Research

The Encounter Bay Right Whale Study (EBRWS) is a citizen science program designed to address research priorities that will inform conservation management and protection of the local Southern Right Whales (SRW) by:

- Maintaining a local Encounter Bay (EB) Photo-ID Catalogue.
- Contributing data to national SRW Assessments.
- Investigating abundance, residency, distribution and movements of SRW in the EB area.
- Assessing the connectivity and movement of SRW from EB with other calving/aggregation areas across Southern Australia.

References & further information

SA Whale Centre Victor Harbor
(08) 8551 0750
Open 10:30-5:00 every day (except Christmas day)
www.sawhalecentre.com

The SA Whale Centre website provides links to the following documents:

- Whale Sighting Log & Report Form
- SA National Parks and Wildlife (Protected Animals—Marine Mammals) Regulations
- Australian National Whale Watching Guidelines
- Marine Parks
  www.environment.sa.gov.au/marineparks/enjoy/whale-watching
- Southern Right Whale Recovery Plan
  www.bit.ly/Recovery-Plan

@southernrightwhales
@sawhalecentre
@southernrightwhales

Encounter Bay Right Whale Study

'Breakwater', Encounter Bay, June 2013

Curtin University

South Australian Whale Centre
A Marine Environment Facility

South Australian Museum

Government of South Australia
Department for Environment and Water

National Parks South Australia

Connecting the community, scientists and managers for Southern Right Whale protection, conservation and education

Why are whales in Encounter Bay?

Southern Right Whales feed in sub-Antarctic waters during our summer before travelling an incredible 3-5,000kms to the shallow, warmer waters off Australia, South Africa, South America and New Zealand southern coasts.

In South Australia whales visit Head of Bight, Fowlers Bay and Encounter Bay between May and November each year to give birth, nurse their young, mate and socialise.

Females and their calves can reside in nursery areas for up to 3-4 months. It is important whales have the opportunity to rest during this time to conserve energy and care for their young.

Females often return to calving and nursery grounds they have used in the past.

When calves are born they average 4-5 m long and weigh about 1 tonne.

Conservation

Southern Right Whales are listed as Endangered under the Australian Environment Protection Biodiversity and Conservation Act 1999. The western population is now growing at around 6% per year but the eastern population is not yet showing signs of recovery.

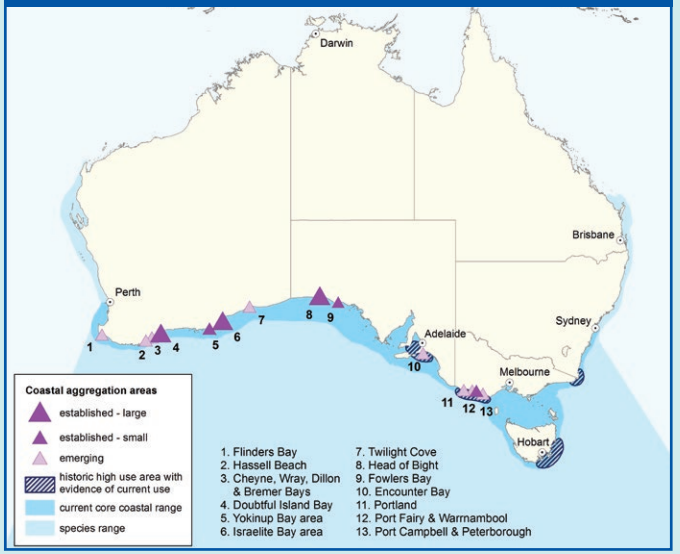
Australia is the winter home to around 2,500 of the 15,000 or so Southern Right Whales remaining worldwide; still a small fraction of the estimated 60,000 – 100,000 that existed worldwide prior to whaling.

In the National Conservation Management Plan for Southern Right Whale 2011-2021, the Commonwealth lists Encounter Bay as a Biologically Important Area (BIA) for breeding. Encounter Bay was listed as an 'emerging' calving aggregation area which suggests less than 3 calves are born at or near Encounter Bay per year.

Right: Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities (2012). Conservation Management Plan for the Southern Right Whale. A Recovery Plan under the EPBC Act 2011-2021.

Our data show an average of more than 3 calves per year are born in Encounter Bay waters which means this area can now be upgraded to a 'small established' aggregation area as defined in the recovery plan, making Encounter Bay a critical area for protection and recovery of the species.

