

SWAN RIVER DOLPHIN DEATHS INVESTIGATED - 27 November (update)

The Trust together with the Department of Environment and Conservation are working in collaboration with Curtin and Murdoch universities to investigate six dolphin deaths in the Swan Canning Riverpark during the past four months. Post mortem investigations are not conclusive but indicate the dolphins had suppressed immune systems and bacterial, fungal and viral infections.

Two dolphins suffered entanglements from fishing line and hooks and had an ongoing infection as a result – an important reminder to anglers not to discard fishing line carelessly in the Riverpark. Recent media reports have linked the deaths to elevated levels of the banned pesticide dieldrin in the dolphins. While it is possible long-term exposure to contaminants may have contributed to the deaths, the Trust and researchers are continuing to investigate a suite of factors.

The Trust has been working with the Department of Water on a non-nutrient contaminants program since 2006, to determine the nature of contaminants, other than nutrients, delivered to and present in the Swan Canning river system. You can view the summary report at www.swanrivertrust.wa.gov.au

The Department of Health has advised that there is no public health risk associated with the deaths of the dolphins.

How you can help

The public can play an essential role in monitoring this iconic species. The Trust's River Guardians program, www.riverguardians.com, manages Dolphin Watch, where volunteers record details of dolphin sightings in the rivers. The project aims to provide key information on dolphin ecology and interactions with human activities in the Swan Canning Riverpark.

The public can help care for our dolphins.

Keep your distance – never approach a wild dolphin and make sure you keep at least 30 metres away if you're in the water or 100 metres if you're in a boat.

Brake for dolphins - dolphins often form resting groups in the middle reaches of the estuary, so keep an eye out for dolphins, and slow down if you spot any.

Never feed dolphins – it is illegal and leaves them vulnerable to entanglement, boat strikes, and disease.

Fish responsibly - dolphins, particularly calves, can get tangled in fishing line. Make sure you dispose of unwanted monofilament line carefully and consider the use of biodegradable fishing line. More information on fishing is available at www.swanrivertrust.wa.gov.au

For more information about the dolphin deaths visit: <http://www.murdoch.edu.au/News/Scientists-and-agencies-investigate-dolphin-deaths/>

