

Rare whales die beached in South Florida

March 30 2006

Three rare, deep-dwelling whales that became beached Wednesday on Florida's South Hutchinson Island reportedly have been euthanized.

Workers spent more than an hour trying to keep the melon-headed whales still in the crashing surf on the barrier island, east of Stuart, Fla., the Palm Beach (Fla.) Post reported Thursday.

The animals were euthanized after scientists decided they were too sick to be saved. The three animals were thin and obviously malnourished, the newspaper said.

Dr. Greg Bossart, director of marine mammal research and conservation at Florida's Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institution, said the three whales most likely were part of the same pod as a dead melon-headed whale that washed ashore Wednesday at Vero Beach.

Bossart, a veterinarian and pathologist says scientists have no idea why the beachings occur.

Although strandings have been reported for centuries, Bossart told the Palm Beach Post he fears environmental degradation could be making the events more common.

"And the more we see these rare species coming ashore, the more I think it points to that," he said.

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Citation: Rare whales die beached in South Florida (2006, March 30) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2006-03-rare-whales-die-beached-south.html>

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