

WHALES OF THE CORAL SEA:

Between April and November Australia's eastern coastline is home to the spectacular acrobatic displays of migrating whales. The Coral Sea plays a central role in this journey, being one of the most important migration corridors. It is home to more than 28 different species of whales and dolphins, 26 of which are on the IUCN Red-list of threatened species. The incredible sight of 400 strong pods of melon-headed and false killer whales have been documented in this area.

There has been a major change in the attitude of Australia in the last 50 years from being one of the main whaling countries, to one of their protectors, fighting worldwide for the conservation of these beautiful animals. By maintaining the marine sanctuary area of the Coral Sea Marine Park to ensure the protection of its reefs and sea mounts we will be making another step forward in ensuring the conservation of these beautiful and charismatic creatures.



In November 2012 the Australian Government declared the Coral Sea Marine Park creating a global icon for Queensland and Australia. The park, nearly 1million km² set aside almost half as a fully protected sanctuary. The reserve also featured the exclusion of oil and gas extraction throughout the entire area; the removal of destructive sea-floor trawling from more than 99% of the reserve; and removal of longlining from more than 70% of the reserve. Whales have been the accidental victims of bycatch in the longline fishery of the Coral Sea, so this was a welcome step forward for whale conservation.

However, these major achievements are all at risk. Despite strong science and overwhelming community support the Abbott Government has suspended the marine park and is undertaking a review. This review casts a shadow of doubt over the level of protection for our Coral Sea and the future of its whales and other incredible marine life.

Australia's history: whaling to whale watching

After the second war world the population of Humpback Whales on the East Coast of Australia was about 10,000 individuals. In just 10 years, from 1952 to 1962, almost 6,300 were harvested and processed by just one whaling station in Queensland. When the effects of whaling on whale populations became evident, Australia adopted an anti-whaling policy and permanently ending whaling in its waters. By starting to promote the international protection and conservation of whales, Australians turned from a whaling nation to a protector of whales and were rewarded economically. Today the whale watching industry is worth around \$42.5million to Australia.

Humpback Whales in the Coral Sea

- Humpback Whales are listed as vulnerable in Australia, as least concern for IUCN and their population, once hunted to very low levels is now slowly recovering
- The Coral Sea is considered an important nursery and breeding ground for Humpback Whales. They migrate to the tropical waters of the Coral Sea from May-October where they calve, mate and fast by living off their layer of blubber (fat).



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Blue Whales in the Coral Sea

- Blue whales are listed as endangered in Australia and by IUCN
- After decades of protection, blue whale numbers remain at about 2% of pre-whaling levels although they are slowly increasing.
- Blue whales feed in the Coral Sea and the protection of the winter breeding location in the Coral Sea would be a significant step towards ensuring the conservation of this species.

Dwarf Minke Whales in the Coral Sea

- Dwarf Minke whales have been exploited by whalers since at least the 1930s. Now, due to their curious nature, they have become the main attraction for many whale watching and diving operations off eastern Australia.
- In June and July, large numbers of Dwarf Minke whales inhabit the Coral Sea. It is still unknown where they spend the rest of the year.

For more information on the campaign to Protect our Coral Sea go to: <http://www.protectourcoralsea.org.au>

