

# Reeling it in!

Each year, thousands of marine birds, mammals and fish are killed or injured due to discarded fishing line and tackle which can cause them to drown, lose limbs, starve or develop life-threatening infections. Specially designed collection bins are making a difference by significantly reducing the amount of fishing line and other waste making its way into the Swan-Canning river system. And now, thanks to a program expansion, they will be fitted along the coast as well.

*by Jason Menzies*





In April 2012 the then Department of Environment and Conservation received notification that one of the beloved Swan Canning Riverpark dolphins was entangled in fishing line. The dolphin was 'Gizmo' – a three-year-old calf who lived in the Swan Canning Riverpark with his mother 'Tupac'. The fishing line was tangled around Gizmo's dorsal fin, cutting into his flesh and causing potentially life-threatening injuries. Wildlife officers made several attempts over a two-month period to disentangle Gizmo, but his protective mother foiled their efforts to get close to her calf. With a long-term untreated flesh wound, Gizmo was at risk of developing an infection, which could lead to serious illness or death. And, as time went on, he collected seaweed and other debris, which hampered his swimming efforts and no doubt affected his ability to feed. Without the fishing line removed, wildlife officers believed Gizmo would have suffered the same fate as thousands of marine birds, mammals and fish that are killed or injured each year.

Fortunately, officers from the WA Water Police and the department were finally able to cut the fishing line and Gizmo was freed from his torturous confines. For those involved in the rescue who had seen too many animals falling victim to the impacts of fishing line, Gizmo's case was one too many. And so they were spurred to do something about the problem and the idea for a fishing line bin pilot project was born.

## A PILOT BEGINS

The *Reel it in* pilot project aimed to target the source of the problem by providing bins for people to responsibly dispose of their fishing line and other fishing

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*Opposite page*

**Main** Gizmo was entangled for two months before finally being freed.

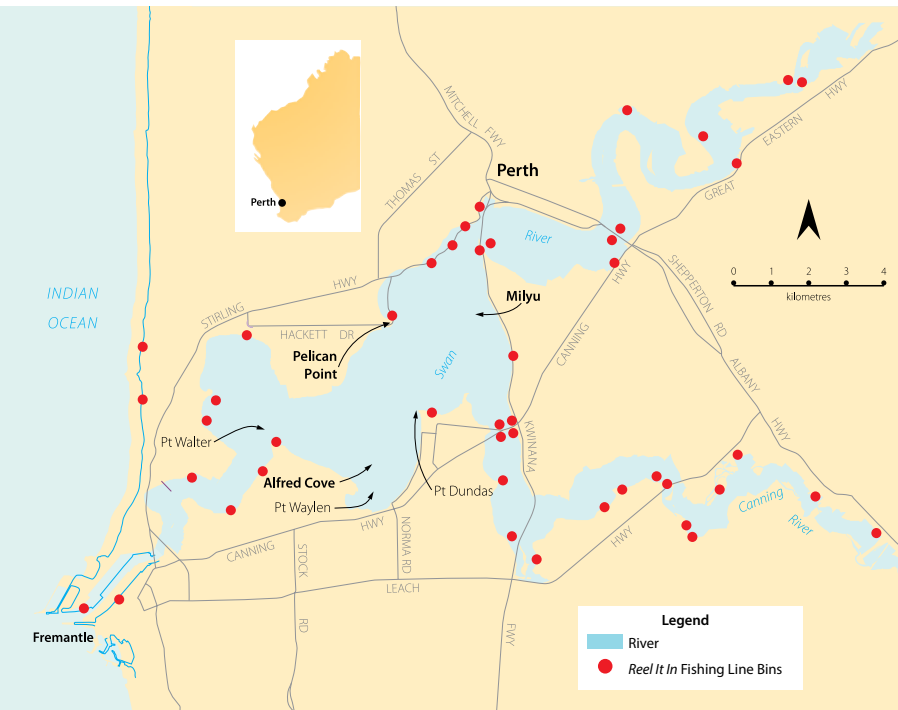
*Photo – DBCA*

**Inset** *Reel it in* bins are now being installed on the coast.

*Photo – Town of Cottesloe*

**Above** Gizmo and Tupac – two of the Swan Canning Riverpark's precious river dolphins.

*Photo – DBCA*



### More than a bin

- *Reel it in* bins have captured more than 50 kilometres of fishing line and thousands of hooks, sinkers and bait bags since being launched in 2013.
- There are more than 70 fishing line collection bins at popular recreational angling locations across WA's coastline and waterways.
- More than 20 community and government groups have partnered with the *Reel it in* campaign to reduce the amount of waste in Western Australia's oceans and waterways.

