

Biodiversity Record: Rediscovery of the Indo-Pacific finless porpoise in Singapore

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Subjects: Indo-Pacific finless porpoise, *Neophocaena phocaenoides* (Mammalia: Artiodactyla: Cetacea: Phocoenidae).

Subjects identified by: Sirius Ng and Zeehan Jaafar.

Location, date and time: Johor Strait, Sungai Johor estuary south of Pulau Tekong (1.311889°N, 104.086083°E); 13 February 2025; between 0600 and 1200 hrs.

Habitat: Estuary surrounded largely by reclaimed land. Container ships and other sea-going vessels were present in the area.

Observers: Rauf Licheng and company.

Observation: A pod of three or four individuals was observed and videographed from the interior of a vessel. During the 21 second video clip, the animals porpoised asynchronously on two occasions; first a single individual, followed by three individuals (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1. Exposed backs of three finless porpoises (within rectangle) in the Sungai Johor estuary off the southern shore of Pulau Tekong. In the background are container ships and Bukit Pengerang in south-eastern Johor, Peninsular Malaysia. (Screen grab from video recorded by: Rauf Licheng)

Remarks: The record presented here, submitted through the web-based citizen science platform Mega Marine Life in Singapore (MegMaLS) (<https://bit.ly/megmals>), represents the first videographic evidence of live *Neophocaena phocaenoides* individuals within the territorial waters of Singapore. Historical reports of *Neophocaena phocaenoides* for Singapore were of unverified eyewitness accounts (Sigurdsson & Yang, 1990; Durville & Taylor, 1996; Tropical Marine Science Institute, 2013). The only verifiable record of this species from Singapore is the skull (ZRC 4.10504) of a carcass stranded at the mouth of Sungei Api Api in Pasir Ris, in 1996, deposited at the Zoological Reference Collection of the

Lee Kong Chian Natural History Museum, at the National University of Singapore (Chua MAH & Lim KKP, personal communications). The present record is the first confirmed record of the finless porpoise from the country since 1996.

All known records of *Neophocaena phocaenoides* within the territorial waters of Singapore, verified and unverified, occurred within the eastern Johor Strait. This signals that habitats within this area likely serve as resource locations or movement corridors for *Neophocaena phocaenoides* (Jaaman et al., 2002; Jefferson & Hung, 2004; Ponnampalam, 2012).

Neophocaena phocaenoides is listed as ‘Critically Endangered’ in Singapore (Ng & Jaafar, 2024) and globally ‘Vulnerable to Extinction’ (Wang & Reeves, 2017). The high extinction risks faced by this species is driven by persistent exposure to anthropogenic resource extraction, vessel traffic and habitat loss and degradation (development, seascape modification, pollution, etc.) throughout its natural range (Patel et al., 2025). Outside of Hong Kong (Barros et al., 2002; Goold & Jefferson, 2002; Jia et al., 2014; Jefferson & Moore, 2020), East Malaysia (Minton et al., 2013; Rajamani et al., 2023), and Peninsular Malaysia (Kuit et al., 2019, 2021; Kimura et al., 2022; Ali et al., 2023), little is known of this species’ ecology, behaviour and distribution (Patel et al., 2025).

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