

NSW DPI / Huon Yellowtail Kingfish Research Project – Stakeholder Update - October 2016

NSW DPI received a report of whale seen with a rope across its back while within the Marine Aquaculture Research Lease area on Saturday 8 November. Images provided of the incident show a rope on the whale of a type not used on the Research Lease. The temporary anchor installation ropes used on the Research Lease are 40mm orange ropes used to provide visibility to whales. Other photos also indicate a small surface float commonly used for fishing traps near the whale and close to the lease infrastructure.

After a short period, the whale moved away from the site. DPI is investigating this report further and has reported it to the Office of Environment and Heritage, Roads and Maritime Services and Port Stephens-Great Lakes Marine Park.

NSW DPI has worked with the Office of Environment and Heritage to mitigate risks to marine fauna during the deployment and installation of the sea pens at Port Stephens. An OEH appointed observer has been on the works vessel to monitor any interactions. On Saturday 8 October at 7.45am (after the reported incident) two whales were observed by the Observer on the Research Lease tail and fin slapping and apparently rubbing against lease infrastructure. Works were held in abeyance for 40 minutes until the whales moved off the Research Lease.

A Marine Fauna Interaction Plan was approved with an interaction response protocol before work commenced on the Research Lease and a training course is being developed for staff and will be offered to members of the Port Stephens tourist industry.

Poor weather has delayed the fine tuning of the Research Lease mooring grid. This has meant a change of plans to now bring two sea pens to Port Stephens. The sea pens will arrive at the temporary mooring at the Boulders within Port Stephens 12 October and the nets will be installed on one of the sea pens. A notice to Mariners is being circulated and it will be accompanied by a 'Securite' to advise water users of this temporary arrangement.

The emergency contact number for the Research Lease is **1300 920 987**, to be used for any incident involving the sea pens.

Upcoming events: Approximate on or before dates dependent on weather. Towing of two sea pens from Newcastle Harbour 11-12/10. Two sea pens to be located in Port Stephens 12 October and then to Providence Bay; and stocking of Yellowtail Kingfish fingerlings 17-18 October 2016.

Further details at <http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/fishing/aquaculture/starting-up/finfish-aquaculture-lease-modification-application> or aquaculture.administration@dpi.nsw.gov.au