



**Tasmanian
Rock Lobster
Fishermen's
Association**

Code of Practice for Reducing Whale Entanglements in the Commercial Rock Lobster Fishery



Approved revision: Jan 2025

To be reviewed: Jan 2026



Introduction

The Tasmanian Rock Lobster Fisherman's Association has developed this industry Code of Practice (CoP), in consultation with the Department of Natural Resources and Environment Tasmania (NRET) Marine Conservation Program (MCP), to assist fishers to reduce the risk of whale entanglement in Tasmanian waters.

This policy is supported by OceanWatch Australia, through funding from the Australian Government's Our Marine Parks Program.

The primary objective of the CoP is to prevent whale entanglement in rock lobster pot lines through the implementation of best practice operational measures. In the unlikely event of a whale entanglement, the CoP provides details for contacting NRET experts who can help determine the appropriate course of action and dispatch response teams where necessary.

Benefits of the CoP

- Reduces risk of a whale entanglement occurring
- Promotes appropriate and safe response in the event of a whale entanglement
- Helps prevent damage to or loss of fishing gear and catch due to whale entanglements
- Adoption of best practice fishing techniques will enhance community perception of the commercial rock lobster fishery
- Industry demonstrating to the community capacity to be proactive in response to an emerging environmental issue

Scope of the Problem

Interactions between whales and commercial fisheries have occurred worldwide for centuries and are increasing in frequency around Australia as whale stocks in the southern hemisphere recover from past exploitation. Of particular concern are the populations of Southern Right Whales and Humpback Whales, both of which have annual migrations through Tasmania's inshore waters.