Coastal aggregation areas for Southern Right Whales



Hunted and protected

1835 Southern Right Whales considered the 'right' whales to hunt due to slow swimming, float when dead, come close to shore & yield large quantities of oil.
1837 Whaling stations established in Encounter Bay (operating from Victor Harbor).
1844 Peak period of whaling activity between 1835 and 1851.
1855 Shore-based whaling in SA abandoned. Whales nearing extinction.
1871 Brief & unsuccessful attempt to re-establish whaling. Illegal Soviet whaling occurred.
1872 Whaling stations in Encounter Bay ceased operating.
1931 Southern Right Whales protected in South Australia.
1935 Southern Right Whales among the first whales to be protected internationally.
1978 All whaling in Australian waters ceased (last whaling station Albany WA).
1990 Southern Right Whales start returning to Encounter Bay.
The 'Encounter Bay Restricted Area' established to increase protection.
2012 Encounter Bay Sanctuary Zone established under Marine Parks Act.
2013 Record calf numbers for Encounter Bay – 11 cow/calf pairs in the Whale Nursery Area.
2017 50 Southern Right Whales were Photo Identified including 7 cow/calf pairs.
2018 Encounter Bay Right Whale Study (EBRWS) and Photo-ID Catalogue launched.
72 individual whales described and recorded in the Photo-ID Catalogue.

'Yapari' with her calf, Encounter Bay, September 2012

What are callosities?

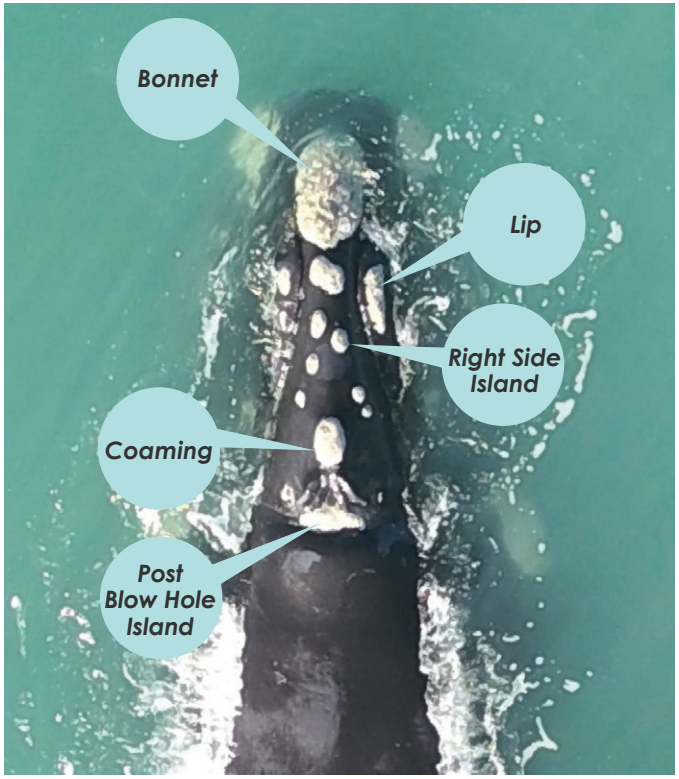
Callosities on the head of the Southern Right Whale are used to photo identify the individual, making the Encounter Bay Right Whale Study (EBRWS) and other research programs possible.

Callosities are growths of hardened skin material similar to human finger-nails.

Colonies of whale lice (cyamids) on the callosities give them a white appearance making them visible from a distance.

Every whale has a unique callosity pattern, similar to a finger print in a human. These unique patterns are present when they are born and remain throughout life.

The unique number, shape and position of the callosities allow us to identify individuals and track them through time and place.



Name	Sightings History	Photo
Milky Way Male Grey morph	**2010** Calf born white (Head of Bight SA) **2011** 1 year old (Encounter Bay SA) **2012** 2 year old (Encounter Bay SA & Portland VIC) **2013** 3 year old (Encounter Bay SA) **2014** not sighted **2015** 5 year old (Head of Bight SA) **2016** not sighted **2017** 7 year old (Head of Bight SA) **2018** 8 year old (Head of Bight SA)	
Buttons Female	**2013** Cow with calf 'Bow' (Encounter Bay SA) **2017** Cow with calf 'Bobbin' (Encounter Bay SA)	
Murphy Grey morph	**2015** Adult (Head of Bight SA) **2016** Adult in mating group (Sleaford Bay SA) **2017** Adult travelling in group (Encounter Bay SA)	
Augustus Male	**2010** Adult travelling west (Encounter Bay SA) **2015** Adult in mating group (Encounter Bay SA)	

How can I contribute?

Do you like to take photos of the whales?

None of this work is possible without photographic evidence and clear sightings information. As a citizen science research study we are looking to the public to collect and provide good data.

Photo identification is a very important tool for assessing abundance, distribution, site use, residency, calving and migration rates, age of sexual maturity, survival and mortality.

