

# Reel it in with Tangaroa Blue



Six years ago, the tragic and untimely death of one of Perth's beloved resident river dolphin calves sparked the development of a project to clean up the city's waterways. The *Reel it in* program has removed a staggering amount of fishing waste and general rubbish from the Swan Canning Riverpark and several WA beaches. However, another dolphin death in 2019, this time in Mandurah, was a sad reminder that there's still a long way to go. A recent community event at Dawseville has highlighted the value of people power and the impact of the *Reel it in* campaign.

by Jason Menzies



Since late 2013, DBCA has been working with the Perth community to address the problem of discarded fishing line in the Swan Canning Riverpark through the delivery of the *Reel it in* fishing line bin project. The program was launched after one of the Swan Canning Riverpark's dolphin calves died as a result of being badly entangled in fishing line.

Six years on, and the department has now installed 65 fishing line bins across the Swan Canning Riverpark. These bins have collected more than 83 kilometres of fishing line, 14,500 hooks and sinkers, 10,500 bait bags to more than 36,000 pieces of general rubbish. More than 50 members of the public have signed up as DBCA volunteers to help empty and maintain the bins and keep them in good working order.

## THE SAGA CONTINUES

While the program has been successful in removing masses of waste from the Swan Canning Riverpark, unfortunately, in August 2019, fishing line claimed the life of Luca, an 18-month-old dolphin calf who lived in the Mandurah Estuary. Tragically, this fatal event was the third time in 12 months that Luca had become entangled in fishing line.

It was obvious that something needed to be done to protect Mandurah's other resident dolphins. So the decision was made to expand DBCA's *River Guardians* program to reel in the problem of fishing waste in Mandurah. And this would not only benefit the resident dolphins, but also the shorebirds that nest in and frequent the area, which is Ramsar-listed as a wetland of international importance.

## LUCA'S LEGACY

After learning of Luca's death, the *River Guardians* team joined forces with the Mandurah Estuary Guardians, who help deliver *Dolphin Watch*, John Tonkin College students and staff, Mandurah Cruises and Mandurah Volunteer Dolphin Rescue Group and provided *Reel it in* bins to be installed across the Peel-Harvey Estuary. There are now 20 *Reel it in* bins installed in Mandurah to help collect fishing-related waste. To further engage the Mandurah community in the program,



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special *Reel it in* signage was installed at popular fishing spots by the City of Mandurah with the assistance of students from John Tonkin College.

Five *Reel it in* bins were installed on Busselton Jetty in November 2019 and six were installed at popular fishing locations in Bunbury in January 2020, in partnership with Busselton Jetty Foundation and Bunbury Dolphin Discovery Centre, respectively. These locations are in addition to other popular coastal fishing spots in Hillarys, Cockburn Sound, Rottnest Island and Walpole.

## COMMUNITY RESPONSE

Each year, Tangaroa Blue, a not-for-profit organisation dedicated to the removal and prevention of marine debris, holds an annual beach clean-up event around Australia. This proved to be an ideal opportunity for DBCA to tackle the issue of discarded fishing line in the Peel-Harvey Estuary and surrounding waters.



Hear more about  
*Reel it in*

Scan this QR code  
or visit Parks and Wildlife  
Service's 'LANDSCOPE'  
playlist on YouTube.



The *Reel it in* with Tangaroa Blue event was held on 19 October 2019 and more than 200 volunteers rolled up their sleeves and got their hands dirty in memory of Luca. They were given a briefing and equipped with the usual clean-up tools – gloves, buckets, rubbish bags and a special

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**Main** Since its inception, the *Reel it in* program has seen 83 kilometres of fishing line removed from the Swan Canning Riverpark.

*Photo – Sally Kirby/Estuary Guardians*

**Inset left** The Swan Canning Riverpark and Peel-Harvey Estuary are home to beloved populations of dolphins.

*Photo – Chandra Salgado Kent*

**Inset right** Becoming entangled in fishing line and other debris can lead to serious injury and even death.

*Photo – Sally Kirby/Estuary Guardians*

**Above** More than 200 volunteers contributed to the inaugural *Reel it in* with Tangaroa Blue event  
*Photo – Jason Menzies/DBCA*





**Above** *Reel it in* bins have been installed in the Swan Canning Riverpark, on popular Perth beaches and the Mandurah Estuary.

**Above right** A database for marine debris helps to create an overview of what types of rubbish are impacting beaches.  
*Photos – Jason Menzies/DBCA*

**Right** Fishing off the old Mandurah traffic bridge, a popular tradition.  
*Photo – Jiri Lochman*

“What we do with that data is we collect it and analyse it over several years, and we can review what’s been found and identify problem materials or sites and investigate further.

We just wanted to have a legacy for Luca. To keep him in our minds for the long term and we’ve started this event, in its first year, and for years to come we hope to be doing that.

It’s up to all of us to do something about it.”

*Maureen Maher, Project Officer, Tangaroa Blue*



data collection sheet. Rubbish was itemised as it was collected, and marked on the data sheet to be later entered into the Australian Marine Debris Database.

## KEEPING TABS ON TRASH

The Australian Marine Debris Database was created to enable volunteers and organisations running 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.

Since 2004, more than seven million pieces of data have been entered into the Australian Marine Debris Database. This has created a comprehensive overview of what amounts and types of marine debris are impacting beaches around the country.

The army of volunteers tackled a variety of landforms spread across two sites, including beaches, groynes, rock embankments and foreshores that were known for ‘collecting’ rubbish thanks to

the strong south-westerly sea breeze. One of the sites, Dawesville Cut, was an easy choice because it has 13 fishing platforms.

With assistance from Oceano Dive Centre and Tackle World Miami, the *River Guardians* team also managed to clean up problem sites in the water. Scuba divers armed with special equipment targeted popular jetties and fishing platforms in Dawesville Cut and the Peel-Harvey Estuary, including the ones that Luca was frequently seen diving under or foraging around.

The inaugural *Reel it in* with Tangaroa Blue clean-up event was a resounding success. In just one day, a staggering 635 kilograms of rubbish was collected by more than 200 volunteers across the two sites. And, while this result is pleasing, it highlights the sheer volume of rubbish that the creatures that inhabit our marine environment must contend with (see also ‘Good news whale tale’ on page 49), and reminds us that we all have a role to play

in reducing and removing the amount of rubbish that ends up in our waterways.

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*The Reel it in with Tangaroa Blue event wouldn’t have been possible without the cohort of partners involved. The author would like to extend a special thanks to Estuary Guardians Mandurah and the teachers and students at John Tonkin College, Mandurah Cruises, Tangaroa Blue, Peel-Harvey Catchment Council, Keep Australia Beautiful WA, Coastal Waste Warriors, City of Mandurah, Oceano Dive Centre, and Recfishwest for helping make the day such a success.*

*For more information about the Tangaroa Blue program, visit [amdi.tangaroablue.org](http://amdi.tangaroablue.org).*

*For more information about River Guardians and the Reel it in programs, visit [dbca.wa.gov.au](http://dbca.wa.gov.au).*