

# Scientists explain mass whale strandings

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Volatile weather, unfamiliar territory and strong social support are all causes of the centuries-old mystery of mass whale beachings, scientists say.

The new theory offered by researchers at the University of Western Australia in Perth also says the combination of slightly sloping, sandy beaches as well could contribute to a stranding, the Age reported Monday.

Physics researcher Shane Chambers said gently inclining beaches are too flat for the whales to navigate with their acoustic signals.

"What this basically means is the whales can't 'see' the shoreline -- they send out signals but nothing returns," he said. "By the time they've detected the shore, they're already stranded."

Microbubbles can remain in the water days after they are caused by stormy weather, also disrupting acoustic signals, he said.

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