

Around 200 stranded whales die in pounding surf in Australia

September 22 2022



In this image made from a video, a rescuer pours water on one of stranded whales on Ocean Beach, near Strahan, Australia Wednesday, Sept. 21, 2022. More than 200 whales have been stranded on Tasmania's west coast, just days after 14 sperm whales were found beached on an island off the southeastern coast. Credit: Australian Broadcasting Corporation via AP

A day after 230 whales were found stranded on the wild and remote west coast of Australia's island state of Tasmania, only 35 were still alive despite rescue efforts that were to continue Thursday.

Half the pod of pilot whales stranded in Macquarie Harbour were presumed to still be alive on Wednesday, the Department of Natural Resources and Environment Tasmania said.

But pounding surf took a toll overnight, Tasmania Parks and Wildlife Service manager Brendon Clark said.

"We've triaged the animals yesterday as part of the preliminary assessment and we've identified those animals that had best chance of survival of the approximately 230 that stranded. Today's focus will be on rescue and release operations," Clark told reporters at nearby Strahan.

"We've got approximately 35 surviving animals out on the beach ... and the primary focus this morning will be on the rescue and release of those animals," Clark added.

The whales beached two years to the day after the largest mass-stranding in Australia's history was discovered in the same harbor.

About 470 long-finned pilot whales were found on Sept. 21, 2020, stuck on sandbars. After a weeklong effort, 111 of those whales were rescued but the rest died.

The entrance to the harbor is a notoriously shallow and dangerous channel known as Hell's Gate.



In this image made from a video, a rescuer pours water on one of stranded whales on Ocean Beach, near Strahan, Australia Wednesday, Sept. 21, 2022. More than 200 whales have been stranded on Tasmania's west coast, just days after 14 sperm whales were found beached on an island off the southeastern coast. Credit: Australian Broadcasting Corporation via AP

Local salmon farmer Linton Kringle helped in the 2020 rescue effort and said the latest challenge would be more difficult.

"Last time they were actually in the harbor and it's quite calm and we could, sort of, deal with them in there and we could get the boats up to them," Kringle said.

"But just on the beach, you just can't get a boat in there—it's too

shallow, way too rough. My thoughts would be try to get them onto a vehicle if we can't swim them out," Kringle added.

Vanessa Pirotta, a wildlife scientist specializing in marine mammals, said it was too early to explain why the stranding had occurred.

"The fact that we've seen similar species, the same time, in the same location, reoccurring in terms of stranding at that same spot might provide some sort of indication that there might be something environmental here," Pirotta said.



This photo released by Department of Natural Resources and Environment Tasmania, shows whales stranded on Ocean Beach at Macquarie Harbour on the west coast of Tasmania of Australia, Wednesday, Sept. 21, 2022. Credit: Department of Natural Resources and Environment Tasmania via AP



This image made from a video, shows the stranded whales on Ocean Beach, near Strahan, Australia Wednesday, Sept. 21, 2022. More than 200 whales have been stranded on Tasmania's west coast, just days after 14 sperm whales were found beached on an island off the southeastern coast. Credit: Australian Broadcasting Corporation via AP



This photo provided by Huon Aquaculture, shows whales stranded at Macquarie Harbour in Strahan, Tasmania, Australia Wednesday, Sept. 21, 2022. About 230 whales have been stranded on Tasmania's west coast, just days after 14 sperm whales were found beached on an island off the southeastern coast. Credit: Andrew Breen/Huon Aquaculture via AP



This photo provided by Huon Aquaculture, shows whales stranded at Macquarie Harbour in Strahan, Tasmania, Australia Wednesday, Sept. 21, 2022. About 230 whales have been stranded on Tasmania's west coast, just days after 14 sperm whales were found beached on an island off the southeastern coast. Credit: Andrew Breen/Huon Aquaculture via AP



This photo provided by Huon Aquaculture, shows whales stranded at Macquarie Harbour in Strahan, Tasmania, Australia Wednesday, Sept. 21, 2022. About 230 whales have been stranded on Tasmania's west coast, just days after 14 sperm whales were found beached on an island off the southeastern coast. Credit: Andrew Breen/Huon Aquaculture via AP



This photo provided by Huon Aquaculture, shows whales stranded at Macquarie Harbour in Strahan, Tasmania, Australia Wednesday, Sept. 21, 2022. About 230 whales have been stranded on Tasmania's west coast, just days after 14 sperm whales were found beached on an island off the southeastern coast. Credit: Linton Kringle/Huon Aquaculture via AP



This photo provided by Huon Aquaculture, shows whales stranded at Macquarie Harbour in Strahan, Tasmania, Australia Wednesday, Sept. 21, 2022. About 230 whales have been stranded on Tasmania's west coast, just days after 14 sperm whales were found beached on an island off the southeastern coast. Credit: Andrew Breen/Huon Aquaculture via AP

David Midson, general manager of the West Coast Council municipality, urged people to stay clear.

"Whales are a [protected species](#), even once deceased, and it is an offense to interfere with a carcass," the environment department said.

Fourteen sperm whales were discovered Monday afternoon on King Island, part of the state of Tasmania in the Bass Strait between Melbourne and Tasmania's northern coast.

Griffith University marine scientist Olaf Meynecke said it's unusual for sperm whales to wash ashore. He said that [warmer temperatures](#) could also be changing the [ocean currents](#) and moving the [whales'](#) traditional food.

"They will be going to different areas and searching for different food sources," Meynecke said. "When they do this, they are not in the best physical condition because they might be starving so this can lead them to take more risks and maybe go closer to shore."

The pilot whale is notorious for stranding in mass numbers, for reasons that are not entirely understood.

© 2022 The Associated Press. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten or redistributed without permission.

Citation: Around 200 stranded whales die in pounding surf in Australia (2022, September 22) retrieved 26 June 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2022-09-stranded-whales-die-pounding-surf.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.