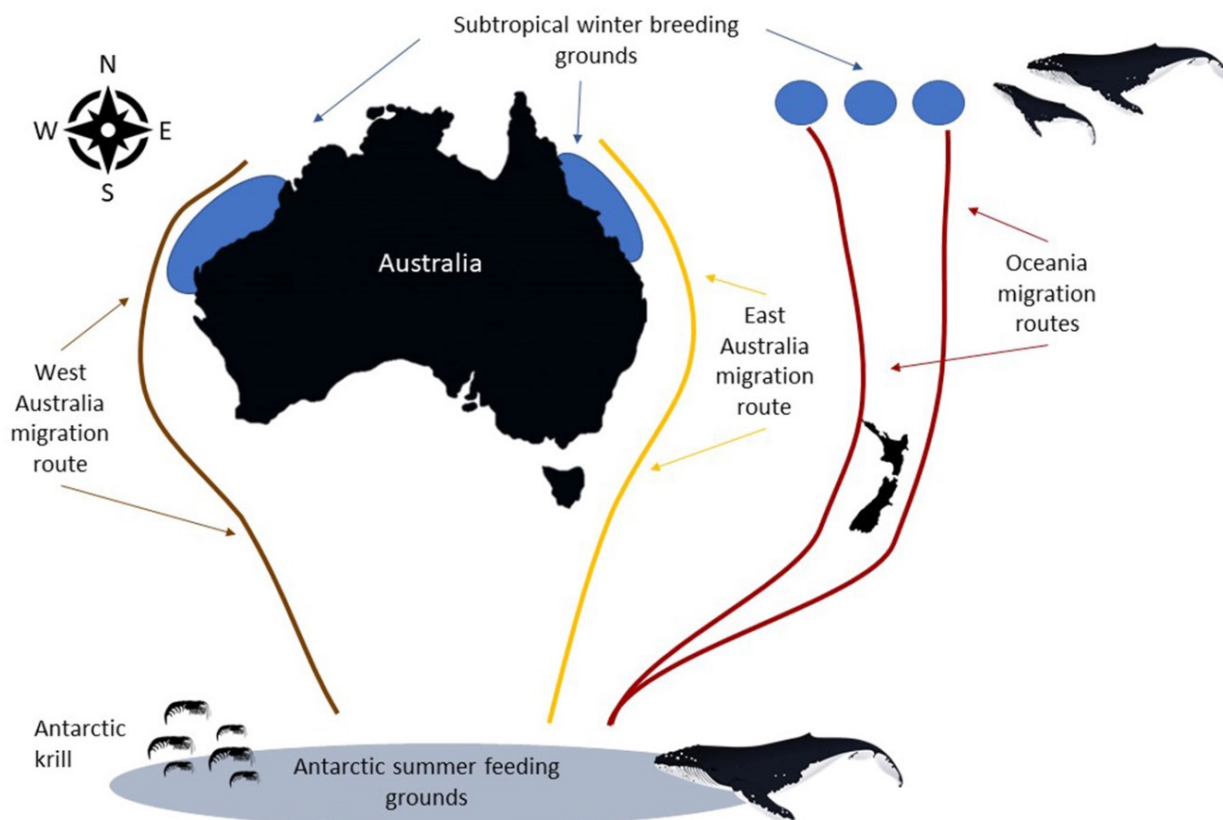


Figure 2: Humpback whale migratory routes

Whale Entanglements

Entanglement of whales can lead to adverse outcomes for the cetacean and to poor public sentiment towards Tasmania's rock lobster fishery. Entanglements typically happen when whales make inadvertent contact with buoy lines extending from lobster pots to the ocean surface. This contact can cause lines to become lodged or wrapped around the whale's tail, body, fins or jaw, which in turn affects the whale's ability to swim, feed and breathe. If a whale can't free itself, or be freed, it may die.

Even when a whale can free itself, the ropes can cause significant physical injuries to the whale, possibly leading to serious infections and amputations of fins or flukes and potentially resulting in a protracted death.

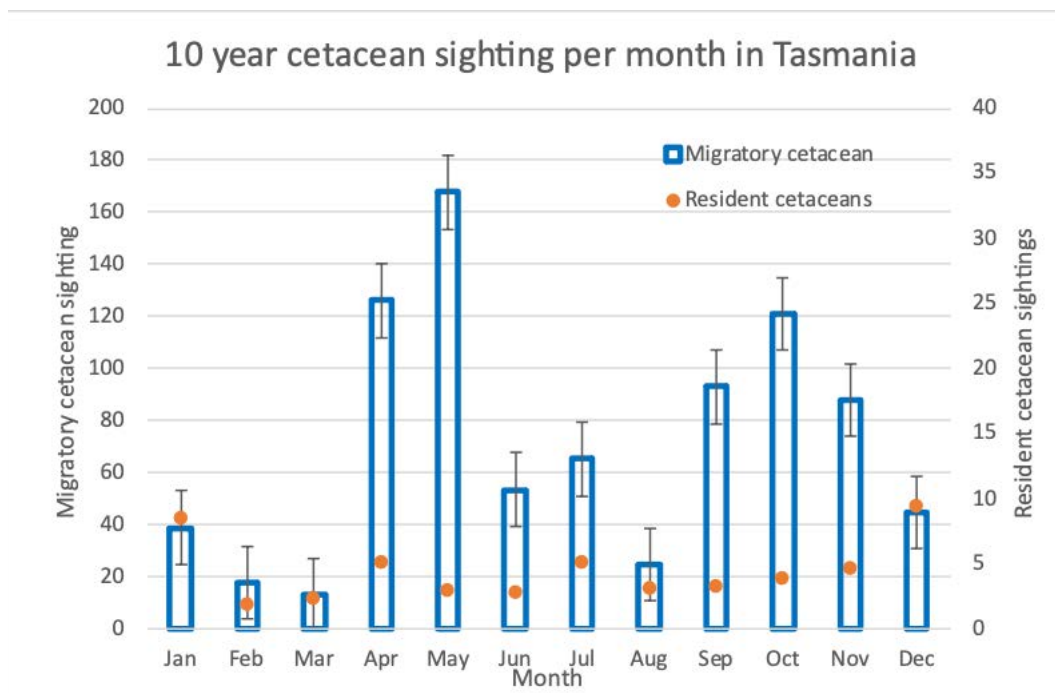


Figure 1: Average number of cetacean sightings 2013-2023

Whale Sightings & Migration Patterns in Tasmania

Whale sightings in Tasmanian have increased since the previous 2011-15 sighting estimate period. Whale watching activities, and education around whales, have increased nationwide, resulting in greater interest and awareness, and higher reporting of sightings.

Cetacean sightings in Tasmania tend to occur more on the East Coast, more likely because there is more human activity on the East Coast rather than more cetaceans. Pot (and line) fishing activities (both commercial and recreational) occur in areas where cetaceans occur.

Between 2013-2023, typically there are 2-3 whale entanglements seen annually in Tasmanian waters. Of these, only one will be untangled. The remainder are only briefly sighted or can't be located after the initial sighting, due to rough weather, rugged coastlines, isolated areas, or whales moving further away from the coastlines into deeper waters.

