



REPORTING AND DOCUMENTING WHALE DEPREDATION

If a marine mammal has ever stolen your fish, you know how frustrating the experience can be. Conflicts between marine mammals and fishermen are on the rise, and we're not just talking seals and sea lions. A growing problem in British Columbia is depredation – the removal of fish from fishing gear – by killer whales and sperm whales. Although depredation is not terribly problematic for sport fisherman in B.C. yet, it is wide spread and damaging to many fisheries around the world. Help us ensure this problem does not grow locally.

The Problem

Once established it's not easily stopped! In areas such as neighbouring Alaska, where depredating killer whales and sperm whales are a major problem, fishermen have struggled to control the issue, even with expensive gear modifications and deterrent devices.

Toothed whales, killer whales in particular, are highly intelligent, social mammals, capable of learning complex behaviours. This means that once a feeding behaviour like depredation is learned it is very difficult to stop, and worse, can spread quickly from a couple individuals to an entire group or population.

With little success at stopping depredation, fishermen, managers, and researchers agree the best course of action for B.C. needs to be preventing the problem from becoming established here.

In Alaska's Bering Sea, killer whales depredating longline fisheries can stalk boats for miles, reducing overall catch rates by up to 30% and individual sets by up to 100% – making some productive fishing grounds unusable!

What's at Stake

- **Your derby winning fish!** – Depredating killer whales primarily target Chinook salmon and Pacific halibut.
- **Substantial economic loss to fishermen** – Depredating whales targeting longline and troll vessels reduce CPUE, decrease accuracy of fish stock assessments, increase operating costs (extra time, fuel, and gear to out run whales), and damage gear.
- **Injury to whales** – Whales are at greater risk of vessel strike, entanglement, conflict with fishermen, and altered foraging strategies. In B.C. most depredation events on sport fishing gear appear to be by members of the northern resident (fish-eating) killer whale population – a threatened species protected under the Species-at-Risk Act.
- **Depredation is only likely to get worse with time and habituation!** Anti-depredation efforts must be unified within the commercial and recreational fishing industry to stop depredation from becoming the costly and impactful issue that it has become in Alaska and other parts of the world. **We need your help!**



Killer Whale

Orcinus orca

LENGTH

6–8 m / 20–26 ft

DORSAL FIN

Black, triangular in females and calves; tall, distinctive in adult males

APPEARANCE

Black body with white underside; grey saddle patch behind dorsal fin; white eye patch

BEHAVIOUR

Usually in groups of 3–25; bushy blows visible in cold weather





PREVENTING DEPREDATION – WHAT TO DO!

Don't let this be your fish! If you are fishing and whales appear:

- **Stop fishing** – Don't give whales a chance to learn how to steal fish from your line! Currently in B.C., killer whales typically do not follow or stay near fishing vessels, but rather take fish opportunistically. They rarely take fish from lines on the bottom, but instead take them when gear is being hauled. Do not set or haul gear when whales are present, stop fishing when whales approach, and only resume fishing when whales have left the area.
- **Fish in a different area** – If whales are milling in the area, move to another location to fish. If a boat in the area experiences a depredation event, other boats in the area should move to another location too.
- **Don't discard fish or offal in the presence of whales** – Refrain from discarding offal overboard during active fishing to reduce attracting marine mammals to fishing vessels. Habituating whales to a free meal may also impact their natural foraging behaviour.
- **Do not harass or shoot at depredating whales** – Apart from it being illegal, these extreme measures to deter or stop depredating whales are ineffective.
- **Report all depredation events** – We need your help! It is vital not only to work to mitigate this problem, but also to track the onset and spread of depredating whale behaviour in B.C.

Please report all depredation events to
Fisheries and Oceans Canada confidential reporting email:
marinemammals@dfo-mpo.gc.ca

If the marine mammal is entangled, sick, injured, or distressed
please also immediately contact the B.C. Marine Mammal Response
Network Incident Reporting Hotline
1.800.465.4336 or VHF Channel 16

Find our whale depredation report online at www.wildwhales.org

REPORT DEPREDATION

What to Record

YOUR LOCATION

(Latitude/Longitude coordinates
if possible)

DATE AND TIME

WHALE SPECIES

SPECIES DEPREDATED

How many damaged fish

TYPE OF FISHING GEAR

WHALE'S BEHAVIOUR

WHALE'S DIRECTION OF TRAVEL

TOTAL NUMBER OF WHALES AND VESSELS IN THE AREA

BEHAVIOUR OF OTHER WHALES IN THE AREA

SEA CONDITION

TAKE PHOTOGRAPHS

Identifying the whale species and
individual whale ID

What to Photograph

INDIVIDUAL WHALE ID

Take a picture of the animal including
flukes, dorsal fin, saddle patch
(for killer whales), identifying scars,
the depredation event, and any
depredated fish

RECOMMENDED CAMERA SETTING

Shutter priority or sport mode – with
a shutter speed of at least 1000

**OCEAN
WISE**