



23 September 2020

Department of Primary Industries, Parks, Water and Environment

Additional 200 whales stranded at Macquarie Harbour

Aerial surveying has detected an additional group of about 200 whales stranded further south in Macquarie Harbour on Tasmania's west coast.

The additional whales were found seven to ten kilometres deeper into the harbour and are believed to be part of the same mass stranding event at Strahan.

This brings the total number of whales for the mass stranding to more than 450.

Incident Controller and Parks and Wildlife Service (PWS) regional manager Nic Deka said a formal assessment will be undertaken this morning.

"From the air most of the additional whales detected appear to be dead, but a boat has headed over there this morning to do an assessment from the water," Mr Deka said.

"We believe the group has been detected now for a range of reasons- one is that they are seven to ten kilometres away so it's a good distance from where we have been working and not necessarily a place that is obvious for a stranding. "

"We certainly searched up and down the coast. In that part of the harbour the water is a very dark tannin colour so we think potentially they stranded, washed back into the water and then have been washed back into the bay, so that made it more difficult for them to be detected earlier in the piece."

Mr Deka said rescue teams will be doing a more extensive search, however their plan remains the same for today.

"We will still be crunching the data on the infrared survey this morning. We are expecting some accurate mapping a bit later today," Mr Deka said.

"We have picked up where we left off yesterday so we are applying the same strategy. We have become more efficient with that since we have gone along. Our focus is on

those animals that are still alive. The mortality has increased, but there are a significant number that are alive so we will continue to work with those.”

Marine and Conservation Program wildlife biologist Dr Kris Carlyon said this stranding event has been the biggest in Tasmania.

“Globally there has been some much bigger events than this, twice the size and over for example in New Zealand. In Tasmania, this is the biggest we have recorded.

“There is little we can do to prevent this occurring in the future.”

Dr Carlyon said the focus remains on the live animals today.

“We are all optimistic of getting more off today, particularly at Fraser Flats where we have resourcing at the moment and we are closer to the heads,” Dr Carlyon said.

“I think we have a really good chance of getting more off the sandbar and out through the gates. We are still very hopeful.”

Mr Deka said the response is also considering the best options for disposal of deceased whales going forward.

“We have some people arriving today to do an assessment and they are going to assist us with working out the best option for disposal of the whales. We are also working with EPA,” Mr Deka said.

“We have a couple of options that we are considering, but we need to consider all aspects before we settle on a decision. We can’t leave the whales in the harbour as they will present a range of issues. We are committed to retrieving and disposing but our key priority is to remain focussed on the rescue effort.”

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

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