

Whales and the WAXA: Defence Sponsored Whale Research off the West Coast of Australia

Colin Trinder

Director of Environmental Stewardship, Department of Defence
BP-2-B029, CANBERRA, ACT, 2600, Australia
Ph: 61 2 6266 8067
Fax: 61 2 6265 3794
e-mail: colin.trinder@defence.gov.au

Abstract

The Western Australia Exercise Area (WAXA), situated near Perth, Western Australia, is one of the primary maritime exercise areas of the Australian Defence Force (ADF). The waters of the WAXA are used extensively by ships, submarines and aircraft of the ADF, and shared with merchant shipping, commercial fishing and recreational activities such as whale watching.

Parts of the WAXA are also an important migration route for the humpback whale (*Megaptera novaeangliae*) and an aggregation area for the blue whale (*Balaenoptera musculus*). In recognition of the periodic presence of these threatened species in the WAXA, the Australian Department of Defence has sponsored and coordinated an extensive research program into the status and habits of blue whales in the WAXA. This research has been conducted in collaboration with leading researchers and government regulatory authorities.

In a wider context, Defence has also undertaken an exhaustive review of all activities carried out at sea and the way in which these activities may have an impact upon all aspects of the environment, including marine mammals. Coupled with the specific knowledge gained from the WAXA blue whale research program, Defence has developed a range of standard environmental risk mitigation measures which are employed by all ADF units operating at sea.

This poster will:

- Describe relevant geographical and biophysical features of the WAXA, including the status of marine mammals and blue and humpback whales in particular.
- Describe Defence activities in the WAXA, including history of use.
- Outline the planning and conduct of ADF activities to minimise risks to marine mammals.
- Describe Defence-sponsored whale research in the WAXA.
- Describe liaison and consultation undertaken by Defence with regulatory authorities, researchers and other stakeholders regarding protection of marine mammals.