



27 September 2020

Department of Primary Industries, Parks, Water and Environment

## Macquarie Harbour whale stranding update

As the mass whale stranding on Tasmania's west coast moves into the next stage, the Department of Primary Industries, Parks, Water and Environment (DPIPWE) would like to thank the trained volunteers, Strahan community, staff, local aquaculture industries, science and research bodies for their assistance to date.

Many of the whale rescue volunteers and marine conservation experts are on their way home after releasing 110 long-finned pilot whales outside of the heads of Macquarie Harbour.

Incident Controller and Parks and Wildlife Service (PWS) manager Rob Buck said the volunteers and staff had worked long hours in cold conditions over the past week to release the stranded whales.

"Thank you to everyone involved for their efforts in such a complex rescue. There has been a tremendous team effort and this combined commitment has allowed us to get as many whales as we can back out to sea," Mr Buck said.

Much of the rescue in the last few days has taken place within the harbour and away from the shoreline. These rescues were vessel based, which meant the number of volunteers and staff on the sandbar at any one time was limited.

Mr Buck also thanked Tasmania Police and the local aquaculture industry.

"Huon, Tassal and Petuna have provided essential and invaluable support during the rescue phase and are continuing to provide essential resources in relation to collection and disposal," Mr Buck said.

From today, the team will focus on a sea burial for the whales who died in the mass stranding.

Aquaculture companies and PWS vessels along with dinghies will be used to remove carcasses. Long lines will tow the deceased whales into offshore waters where they'll be released.

Mr Buck said the incident team had sought the assistance of the CSIRO Marine Division, who provided advice with regards to oceanographic currents to plan for the disposal of the whale carcasses at sea.

Removal of all the whales that died will take a number of days and is dependent on wind, tide and current conditions.

The boat ramp at Macquarie Heads remains closed during the operation. Recreational boat users are asked to use the Strahan boat ramp.

The Macquarie Heads boat ramp will reopen as soon as practically possible.

A Notice to Mariners will be issued by Marine and Safety Tasmania each day following the disposal of any whales at sea.

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 the DPIPWE website:  
<https://dPIPWE.tas.gov.au/whale-stranding>

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