

# Marine Mammal Stranding Response Best Practices

CODES: 1. Alive 2. Carcass in good condition 3. Fair-decomposition but organs intact  
4. Poor-advanced decomposition 5. Mummified or skeletal remains

When a marine mammal strands:



Call a forest officer  
Call a veterinary officer  
Call a locally based researcher

## Crowd Management:



Maintain crowds at a safe distance from the stranded mammal to avoid further distress to the animal and to avoid injuries to people caused by sudden movements of the animal.

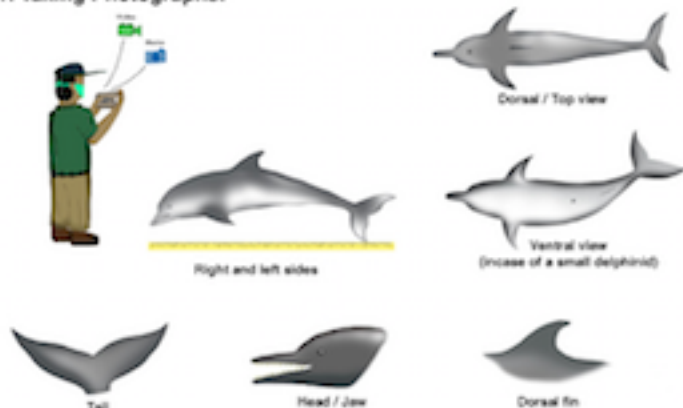
## Health and safety precautions:

1. Ensure that volunteers wear protective gloves and masks while handling marine mammals.
2. Volunteers should not stay in water for long time with a decomposing carcass.

## In case of a dead stranding:

Marine mammal stranding incidents provide low-cost opportunities to collect a wealth of biological information on marine mammals such as species diversity, anthropogenic and natural causes of mortality and assessing health of populations in an area.

### 1. Taking Photographs:



Photographs are crucial in species identification.

A full photo of the animal should be taken along with a scale or a small object to estimate its length.

### 2. Taking measurements:



Measurements of stranded dolphins and whales should be taken as linear lengths i.e. by holding the tape straight over or to the side of the animal. Care should be taken to not let the tape curve along the body. Doing this will result in lengths that are longer than the actual length.



Take teeth count of upper and lower jaw of any one side. Examination of the dentition aids in age determination, species identification, feeding habits and genetics.

### 3. Taking and preserving tissue samples:

Marine Mammals are protected under schedule 1 of the wildlife protection act and samples should be collected after due permissions. Use sterilized blades/scissors/forceps to scrape thin skin samples. Make sure samples don't contain blubber.



Blubber  
Luncheon  
Collarbone  
Spermatheca  
Sample type skin / fat / blubber / heart / Pectoral muscle / vertebrae

#### Dimensions:

10m x 10m. Taking two samples from each animal.

#### Storage:

Option 1 (preferred)- 70% ethanol + freezing  
Option 2- salt-freezing

## In case of a live stranding:

Live stranded mammals are under tremendous stress and volunteers on ground need to take measures to alleviate the distress as much as possible.



Provide shade to the animal from direct sunlight to minimize dehydration.

Keep the mammals skin moist with wet towels and be careful not to cover the blow-hole or pour water into it.



Dig out sand from underneath the flippers and fluke of the animal and fill the area with water.

## Handling live animals:



The tail and flippers are delicate parts that get damaged easily. Do not handle the animal by holding those parts.



## Proper handling:

If the animal is healthy enough to be refloated.



For proper handling, support the area behind the flipper and behind the dorsal fin.

Transport the animal to a favorable location for refloating using a harness or a stretcher.

## Release:

Refloating the animal making sure the blow-hole and dorsal fin are upright. Sway the animal gently back and forth for some time to make it comfortable and then release.



## Carcass Disposal:



### Burying:

Incase of a small or medium delphinid, the carcass should be carried to a site at or above the high tide mark. Location of the spot should be marked incase the skeleton is to be retrieved in the future. Chemicals such as bleaching powder should not be used to cover the carcass.