Entanglements may occur within all coastal Tasmanian waters, on both the northern and southern migratory routes.





Current Management

The commercial harvest of rock lobster is controlled by a total allowable commercial catch (TACC) and a quota management system. In 2024, the commercial fleet size was about 85 vessels. Current management measures used within the fishery that directly or indirectly reduce the risk of an entanglement occurring include:

1. Maximum pot numbers (max 60 on a vessel, max of 10,507 in the fishery)
2. Maximum soak time limited to 48 hrs
3. Closed season (regional) during peak whale migration periods

The ongoing rock lobster stock rebuilding strategy is expected to reduce total number of pot lifts across the fishery i.e. less fishing effort required to catch the TACC.





Mitigation Measures

Rock lobster fishers are encouraged to adopt the following mitigation measures to reduce the risk of whale entanglement:

1. Avoid excessive surface slack in pot ropes. Adjust rope lengths for the depth and strength of tide being worked, especially inshore. Excess slack in pot ropes should be coiled and tied close to floats. Slack should be limited to enough rope to allow for recovery and to commence hauling safely. Where possible, avoid using 8mm – 10 mm rope (which is implicated in more entanglements), and avoid knots in ropes.
2. Regularly check pots, as per standard fishing practice. Mark all gear
3. Where possible avoid setting pots in clusters.
4. Collect any abandoned/lost or cut pot lines, rope or fishing gear. Report lost gear.
5. Be aware of increased whale numbers between June and November and place pots away from peak migration routes where possible.
6. Alert fishers in the area if you observe a whale passing through fishing grounds.

Best practise to prevent entanglement in Tasmanian waters is line management. Other options are not only costly but also may not be suitable for the state's fishing conditions.

Entangled Whales

1. If you observe an entangled whale report it to the Whale Hotline (0427WHALES, 0427 942 537) as soon as possible. If outside of mobile coverage, report entanglements to Tas Maritime Radio via VHF/HF network.

Rapid reporting ensures Disentanglement Teams have the best chance of successfully disentangling whales.

2. Safety of the fisher and crew is a priority; fishers should not attempt to disentangle or cut free the whale unless otherwise advised.
3. Maintain visual, do not get close to whale remain at least 100m away or 300m if there is a calf present.
4. Note location, speed and direction of travel, number of whales in the pod.
5. Record and relay the type of entanglement (gear and rope type, length, colour etc) describe whether entanglement is on head, flippers, tails etc.
6. Keep contact details current for whale entanglements.



Reporting Interactions

In Australian waters all cetacean species are protected under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999. All interactions with cetacean species must be accurately reported as a “protected species interaction record” in your logbook.

If you are undertaking a legal rock lobster fishing activity and you report an interaction which results in the injury or death of a protected species, you are exempt from prosecution under the EPBC Act 1999, because the rock lobster management plan has been accredited under this Act. However, if you fail to report an interaction with a protected species you will be liable to prosecution.

What is an Interaction?

An interaction with a protected species means any physical contact between the protected species, an individual (person), vessel or fishing gear. This includes all interactions where a protected species has been caught (or entangled) in rock lobster fishing gear and collisions with fishing vessels.

Species Code

Identify the protected species by writing in the code that corresponds with the species that the interaction was with in your logbook (Table 1)

| Species Common Name | Code |
|------------------------------------|------|
| Dolphin | D |
| Whale | W |
| Other (please explain in comments) | O |

Table 1: Cetacean species logbook codes

Number

Write in the total number of each type of protected species that the interaction was with. For example, if two whales were entangled in your fishing gear you would write ‘2’ in the corresponding column.

Interaction Code (Inter Code)

Identify what type of interaction occurred by writing in the code that corresponds with the relevant option listed in Table 2.

| Species Common Name | Code |
|---|------|
| Damage to fishing gear | GD |
| Tangled or fouled in gear, released alive | TA |
| Tangled or fouled in gear, released dead | TD |
| Collision with vessel, alive | VA |
| Collision with vessel, dead | VD |
| Collision with vessel, injured | VI |
| Other (please explain in comments) | O |

Table 2: Interaction codes

Reporting Sightings

Real-time reporting of cetacean sightings contributes important information to long-term monitoring of threatened species. To help facilitate the collection of photographs of individuals, please report all sightings to the number below:

Whale Hotline
0427 942 537





Australian Government



Australian
Marine Parks



OCEANWATCH
AUSTRALIA