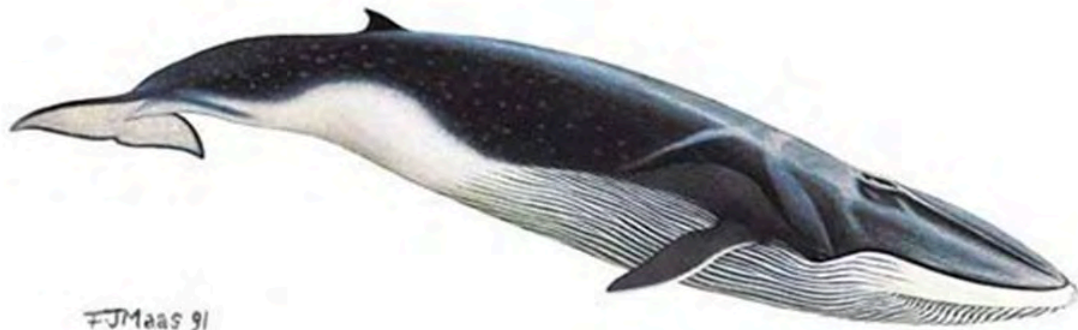


Fin Whale

Balaenoptera physalus



This time of year you can see the second largest animal in the world in Irish waters. Have you seen any?

Fin whales can reach up to 24 m in length, only Blue Whales are bigger than that. The largest recorded fin whale was a female about 27 m long, weighing more than 100 tons! They are capable of raising their entire body out of the water and falling back in, making a huge splash. Interestingly, the patterns on their jaws are asymmetrical - white on the right side and dark on the left side. That provides a good camouflage during hunting - they swim on their right side so the lighter colour of the head is less obvious to their prey. Their body is long and streamline, allowing them to travel up to 45 km per hour!

Fin whales, like blue whales, communicate through vocalizations and have one of the deepest, loudest voices in the ocean, letting them communicate over great distances. A study done about the sound frequencies of fin whales suggest that whales use counter-calling in order to get information about their surroundings. Counter-calling is when one whale of a pod calls and another answers. The information conveyed by the time it takes to answer as well as the echo of the answer is believed to hold a lot of important information about the whale's surroundings.

Fin whales are classified as endangered on by IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. They are also listed on Appendix I of the Convention on Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), but

unfortunately, this does not apply to Iceland, Norway and Japan, who hold reservations. 128 fin whales have been caught during this season by Iceland's whaling ships. (The quota is 154, but the hunt continues and it is believed that the quota will be used in next few weeks.) The meat from these whales will then be shipped to Japan.

Fin whales can be seen off the south coast of Ireland from August till January, although there are records from spring months as well. They are also the most commonly observed large baleen whales in Irish waters. If you are planning any whale watching trips this season, let us know! We wish the very best of luck to all you whale-watchers out there and don't forget to post photographs of your sightings!