

Whale poo could aid climate, say Aussie scientists

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Humpback whales (C) rise out of the water off the coast near Sydney in 2008. Experts from the Australian Antarctic Division have found that whale excrement -- much of which is derived from the huge mammals' consumption of krill -- effectively places a plant-friendly fertilizer into ocean waters.

Australian scientists have discovered an unlikely element in the fight against climate change -- whale poo.

Experts from the Australian Antarctic Division have found that whale excrement -- much of which is derived from the huge mammals' consumption of krill -- effectively places a plant-friendly fertilizer into ocean waters.

"When [whales](#) consume the iron-rich krill, they excrete most of the iron back into the water, therefore fertilising the ocean and starting the whole food cycle again," scientist Steve Nicol said.

The research suggests that if whale numbers grow, their droppings could help marine plant life flourish, thereby improving the ocean's ability to absorb carbon dioxide blamed for global warming.

Iron is a vital element in the production of marine plants, known as algae, which suck up carbon dioxide as they grow, although it is a scarce element in the "anaemic" [Southern Ocean](#), said chemical oceanographer Andrew Bowie.

"One-third of the world's oceans are low in trace element iron," the researcher at the Antarctic Climate and Ecosystems Cooperative Research Centre told AFP.

Bowie said whales consumed several tonnes of krill, small shrimp-like crustaceans, each day and this found its way back into the [ocean](#) via liquid-form, reddish brown emissions from the giant mammals.

He said while the researchers were pretty confident that whale poo would contain iron, they were surprised at the high concentration, about 10 million times that of Antarctic [seawater](#).

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