

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN DOLPHINS AND PORPOISES

The terms dolphin and porpoise are sometimes used synonymously for small cetaceans but there is a difference.

Dolphins usually have a narrow beak and a slender streamlined body form, while porpoises have a blunt snout and a stout, rather stocky form. Another difference is that the dorsal fin of dolphins curves backwards while that of porpoises is triangular. Both porpoises and dolphins are members of the family Delphinidae which embraces some of the toothed whales, sometimes large but mainly small. It is a very large family containing about 50 species and has a world-wide distribution. Only 6 of these species are porpoises.

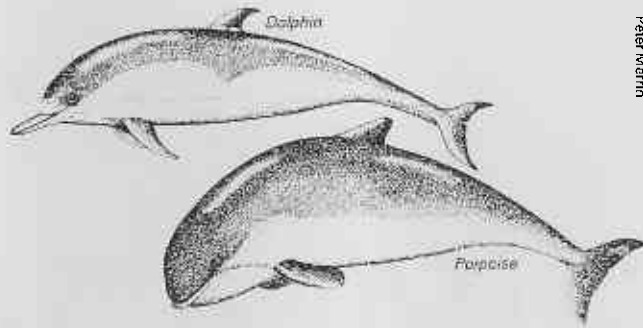
Porpoises are fairly small animals. Most species grow only up to about 2 metres. Most dolphins grow to between 2 and 4 metres long though the biggest, the Killer Whale (*Orcinus orca*) grows up to 9 metres long.

Porpoises do not occur in Australian waters. The commonest dolphin seen off the Western Australian coast is the Bottle-nosed Dolphin (*Tursiops truncatus*). Other species which have been reported along our coast include: Risso's Dolphin (*Grampus griseus*), The Common Dolphin (*Delphinus delphis*), and the Striped Dolphin (*Stenella caeruleoalba*).

Only within the last 15 years has another species, the Irrawaddy River Dolphin (*Orcaella brevirostris*) been recognised as an Australian species, from speci-

mens caught in fish traps off Broome. This animal belies the earlier statement that dolphins have a narrow beak since it has a blunt nose and a short shelf-like beak.

The distribution of dolphins along the Western Australian coast is poorly understood and the Western Australian Museum would welcome information, particularly when dead dolphins, or any other marine mammal remains, are found on the beach. The Museum should be informed as soon as possible after the finding; where possible the remains should be removed at least above high water mark pending further examination, and a photograph should be taken.



Basic appearance difference between Dolphin and Porpoise.