

Port of Varanus Island – Whale strike reporting and safe operating distances

Number: V02/2025

Date: 29/07/2025

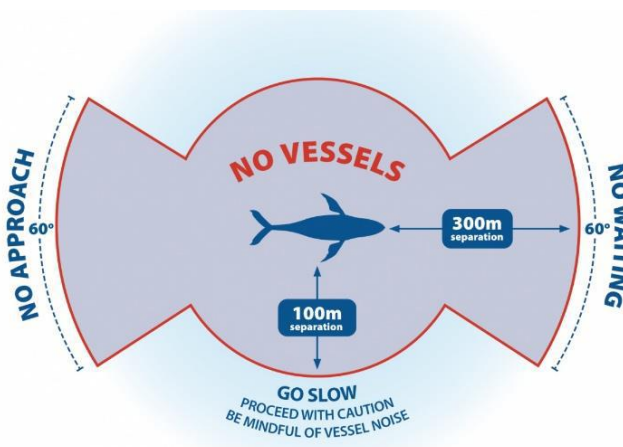
Date of effect:	29/07/2025
Details:	Port of Varanus Island - Whale strike reporting and safe operating distances
Former notice:	V03/2024 (cancelled)
Charts and publications:	NA
Further notice:	NA
Attachments:	Chart displaying Varanus Island port limits

Whales and other marine fauna susceptible to vessel collisions are protected under both Commonwealth and State legislation.

The Western Australian coastline is a known migration route for the Western Australian Humpback whale population. Humpback whales pass through Varanus Island port waters as they migrate from their Southern Ocean feeding grounds to their tropical breeding grounds in the Kimberley. The migration occurs annually between June and November. The presence of whales in relatively shallow port waters limits their ability to avoid vessels, significantly increasing the risk of collisions between vessels and whales.

All Vessel Masters are required to maintain a safe distance from whales:

- 100m on either side
- 300m in front or behind



Commercial Vessels, as part of their Safety Management Systems, are required by the Australian Maritime Safety Authority (AMSA) to conduct a risk assessment when operating in areas where marine fauna is likely to be present.

AMSA advise the following precautions to prevent incidents in high-risk locations

- **Maintain a good lookout:** where possible, posting extra lookouts in known migration, resting and breeding areas to scan ahead with binoculars on the bridge or from the bow of the vessel, including at night.
- **Reduce speed:** especially in low visibility, in known migration, resting and breeding areas, and when entering and leaving ports, bays and harbours. The faster a vessel is travelling, the less time both the person in charge of the vessel and the animal have to react to avoid collision and the greater the potential damage.
- **Be aware** of any special management zones, 'caution zones' or seasonal exclusion zones that may exist to protect particularly susceptible species.

During times of whale activity, Varanus Island Port Control will broadcast Sécurité messages on VHF Channel 79 and 16 detailing recent whale sightings.

Vessel Masters are asked to report to Varanus Island Port Control any whale activity in the vicinity of shipping routes or where marine fauna could pose a navigation hazard in port waters (i.e. a carcass floating in the shipping channel).

Varanus Island Port Control can be contacted 24 hours a day on 08 9159 6556 or VHF Channel 79 and 16.

Reporting a Collision with Marine Fauna

Within Port Waters

All collisions with marine fauna or injured marine fauna sightings should be immediately reported to Varanus Island Port Control.

Notifying Varanus Island Port Control does not relieve you of your obligation to report to the appropriate authorities below. If, for any reason, you are unable to report to the authorities below, please inform Varanus Island Port Control.

Within State Waters (three nautical miles from the coast)

The Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (DBCA) Parks and Wildlife Service must be notified.

Phone: 08 9182 2000

Email: karratha.admin@dbca.wa.gov.au

Within Commonwealth Waters (three to 200 nautical miles from the coast)

The Department of Climate Change, Energy, Environment, and Water (DCCEEW) must be notified.

Hotline: 1800 920 528

Email: EPBC.Permits@dcceew.gov.au

<https://www.dcceew.gov.au/environment/marine/marine-species/cetaceans/notification-interactions>

Notifications of injured marine animals can also be made to the **Wildcare Helpline**: 08 9474 9055.

Additional Obligations within Port, State, and Commonwealth Waters

All collisions with whales within Australia must be reported to the Australian Marine Mammal Centre (AMMC) at: <https://www.marinemammals.gov.au>

The requirements for Commercial Vessels to submit incident notifications as per Port of Dampier Marine Notice D18/2024, and the AMSA and Australian Transport Safety Bureau (ATSB) obligations are unchanged by this Marine Notice.

Actions to be taken

Notifications should include, but not be limited to:

- Time and date of incident
- Location (Lat/Long and general)
- Species (if known)
 - Approximate size of animal, and
 - Number of animals sighted.
- Speed of collision and events leading up to the incident
- Animal behaviour prior and post collision, and any evidence of injury
- Weather conditions at the time of the collision

The DBCA requests, if safe to do so, that the vessel remains at a safe distance (outside 100m) and monitors the condition and behaviour of the injured animal until advised by DBCA on the next course of action. If possible, take video and photographs identifying any injuries or behaviours post-incident, and pass this on to assist with the DBCA response. Drones may be used to monitor, noting a separation distance of 60m.

Further information can be found at:

[Have a whale of a time watching southern migration | Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions \(dbca.wa.gov.au\)](#)

<https://www.amsa.gov.au/collisions-between-vessels-and-marine-fauna>

Capt. Mike Minogue
Harbour Master

Varanus Island port limits

