



Volunteers help keep the whales afloat in waist deep water. Photo courtesy of the South Western Times, Bunbury.

Volunteers invaluable to whale rescue

THE efforts of thousands of volunteers who helped rescue six whales stranded in Busselton's Geographe Bay in January have been publicly thanked.

"We couldn't have done it without them," said the Department of Conservation and Land Management Parks and Visitors Services Coordinator Neil Taylor.

He estimates between 2,000 and 3,000 people helped with the six Gray's beaked whales – five adults and one juvenile – in shifts in what many later described as a once in a lifetime experience.

Neil said the volunteers were organised into teams of about 12, spending about 30 minutes with the animal before being replaced by another crew.

"The result we had wouldn't have been attainable without their support," Neil said.

"What people did was hold the animals in waist deep water so that they could breathe and also to keep their

by Tracy Peacock

dorsal fin wet."

Neil said volunteers were organised by Department staff and were required to register before they helped in the rescue attempt.

The stranded whales were reported to the Department at about 7am, and volunteers were soon on the scene assisting with their rescue.

The Department bought in slings and other rescue equipment in an effort to save the whales.

Although they were returned to deeper waters, three of the whales later died.

Neil acknowledged the dedication of Department staff during the rescue plus support of the Fisheries Department, local shire and the State Emergency Service.

