



# Watch out for whales

May 2007

## Why we care

Whales are regularly seen in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park. Some species live in our warm tropical waters all year, while others pass through during their migration each winter from the colder southern oceans. It is important to treat these beautiful animals with respect and care.

Boat strikes are one of the key potential threats to whales. The magnitude of impact is determined by vessel size, speed, hull composition and propulsion system. Strike by large vessels may cause serious injury or death. It is important to ensure swift action to avoid and respond to boat strikes.

## Advice to skippers

- Whale migration season is between May and September
- There are no formal notices advising on the presence of whales
- To avoid boat strike:
  - Maintain a look out to keep an eye out for whales
  - Communicate with other boats to find out if whales have been spotted in the area
- Reduce vessel speed in areas where whales have been sighted
- It is a legal requirement to report boat strikes on whales.

## Responding to strikes

1. First priority is to ensure the safety of passengers and the vessel
2. Do not follow the whale after hitting it; continue on your previous course
3. Take note of the location of the whale strike (latitude, longitude or alternatively name of closest reef, distance and direction to it)
4. Report strike details to the 24-hour EPA Hotline 1300 130 372
  - Date
  - Time
  - Location
  - Condition of whale (if known).

## What to tell passengers

- Advise passengers and crew that a whale may have been struck; to remain calm and the relevant authorities have been/will be contacted and they will keep a look out for the whale.

## Whales in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park

- More than 7000 humpback whales migrate north along the east coast of Australia each year. Since whaling ceased in 1978, the number of humpback whales seen along the Queensland coast has increased, with the current rate of increase estimated at about 10 per cent annually.
- We are fortunate to see more of these magnificent creatures each year on the Great Barrier Reef, however our activities sometimes interfere with their migration.
- Humpback whales are large (12-14m) and powerful (weigh up to 40 tonne). Sometimes whales approach us and we cannot get out of their way.
- The Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service monitors whales and responds to injured animals as required.



### Further information

Refer to the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority's Responsible Reef Practices and Onboard - The Tourism Operator's Handbook for the Great Barrier Reef.

### Contacts

#### Species Conservation Unit

Email: [species@gbmpa.gov.au](mailto:species@gbmpa.gov.au)

#### Tourism and Recreation Policy Unit

Email: [tourec@gbmpa.gov.au](mailto:tourec@gbmpa.gov.au)

*Acknowledgements:* This material has been developed through the cooperation and collaboration of:

