

Dutch probe mystery porpoise deaths

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Dutch scientists were on Wednesday probing the mysterious deaths of dozens of harbour porpoises whose carcasses have been washing up on the country's northern beaches since last week.

Around 100 dead [harbour](#) porpoises have so far been spotted in the Wadden Islands, the scenic archipelago in the North Sea just off the Dutch coastline, animal welfare activists said.

"Since last Thursday we have seen a huge number of dead stranded harbour porpoises," said Annemarie van den Berg, director of SOS Dolphin, the foundation tasked with saving the mammals in the Netherlands.

They were still being found even on Wednesday, she told AFP, "although numbers seem to be slowing down".

Although it is not uncommon for porpoises to wash up on Dutch beaches, "the numbers are so much higher than normal, setting off alarm bells," Van den Berg said.

The [animals](#) were all in the same state of decomposition "making us think that all of these animals must have died in the same area".

Around two dozen of the animals have been sent to the veterinary department at Utrecht University, where at least one was examined on Wednesday.

"The actual reason for the mass stranding remains a mystery," said Lonneke IJsseldijk, a [marine biologist](#) who did the initial autopsy.

But Dutch media reports speculated the mammals could have been killed after being disturbed by off-shore wind farm building or a naval exercise that started in the sea around the Wadden Islands earlier last week.

"It's possible that something happened where these animals were that killed them," IJsseldijk said in a statement. "It could also be from a disease."

She hoped to have more clarity later in the week, she added.

Her probe would also include a test for the deadly morbillivirus, blamed for mass deaths in dolphins.

Yearly between 200 and 900 dead harbour porpoises—one of the most abundant cetaceans in the northern Atlantic region—are found on Dutch beaches, Van den Berg said.

"But we think there is something strange happening in the Wadden Sea. Why it happened though is still very much speculation," she said.

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