



22 September 2020

Department of Primary Industries, Parks, Water and Environment

Whale stranding update

Marine conservation experts have mapped out the rescue response over coming days in relation to the mass whale stranding on Tasmania's west coast.

There are currently 60 people involved in the rescue effort on-site at Strahan at this current time. This includes 40 staff from across Department of Primary Industries, Parks, Water and Environment (DPIPWE), staff from other Departments and Tasmania Police.

An estimated 270 pilot whales are believed to have stranded at Strahan, with 200 stranded on a sandbar off the Macquarie Heads boat ramp, another 30 several hundred metres away on another sandbar, and about 30 more along Ocean Beach.

Marine Conservation Program wildlife biologist Dr Kris Carlyon said marine conservation experts involved with rescue efforts are trying to refloat animals and assess behaviour.

"A lot of the rescue efforts will depend on how these animals respond once they have water underneath them," Dr Carlyon said.

"Triage is going to be quite important here. We have got animals over a large area and in a really challenging location so we are going to take the animals with the best chance to start with and the ones we are able to deal with.

"Some animals may be too big or the location is too difficult to get to. About a third of the animals are deceased. We will update figures later in the day."

Incident Controller and PWS regional manager Nic Deka said the plan has been to trial various rescue efforts this morning before identifying the method which may offer the best chance of success.

"We have now freed a small number successfully that appear to have stayed out at sea and are now scaling up that approach," Mr Deka said.

Dr Kris Carlyon said the rescue efforts is likely to take days, dependent on weather and tide conditions.

“These are long-finned pilot whales they are quite a robust species. They are wet, they are cool, and today we have some really suitable weather for them,” Dr Carlyon said.

“If conditions stay the same they can survive for quite a few days.”

“We have specialised equipment to help. The challenge will be what to do with those animals once they are refloated. Will we have to herd them out or will we have to move them by some other means,” Dr Carlyon said.

Mr Deka said tides have been driven by barometric pressure.

“We have a low pressure system that is putting water into the harbour so we will get the strongest tides in a couple of days as a high pressure system starts to move over the state and the harbour empties with strong outgoing tides. That will be an opportunity we try to take maximum advantage of,” Mr Deka said.

“We have the marine conservation experts on the scene and we have the resources to do the job.

“It is not a task for the uninitiated. We need people who have had the training. These are big animals and it’s on the upper end of complexity.

“However, if we find a need for additional volunteers, we will do a call out.”

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

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