**Above right** Specially designed bins enable rubbish to be discarded safely.  
 Photo – Emily Hamley

**Below** Volunteers empty and audit the bins each week.  
 Photo – Sue Harper

waste. With the support of Keep Australia Beautiful WA, Recfishwest and Native Animal Rescue (NAR), the department developed and installed 40 custom-made fishing line bins at popular fishing spots along the Swan and Canning rivers.

Made of 100 per cent recycled materials, the *Reel it in* bins were designed to provide a safe and easy way to dispose

of unwanted fishing line and tackle. They were also created so that animals and weather couldn't pull the rubbish back out.

The two-year pilot proved incredibly successful with more than 15,000 metres of fishing line and 5,000 pieces of other fishing tackle and bait bags, as well as a raft of miscellaneous rubbish, collected, which would have otherwise ended up in our waterways. The project proved itself to be a simple, very cost-effective solution to the really serious problem of fishing line entanglement. The strong partnerships that were forged with community groups and volunteers indicated that the project would also be sustainable into the future.

### IT TAKES A VILLAGE

The NAR group became involved in the pilot to help monitor, empty and audit the bins and gauge the effectiveness of the project. Each week, NAR volunteers empty the contents of each bin into specially labelled bags and take them back to their Malaga headquarters. They then sift through the contents of each bin and enter data about what they find into the *Reel it in* rubbish collection database.

NAR completes their weekly bin emptying of the fishing line bins with the assistance of the Youth Policing Division of WA Police, Police and Citizen Youth Clubs and at-risk youth. This means that as well as achieving significant environmental



### Get involved - Adopt-a-Bin

Parks and Wildlife Services has a dedicated group of *Reel it in* volunteers who empty and audit their local fishing line bin on a weekly basis. Volunteers are provided with training and equipment and are registered with the Parks and Wildlife Service volunteer program.

Keep an eye on the *River Guardians* website at [www.riverguardians.com](http://www.riverguardians.com) and social media pages to see if there's a bin available for 'adoption' near you.

For other information, and to register your interest, please email [community@dbca.wa.gov.au](mailto:community@dbca.wa.gov.au).



**Above** Fishing line tangled around a pelican's bill.

Photo – Keep Australia Beautiful WA

**Above right** Mother and calf entangled.

Photo – Delphine Chabanne

**Below right** *Reel it in* bins are a simple, inexpensive solution for fishing waste.

Photo – DBCA

results, the *Reel it in* project is achieving positive social outcomes for Perth's youth.

Many *River Rangers* schools have also taken an interest in the *Reel it in* project and have incorporated it into their practical learning curriculum by helping to adopt and clean up foreshores at popular fishing sites.

## EXPANDING PROGRAM

Following the pilot project's resounding success, steps were taken to expand it. The department worked with 12 riverfront local governments to install 61 dedicated fishing line bins at popular jetties, fishing platforms, traffic bridges and foreshores throughout the Swan Canning Riverpark. In the past three years, the *Reel it in* bins have collected a staggering 50 kilometres of fishing line, 7,600 hooks and sinkers, 6,600 bait bags and 18,000 pieces of general rubbish.

In a further expansion, the department is now targeting popular



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Western Australian coastal fishing spots as potential locations. *Reel it in* bins have now been installed at the iconic Cottesloe Groyne, Hillarys Boat Harbour and boat ramps on the fringe of Shoalwater Islands Marine Park. They have also been installed at Victoria Quay; the North and South moles in Fremantle Port; Woodman Point Ammo Jetty; CY O'Connor Groyne in the City of Cockburn; Meelup Regional Park; and in the City of Mandurah through the Estuary Guardians program.

The data collected from the *Reel it in* bins is now being entered into the Australian Marine Debris (AMD) Database. This database was created by Tangaroa Blue to enable volunteers and organisations who were running beach clean-up events to collect data on what they found with a consistent methodology so it could be collated into a standardised national database on marine debris.

## NEVER-ENDING STORY

While the *Reel it in* project has made a significant contribution to reducing the amount of waste in and around Perth's river and coastal waters, ridding our environment of this rubbish completely is ongoing. Dolphins are still being impacted by discarded fishing waste and for each fishing line death or injury we know about, there are possibly hundreds that go unnoticed. However, we're undoubtedly making positive steps in the right direction.

### *Have you seen sick or injured native wildlife?*

Please contact the Wildcare Helpline on (08) 9474 9055.

The Wildcare Helpline provides a service for the public who find sick or injured native wildlife and are seeking advice on what to do or where to find care for the animal.

You can download the new Wildcare Helpline app to your smart phone by visiting the App Store or Google Play (see also 'In Review' on page 37).



**Jason Menzies** is Parks and Wildlife Service's Volunteers and Community Unit manager. He can be contacted on (08) 9278 0932 or by email ([jason.menzies@dbca.wa.gov.au](mailto:jason.menzies@dbca.wa.gov.au)).