



MEDIA RELEASE

Humpback Whales Seen Near Darwin

A pair of keen fishermen got a welcome surprise when fishing near Darwin last weekend.

Instead of catching Spanish Mackerel as they had intended, Steve Wingrave and Aidan Smith both got a close view of a humpback whale migrating south with its newly born calf.

The men, who both work for the Department of Natural Resources, Environment and the Arts (NRETA), said the memories of the event would remain with them forever, with the help of Mr Smith's mobile phone.

"I didn't have a proper camera with me so I had to use my mobile phone to take photos of the unique event," Mr Smith, NRETA's hydrographic data manager said.

"I don't go fishing all that often and despite things being quiet on the fishing front last Saturday this is certainly one fishing trip I'll never forget."

Mr Smith and Mr Wingrave were about five to 10 kilometres off shore between Lee Point and Casuarina Beach when they saw what they initially thought was a tree in the sea on 11 August.

"After taking the first photo I then thought it might have been a croc but as we got closer we figured that if it was a croc, it was probably the biggest croc on Earth," Mr Smith said.

"We got closer to the objects and soon realised we were looking at a recently born humpback whale next to its mother, which didn't move for a while but when it did to breathe and blew out air from its blowhole, it was truly amazing.

"I've never seen whales that close up before and it wasn't something we expected to see when we set out on our fishing trip on Saturday morning."

Mr Smith reported the sighting to NRETA senior wildlife officer Ray Chatto who said humpback whale sightings along the Northern Territory coast between the Tiwi Islands and the Western Australia border had become more common during the past seven to eight years.

"While humpback whale sightings are becoming more common in the September/October period off the Territory's north-west coast, they aren't seen in large numbers," Mr Chatto said.

"Based on our records, this is one of the earliest sightings near Darwin of humpback whales migrating south from their tropical waters breeding grounds to the Antarctic for summer.

“The fact we now see Humpbacks off our coast more than we used to is probably resultant from the overall population increase since whaling stopped and that some of this increase is now calling in on us on their way south.

“We don’t know as much about these and other large whale species along the NT coast as our interstate colleagues along the east, west and southern coasts of Australia where large whales are much more abundant and also subject to a large whale watching ecotourism industry.”

Mr Chatto said NRETA is interested in reports of sightings of whales and urged people to report sightings to him on 8920 9260.

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Media Note – For more information contact Aidan Smith on 8999 4522 or Steve Wingrave on 0428 888 204 or Ray Chatto on 8920 9260

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