The goal is to get clear photos of the top and both sides of the whale's head.

Below are examples of photos we use for identification:

Example 1
Right side

Example 2
Left side

Example 3
Top

'Breakwater', 2013

If you think you have good identifying photos of a whale, please get in touch with the EBRWS team at info@ebrws.com.au

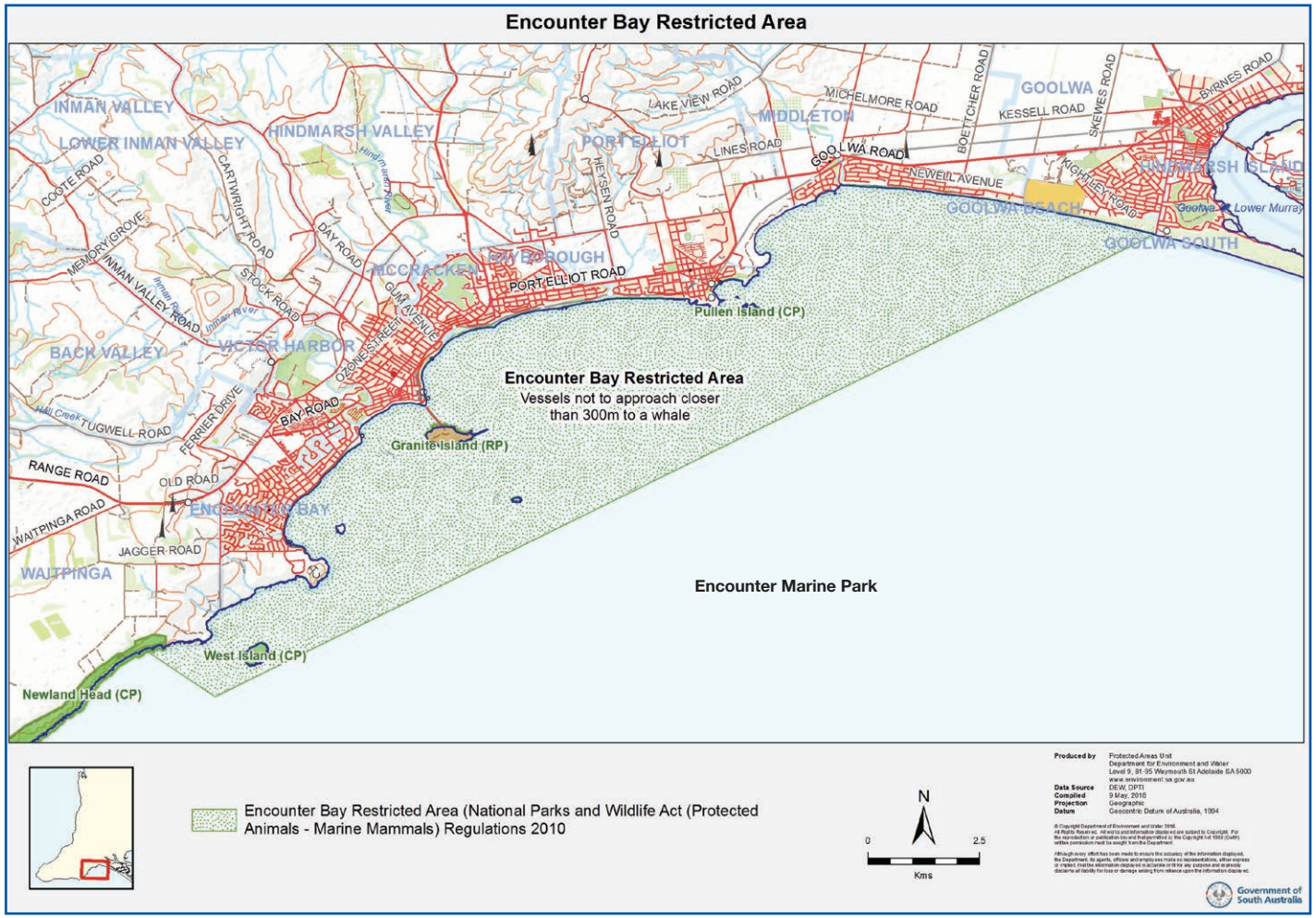
Protection in aggregation areas

Whales visiting Encounter Bay are provided with greater protection within the 'Encounter Bay Restricted Area'. Regulations require all vessels to remain 300 metres from whales.

To minimise disturbance to the whales and increase public safety, whale watching guidelines and marine parks regulations are enforced.

Have you seen these whales?

The EBRWS has put together a catalogue of whales we have seen in Encounter Bay over the years.

Visit the online catalogue and compare the catalogued whales to those you have seen.

(www.sawhalecentre.com.au)