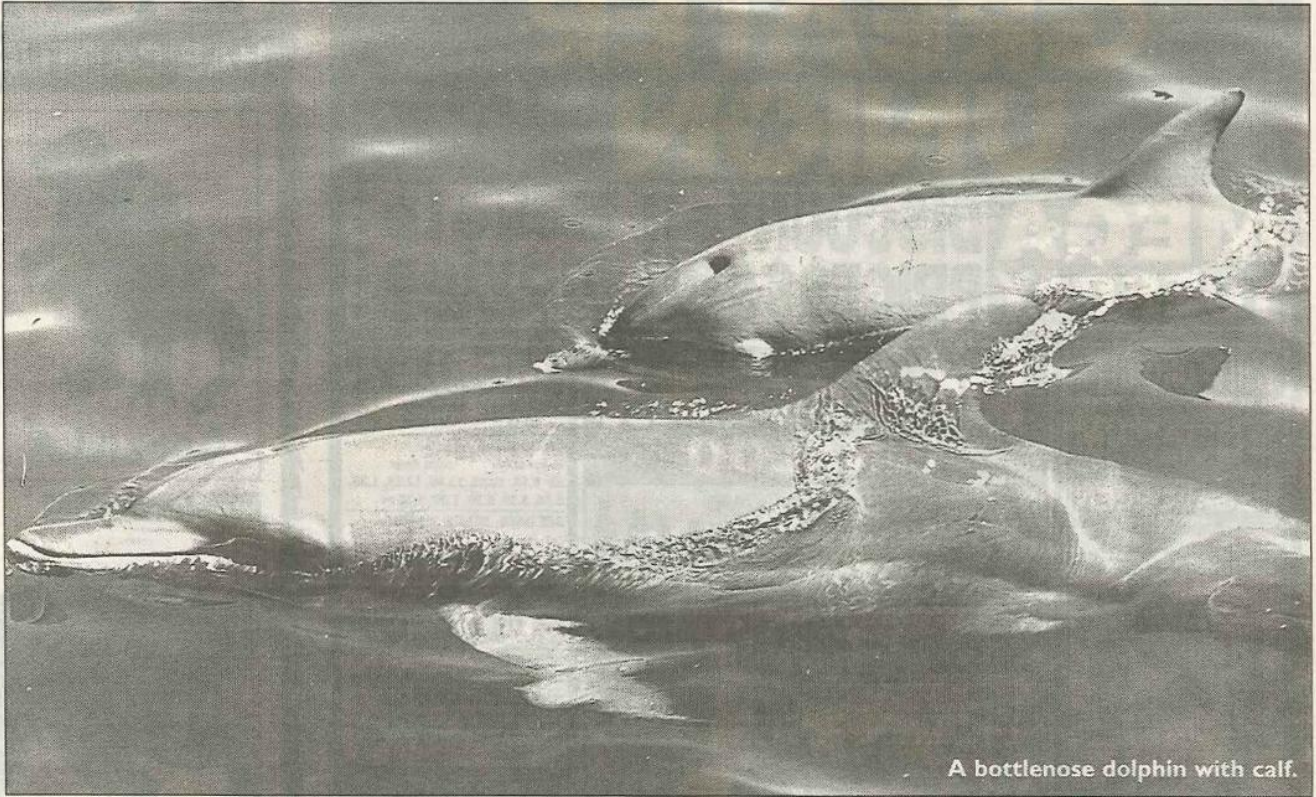


T O D A Y

TELEVISION



A bottlenose dolphin with calf.

Dolphins take a bow

FOR many, our knowledge of dolphins is limited to images of marine park performances and shows like Flipper. But in the wild there's much more to the dolphin than a carefree mammal frolicking at sea.

Dolphins' Day, a half-hour documentary screening tomorrow at 8pm as part of the ABC's Wild Ones series, focuses on the bottlenose dolphins of Bunbury's Koombana Bay and the studies carried out by Steve Honnor and the Dolphin Discovery Centre.

A busy estuary used by commercial and pleasure craft hardly seems an ideal place for a pod of dolphins to live. But thanks to Honnor's research over the past seven years, the dolphins' habits and needs are now better understood and strategies have been formulated to ensure the dolphins and human residents of the bay can live in harmony.

Such is the level of trust between Honnor, the film crew and the dolphins that some of the footage in Dolphins' Day is thought to be a world first.

There's the mother who puts her own life at risk by carrying around a dead calf, whose decaying corpse will attract sharks. Then, there is footage of male dolphins that herd a female away from her pod so they can mate with her,

against her will it would appear, in scenes akin to gang rape.

Despite a self-confessed lack of knowledge about dolphins when she started out, director Celia Tate has produced a fascinating insight into the mammals.

"It was a completely new world for me, I knew nothing so I had to read and watch lots," she said.

Of the violent mating scene, she said: "I've seen all the dolphin films now, I must have seen every one made in the world, and I had never seen that before. It was a very dangerous thing to film, they are big animals thrashing around and moving very fast. It's a side of dolphins people will be surprised to see. I think it will be the first time it has been seen on TV."

Filmed between December 1996 and 1997, Tate says the documentary took 150 days of filming — and most of the good material came from just four days of underwater filming.

"It's very challenging making films about wild animals, where you have no control over access to them," she says.

Tate is quick to hand most of the credit to Leighton De Barros, a former GWN cameraman who was familiar with the dolphins and put the documen-

tary proposal to the ABC.

"The hero of the day is Leighton. He's a young cameraman with an enormous future," Tate said.

"Natural history photography is the most demanding for cinematographers and he has really got what it takes to make good films."

Tate said De Barros almost became a member of the dolphin pod, wearing the same wetsuit, using the same boat, making the same sounds and signals to earn their trust. She said De Barros had great patience when at times "I was doing my nut thinking that after four months we had no footage of an international standard!"

Tate describes the documentary as perhaps the first "urban" dolphin story because most dolphins are filmed in idyllic ocean conditions — not in water that at times resembles "pea soup".

Tate, who also directed the social documentary *Belinda's Baby* which screened recently on the ABC, is working on a number of other natural history documentaries, including another project with De Barros and Dolphins' Day producer Brian Beaton.

Sue Yeap