, does not bow ride. Closest relative is the Irrawaddy dolphin (*Orcaella brevirostris*).

## Identifying the Indo-Pacific humpback dolphin (Humpback dolphin) (*Sousa chinensis*)



(Photo Guido Parra)



(Photo Carol Palmer)

**Found:** Shallow coastal waters of the Indo-pacific region (northern Australia) S/W Pacific-China to Australia; **Length:** 2 – 2.8m; **Weight:** 100 – 200 kg; **Color:** Mainly pale grey. Adults usually have white/pink coloration on dorsal fin.

**Appearance:** Distinctive triangular dorsal fin. Long slender beak/nose (rostrum). Young are mostly medium pale grey with pinkish under-parts. Dorsal fin usually has distinctive pink to white pigmentation. Slow swimmer, usually in small groups of 1 to 3 but can also form larger schools. Tends to surface with characteristic roll. Could be confused with bottlenose but not as interactive with people/boats, has longer slender beak and does not bow ride.

## Identifying the Indo-Pacific bottlenose dolphin (*Tursiops aduncus*)



Dorsal fin tall, back curved and sickle shape and centrally placed.



Beak shorter and thicker

(Photo Carol Palmer)

(Photo Carol Palmer)

**Found:** Coastal Indian Ocean and southwest and northwest Pacific Ocean (northern Australia);  
**Length:** 1.8 – 3.9 m; **Weight:** 150 – 650kg 100 – 200 kg; **Color:** Generally greyish but can be spotted below.

**Appearance:** Dorsal fin tall, back curved and sickle shape and centrally placed. Can be interactive with boats and people very sociable, inquisitive and can bow rides.

## WHAT TO RECORD

WHAT TYPE OF DOLPHIN? SNUBFIN HUMPBACK BOTTLENOSE

DATE:

TIME:

GPS LOCATION (or mark on map):

WATER DEPTH:

HOW MANY (any calves or juveniles? Calves < half body length of adult; juveniles 2/3 length of adult):

PHOTO TAKEN: ( photo of the dorsal fin would be good)

COMMENTS:

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THANKYOU