



Media Release

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Australia's own dolphin could be extinct within three generations

Australia's only endemic dolphin needs legal protection or could become extinct within three generations, a new report by WWF warns.

With funding assistance from bank ING DIRECT, WWF has finally collected enough information on the elusive snubfin dolphin to support its listing as a Threatened Species under Australia's premier environmental law, giving it the legal protection it needs to survive.

"Other than in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park, there is virtually no protection of snubfin dolphins. Even inside the marine park snubfins are killed by nets and displaced by coastal developments," said Lydia Gibson, WWF's Tropical Marine Species Manager.

"Although snubfin dolphins have managed to survive massive environmental changes over the past 20,000 years, they may not last another three generations unless we take the necessary steps to protect them."

One calculation suggests the number of snubfins may be fewer than 1000 animals alive today. Of the sub-populations that still exist many may not be viable in the long-term, the report says.

In-shore fishing with gill-nets and drift nets is highly likely to have killed many hundreds of snubfin dolphins in the past and they continue to be killed in gill net fisheries and by shark control measures designed to protect bathers.

Scars from collisions with boats are frequent in some locations, which may indicate snubfins are dying from boat collisions without ever being recorded.

Their remaining coastal habitat is also subject to rapid development with many of Australia's tropical regions undergoing dramatic industrial transformation as ports and terminals are built to support the boom in mineral and energy exports.

"Population modelling has shown that in some areas the loss of just one individual per year in addition to the natural mortality rate may be enough to trigger irreversible declines in local populations," Ms Gibson said.

ING DIRECT, Australia's largest online bank, has funded WWF's snubfin dolphin campaign since 2007, working closely with the conservation organisation on its snubfin projects, including on the release of the latest report.

"Research conducted in the past few years shows convincingly that human activities are having an impact on snubfin dolphins," said David Breen, Head of Corporate Affairs, ING DIRECT.

"We hope our assistance has helped researchers understand more about these remarkable creatures so they can be safeguarded long into the future."

For more information:

Caroline Thomas, PR Manager, ING DIRECT, 0413 317 225

Charlie Stevens, WWF Media Manager – Queensland, 0424 649 689