

A banner for the Port Stephens 2009 Whale Festival. The text 'Port Stephens 2009' is in a white, sans-serif font, and 'WHALE FESTIVAL' is in a larger, bold, white, serif font. The background is a scenic view of a coastal town with a blue sky and a whale breaching the water on the right side.

Port Stephens 2009 WHALE FESTIVAL

MEDIA RELEASE

Tuesday 9th June 2009-06-09

For the love of Whales

National Whale Day last Saturday might have gone unheeded by most Sydney residents but not those from the little coastal community of Port Stephens. Over 400 residents and visitors rallied on Shoal Bay beach at midday to create a giant human Humpback whale in celebration of the arrival of the whales and their amazing recovery. Most Port residents love to watch the passage of the whales from headlands or boats and recognize the sheer economic value these mega-mammals bring to the region through tourism.

Back in the bad old days of whaling, the Humpback whale populations on both the east and west coast of Australia were decimated by the whaling nations of the world including Australia. The East coast group known as population 5 was reduced to as few as 300 whales by 1978. Just a tiny remnant of a population thought to have contained more than 20,000 whales at the end of WW 2 according to Marine scientist Wally Franklin.

Today, more than 30 years since Australia stopped whaling, 9000 Humpback whales are once again making money for at least 20 coastal communities like Port Stephens on Australia's East coast. Last year according to whale tour operator Frank Future 40,000 visitors went Whale watching from Nelson Bay leaving \$10 million to the port during the winter, a time when historically many tourism businesses used to shed staff or go into hibernation.

A report on the Growth of Whale Watching in Australia published by the International Fund for Animal Welfare in 2004 quantified whale and dolphin tourism was worth \$96 million to NSW and \$276 million to the entire of Australia. Tourism businesses can now stay open all year offering a chance of regular work for locals who turned out on mass in Port Stephens to say a big thanks to the whales.

Author Frank Future
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