

Season-end Report



Response team with gear removed from a humpback whale

Authorization:

Is under NOAA Fisheries' Marine Mammal Health and Stranding Response Program (permit #18786-03).

Objectives:

- Provide safe and authorized response to entangled large whales in order to free some large whales from life threatening entanglements
- Increase awareness
- Gather valuable information that may mitigate the threat (risks) of entanglement for large whales and associated response.

Network:

The Sanctuary helps coordinate and works closely with NOAA Fisheries Office of Protected Resources, Pacific Islands Regional Office, Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center, and NOAA Office of Law Enforcement; Hawai'i's Department of Land and Natural Resources; the United States Coast Guard; the tour industry; researchers; fishermen; and others on receiving, and when appropriate, responding to reports of humpback whales in life threatening entanglements.

Entanglements:

Synopsis

The 2017-2018 humpback whale season (November 1, 2017 – May 30, 2018) was the Network's 16th and was marked by a large number of confirmed reports and associated responses. Twenty-six (26) confirmed reports, representing at least 14 different humpback whales, were received. Response efforts were mounted to 11 of the animals and as a result, 5 animals were actively freed of all or portions of their entangling gear, a 6th animal likely shed its gear due to the drag of the telemetry buoy, and a 7th animal was able to shed the gear on its own. Over 1000 feet of gear was removed, significantly reducing the impact for these animals.

Response

Twenty-one (21) authorized response efforts were mounted by the Network. Efforts included responders from Kauai, Oahu, Maui, and the island of Hawaii. One animal was freed on Christmas Day. Network members on Hawaii responded to the region's first reported gillnet entangled whale. Maui teams mounted 10 efforts in just over 30 days which resulted in 2 animals being freed. Teams on Oahu responded to an entangled whale on Penguin Bank and removed some gear. Kauai had a challenging late-season

report and was able to assess and tag the animal. It is believed the drag of the tethered telemetry buoy pulled off the entangling gear.

Efforts involved the Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary, NOAA Fisheries Protected Resources and Science Center, Hawai'i's Department of Land and Natural Resources, the U.S. Coast Guard, Kahoolawe Island Reserve Commission, NOAA Corps, NOAA Office of Law Enforcement, the West Hawaii Marine Mammal Response Network, Ultimate Whale Watch, Pacific Whale Foundation, Turtle Island Restoration Network, the Whaleman Foundation, Hawaii Association for Marine Education and Research, the Navy's Marine Mammal Program, the National Marine Mammal Foundation, Kauai Sea Riders, and many others.

Gear Investigation

Success, however, was also measured through the information gained. Preliminary investigation of gear indicated 4 cases of pot (trap) gear set off the northwest coast of North America, 1 case of marine debris, 1 case of gillnet, and 8 unknowns. A predominance of entanglements included the mouth (7 cases), with 1 case involving the rostrum, 2 cases involving the tailstock region only, and in 4 cases the nature of the entanglement was not determined.



Highlights:

- More than 90 hours of training was conducted.
- Thirty-nine (39) reports of entangled whales were received (13 unconfirmed and 26 confirmed), representing at least 14 different humpback whales were confirmed entangled in gear.
- Eleven (11) of the entangled whales were initially sighted within Sanctuary waters.
- Reports were received off Hawai'i, Kaua'i, Lanai, O'ahu, and Maui Nui waters.
- The latest report of any season was received, with a subadult humpback whale being reported on May 20.
- Seven (7) cases involved adults and 7 were subadults.
- Twenty-one (21) multi-agency, multi-asset responses mounted to 11 different animals.
- Drones were used opportunistically on 6 efforts.
- Five (5) entangled whales had gear actively removed. A 6th animal likely is free as a result of drag applied by an attached telemetry buoy.
- Since 2003 the Hawai'i Network has freed 27 large whales from life-threatening entanglements, removing more than 11,500 feet of lines and netting.



What to do if you find an entangled whale

*Do not to approach closely or attempt to approach the animal or free it. While well-intentioned, freeing a 40-ton whale is extremely dangerous for the animal and the would-be rescuer. Getting in the water is especially dangerous. People have been killed. As a result, only trained and well-equipped responders that are authorized under NOAA Fisheries' Marine Mammal Health and Stranding Response Program are permitted to disentangle whales. If you sight any marine mammal in distress, maintain 100 yards distance and please call the **NOAA Fisheries' 24/7 response Hotline at 888 256-9840**. If unable to call, please radio the U.S. Coast Guard on **VHF CH. 16**, and they will relay the report.*



The Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary is jointly managed by the

<http://hawaiihumpbackwhale.noaa.gov>

