

Whale and dolphin strandings

To report a stranding call the
Wildcare Helpline on
9474 9055



Department of
Environment and Conservation



Euthanasia methods

Why can't something be done immediately to help the whale?

Live whale beaching and stranding incidents are assessed on a case-by-case basis. Due to their massive size and weight, dealing with humpbacks that can move suddenly in the surf is very dangerous. The main priority is to ensure the safety of staff and volunteers. Consequently it's not always possible for wildlife officers to immediately safely access and deal with the animal.

Why can't you tow the whale back out to sea?

Moving live large whales weighing tens of thousands of kilograms is difficult and dangerous even under calm sea conditions. It invariably causes stress and may cause serious injuries to the whale.

Decades of experience has taught the Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC) that a large baleen whale that comes ashore is likely to be in a terminal condition. Some whales die within hours while others may take many days or in some cases, weeks. The whale faces a lingering death and, euthanasia is the only option available to relieve its suffering.

How do you decide what euthanasia method to use?

There are limited euthanasia options available to wildlife officers.

Humpback whales will usually only come to shore if they're sick, so a clinical assessment is always carried out with the assistance of a veterinarian before deciding what the best course of action is without prolonging the animal's suffering.

The technique used on the day is largely determined by the animal's size and location. For instance, euthanasia by firearm is the most humane and effective method for smaller humpbacks while the focused implosion method, which involves the use of explosives, is the quickest and safest for larger whales that have beached.

What is the implosion technique?

A controlled implosion to the whale's cranium that euthanases the whale.

The technique involves placing sandbags over a charge on top of the cranium. When the charge is detonated the force is driven down into the cranium and sand is dispersed into the air. Empty sandbags may be seen flying. For safety reasons, it may be necessary to enforce an exclusion zone of up to one kilometre for boats, the public, aircraft and electronic devices.

The method was developed and refined over a 20-year period to the point where an instantaneous death can be delivered to the whale.

It has also been endorsed as an accepted technique by the International Whaling Commission.

How many times has this method been carried out?

In 2009, DEC dealt with 46 humpback whale beaching incidents. Of the 13 that were still alive when they came ashore, nine whales died during palliative care and four were euthanased to end their suffering. Two were euthanased by implosion and two humpbacks less than seven metres in length were euthanased by rifle shot.

What should members of the public do if they see a sick whale?

Anyone who sees an injured, entangled or sick whale should keep a safe distance from the animal, refrain from pushing it out to sea and contact the **DEC Wildcare Helpline immediately on (08) 9474 9055.**

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