

More than 130 dolphins beach in Japan

April 10 2015, by Toshifumi Kitamura



Children look at melon-headed whales beached on the shore of Hokota city, northeast of Tokyo on April 10, 2015

More than 130 melon-headed whales, a member of the dolphin family usually found in the deep ocean, beached in Japan on Friday, sparking frantic efforts by locals and coastguards to save them.

Rescuers were battling to stop the creatures' skin from drying out as they lay on a beach about 100 kilometres (60 miles) northeast of Tokyo,

while some were being carried in slings back towards the ocean.

Television footage showed several animals from the large pod had been badly cut, with many having deep gashes on their skin.

An AFP journalist at the scene said that despite efforts to get the dolphins into the water, some were being pushed back onto the beach by the tide soon after they had been released.

A number of the creatures had died, he said, and were being buried.

"We see one or two [whales](#) washing ashore a year, but this may be the first time to find over 100 of them on a beach," a coastguard official told AFP.

The pod was stretched out along a roughly 10-kilometre-long stretch of beach in Hokota, Ibaraki, where they had been found by locals early Friday morning.

"They are alive. I feel sorry for them," a man told public broadcaster NHK, as others were seen ferrying buckets of seawater to the stranded animals and pouring it over them.

Several animals could be seen writhing in a futile effort to move themselves on the sand, although as the morning progressed they were clearly becoming weaker.



Residents attempt to save melon-headed whales beached on the shore of Hokota city, northeast of Tokyo on April 10, 2015

Melon-headed whales, also known as electra dolphins, are relatively common in Japanese waters and can grow to be two- to three- meters (six- to nine-feet) long.

In 2011, about 50 melon-headed whales beached themselves in a similar area.

Despite international opprobrium, Japan hunts minke and [pilot whales](#) off its own coast, and has for many years also pursued the mammals in the Antarctic Ocean using a scientific exemption to the international moratorium on whaling.

It has never made any secret of the fact that meat from the animals is

also consumed.



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However, a UN court ruled last year that its hunt was a commercial activity masquerading as research, and ordered it be halted.

Tokyo, which insists whaling is a tradition and labels environmental campaigners as "cultural imperialists", has vowed to restart a redesigned southern ocean whaling programme, possibly later this year.

Japan also defies international opinion with the slaughter of hundreds of dolphins in a bay near the southern whaling town of Taiji.

The killing was brought to worldwide attention with the Oscar-winning

documentary "The Cove".

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