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Department of Primary Industries, Parks, Water and Environment

Macquarie Harbour whale stranding update

Ninety-four long-finned pilot whales have been released outside the heads at Macquarie Harbour by marine conservation experts and trained volunteers following the mass stranding on Tasmania's west coast.

Efforts continue to rescue 12 to 20 whales that have the greatest chance of survival.

Marine Conservation Program wildlife biologist Dr Kris Carlyon said the team of rescuers at Macquarie Harbour were dealing with unique circumstances.

"We haven't dealt with a stranding of this type before and we are using new and novel techniques as part of the rescue event. Moving the animals offshore - we haven't had to do this with pilot whales before on such a scale. Bringing animals alongside a boat is a new technique for us," Dr Carlyon said.

"Each and every stranding is different and you apply the method you have at your disposal to undertake the best, quickest and most humane rescue of animals.

"We are getting up to 94 animals released and that is one hell of an effort. The best case scenario is these animals will regroup and rebond."

Dr Carlyon confirmed that some of the whales had rebeached overnight.

"We do have several live animals that we are assessing. We will look at refloating those animals and giving them another chance," he said.

Some of the animals that rebeached have died.

Since the mass stranding, volunteer numbers have remained steady. About 90 to 100 people have worked on the rescue effort at any one time.

"We are getting some fantastic support from volunteers," Dr Carlyon said.

"We have animals in an offshore environment which is vessel based. We are working in the water with these animals and it is not somewhere we can deploy a large number of people. It's not needed either. We have had a cap on the number of volunteers at any one time and at the moment our resources are good," he said.

Incident Controller and Parks and Wildlife Service (PWS) regional manager Nic Deka said collection of the dead whales had begun today to stop them drifting into the harbour.

“Today we will be trialling a technique for burial at sea,” Mr Deka said.

“Our aim is to remove the carcasses from Macquarie Harbour as quickly as possible. Ideally it could take four to five days, but it could take several days depending on wind, tide and current,” he said.

It is possible whales will be found in other areas around Macquarie Harbour in coming days. Please report any sightings to the Whale Hotline on 0427 WHALES.

For more information about the whale stranding visit the DPIPWE Marine Conservation Program Facebook page and the DPIPWE website: <https://dPIPWE.tas.gov.au/whale-stranding>

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