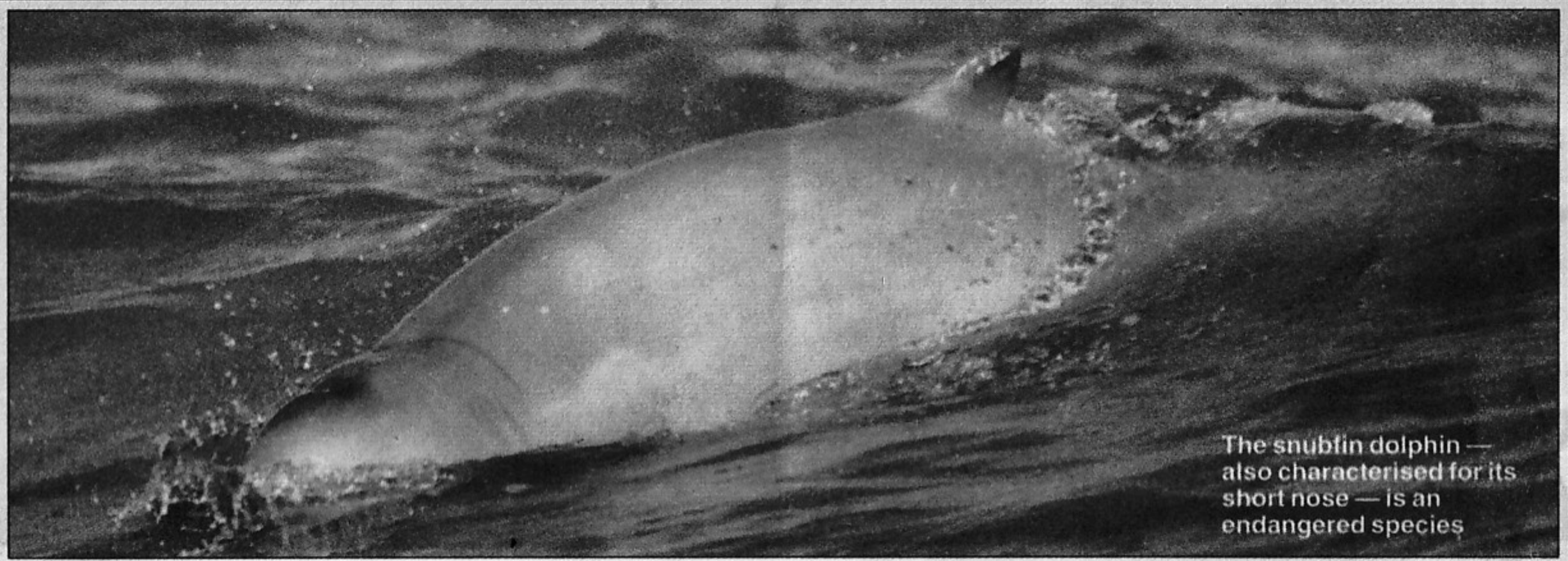


Could this snubby nosed dolphin stop our marina estate?



The snubfin dolphin — also characterised for its short nose — is an endangered species

By DANIEL BATEMAN

'Thursto' dolphin could lead species from extinction

AUSTRALIA'S only native dolphin could bring development of Townsville's \$1 billion dollar cruise ship terminal to a grinding halt.

The snubfin dolphin, which was discovered as a new species living in Cleveland Bay in 2005, is listed as a threatened species by the Federal Government, and is protected under the Queensland Nature Conservation Act.

Scientists regard the mammal as having a high conservation status with less than 100 of them remaining in Australian waters.

Everything that is known about the rare sea creature, which has a uniquely rounded forehead, is known from research undertaken in Cleveland Bay.

University of Queensland researcher Dr Guido Parra said the dolphin and Townsville's cruise ship terminal could not co-exist.

"Where the development will be located has been identified as one of the high-use areas for not only the snubfin but also another rare species which occurs in

IF a Townsville environmentalist has his way, one of Australia's rarest dolphins could soon be named after Johnathan Thurston.

Sustainability consultant Guy Lane of Townsville firm SEA-O2 has launched a conservation program aimed at protecting dolphin species, including the snubfin dolphin, in Townsville waters.

"The snubfin dolphin holds a special appeal because most

fishermen and long-term Townsville residents do not know of its existence," Mr Lane said.

The conservation program, dubbed 'Townsville Dolphins', aims to raise funding for dolphin research, communication and conservation management.

Mr Lane is hoping a naming rights program, such as one in place to protect Great White sharks in South Australia, would attract sponsors.

Sponsors would be able to name a dolphin after themselves.

"I'm hoping a lot of people jump on board — even the Cowboys," Mr Lane said.

It is hoped the program will raise \$300,000 within the next 12 months for a full-time project officer and dolphin researcher.

For more information about the program go to www.townsvilledolphins.org.

the bay, the humpback dolphin," Dr Parra said.

"It will definitely have an impact on the local populations of dolphins which are using those areas."

Authorities have said the breakwater development would be subject to a rigorous environmental impact assessment, but Dr Parra believed the snubfin dolphin had been glossed over in the process.

"It was very superficial at the moment," he said.

"I guess they're only in the first stages of conducting a full-on environmental assessment and I guess they're looking for feedback from

the public and environmental agencies."

Two agencies responsible for conservation of the dolphin, the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority and the Environmental Protection Agency, were yesterday unable to comment directly.

GBRMPA referred the *Bulletin* to the Department of the Environment and Water Resources.

A department spokeswoman said the ocean terminal project was being assessed through an environmental impact statement and it could not begin without Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act approval.

The EPA referred us to the Department of Infrastructure which is undertaking the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA).

An Infrastructure spokeswoman said the EIS made specific reference to the potential impact upon marine wildlife including dolphins.

Later, the EPA said it was 'involved in identifying recovery and management actions for the animal.'

Dr Parra warned the dolphin was extremely susceptible to major environmental change.

The major threat to the mammal at the moment is shark nets.

"The Chinese white dol-

phin, which dated back 20 million years, was declared extinct in December.

Researchers blamed shipping traffic, whose engines interfered with the sonar the dolphin used to navigate and feed, as one of the main reasons.

North Queensland Conservation Council coordinator James McLellan said authorities would have to seriously re-think plans for Townsville's cruise ship terminal if they wanted to avoid another dolphin extinction.

"It really does need to be properly investigated," Mr McLellan said.