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Exclusion zone for special whale



Migaloo (Daniel Burns, Southern Cross University Whale Research Centre)

Australian authorities have warned the public to stay away from a rare white humpback whale named Migaloo that has made an appearance off the east coast.

Officials in Queensland state have declared Migaloo a "special-interest whale" and banned anyone from coming within 500 metres of him.

Anyone coming too close by boat, jet ski or aircraft will face a fine of \$13,500 (£8,000).

Officials said the whale needed to be left alone to migrate up the coast.

"The whale-watching regulations are there to protect the whales, but also to protect people from these huge, unpredictable animals," said Queensland's Environment Minister Kate Jones.

"Adult humpbacks can weigh more than a fully-loaded semi-trailer so you need to stay out of their way," she added.

Loyal following

Migaloo is the only known all-white humpback whale in the world, Prof Peter Harrison of the Southern Cross University Whale Research Centre told the BBC News website.

"He's a very special whale," Prof Harrison said. "Nothing should divert him on his migration route to the Great Barrier Reef."

Migaloo, which means "white fella" in a Queensland aboriginal dialect, is from Australia's Great Barrier Reef area, but migrates every summer to the waters off Antarctica to feed on krill.

He has attracted a loyal following since he was first spotted as a young whale in 1991. There are websites dedicated to him and he inspired an anti-whale hunt campaign, Operation Migaloo, last year.

Aside from curiosity seekers, the other big threat to Migaloo and other humpbacks is the potential resumption of hunting by Japanese whalers in the Southern Ocean, Prof Harrison said.