

Juvenile sperm whale euthanized after stranding on North Carolina beach

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A mother sperm whale and her calf off the coast of Mauritius. The calf has remoras attached to its body. Credit: Gabriel Barathieu/Wikipedia/CC BY-SA 2.0

A juvenile sperm whale that appeared to be in poor health was euthanized Wednesday after stranding on a North Carolina beach.

The Virginian-Pilot newspaper [reported](#) the whale was put down near

Jennette's Pier in the Outer Banks town of Nags Head.

The whale was spotted in the surf about 7:30 a.m., prompting members of the OBX Marine Mammal Stranding Network to respond. They observed the mammal for a few hours until the tide dropped.

The North Carolina Aquarium on Roanoke Island said in a statement that euthanasia was the best course of action because rehabilitation for many large whale species is difficult or impossible.

"Unfortunately, these single marine [mammal](#) strandings indicate that the animal's health is rapidly declining," the [aquarium](#) stated.

The aquarium said experts will perform a thorough examination of the whale's body to learn more about it and possibly determine the cause of its stranding.

Sperm whales are the biggest species of whale with teeth and can grow to 60 feet (18 meters) long. They are listed as endangered and federally protected. They were nearly decimated by the whaling industry in the 19th and 20th centuries because of the prized waxy substance found in their heads, spermaceti, that was used in oil lamps, lubricants and candles.

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