

More than 130 pilot whales die in mass Australia beaching

March 23 2018

Pilot whale

One of the largest members of the dolphin family

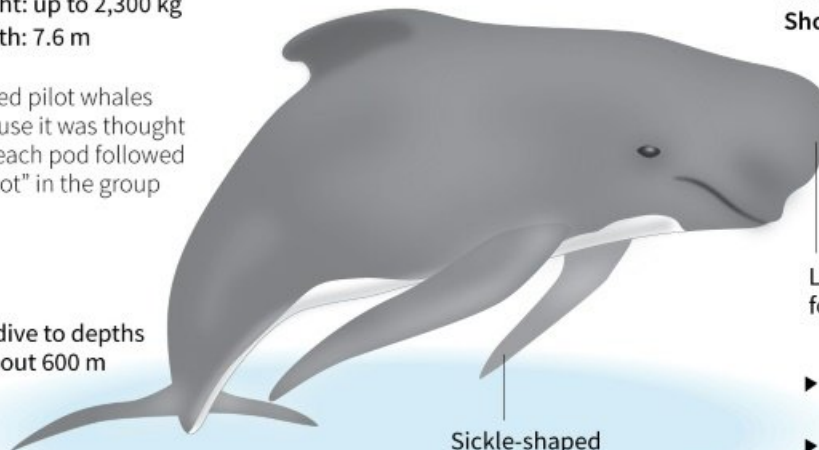
Weight: up to 2,300 kg

Length: 7.6 m

Named pilot whales because it was thought that each pod followed a "pilot" in the group

Can dive to depths of about 600 m

- ▶ One of the whale species most often involved in mass strandings



Sickle-shaped flippers

Two types:

Long finned: *Globicephala melas*

Short finned: *Globicephala macrorhynchus*

Differ slightly in

- size
- tooth count
- flipper length
- skull formation

Large bulbous forehead

- ▶ Commonly seen in tight, sociable pods
- ▶ Each pod has between 20-100 whales

Source: CSM/NOAA Fisheries/IUCN/NZ Department of Conservation

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Factfile on pilot whales.

At least 135 short-finned pilot whales died Friday after a mass beaching in Australia as rescuers worked to herd those still alive back out to sea.

The stranding of 150 [whales](#) at Hamelin Bay, some 315 kilometres (195

miles) south of Perth, was spotted by a commercial fisherman at daybreak, with fears the carcasses will attract sharks.

Western Australia state's Parks and Wildlife Service said its staff were on site and assessing the health and well-being of the 15 still alive.

"Most of the whales beached themselves on dry land overnight and have not survived," said incident controller Jeremy Chick who added they they were awaiting support and equipment to help in a rescue attempt.

"The strength of the animals and the windy and possibly wet weather conditions will affect when and where we attempt to move them out to sea.

"The main objectives are to ensure the safety of staff and volunteers as well as the whales' greatest chance of survival."

Hamelin beach, named after French explorer Jacques Felix Emmanuel Hamelin who sailed through the area in about 1801, was closed with a shark alert issued for the area.

Short-finned pilot whales inhabit tropical and [subtropical waters](#) and are often seen in the hundreds and when they beach, it is usually en masse.

The reason why mass strandings occur is still unknown.

There are many theories including the shape of the coastline being a contributing factor, whales responding to distress calls from other whales, or groups following a leader into shore.

The largest mass stranding in Australia's west was at Dunsborough in 1996 when 320 long-finned pilot whales came ashore. All but 20 survived.

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