

Over 100 pilot whales beached on western Australian coast have been rescued, researcher says

April 25 2024, by ROD McGUIRK



This image supplied by Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions, shows a pod of pilot whales stranded on a beach at Toby's Inlet in Western Australia, Thursday, April 25, 2024. Dozens of pilot whales have beached on the western Australian coast and wildlife authorities were attempting to rescue them, a state government said on Thursday. Credit: Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions via AP

More than 100 long-finned pilot whales that beached on the western Australian coast Thursday have returned to sea, while 31 died on the shore, a whale researcher said.

Researcher Ian Wiese joined hundreds of volunteers who helped rescue the whales at Toby's Inlet near the tourist town of Dunsborough.

"There were well over 200 along the beach here and just nearby and there's 31, I think, deceased but the rest got away, which is an amazing story," Wiese told Australian Broadcasting Corp.

"When I first arrived, there was, I think, 160 in the water—almost out of the water—and there were a couple of hundred people who were with the whales, they were trying to comfort them and make sure that their heads were out of the water so they could breathe. And then after an hour or so, all of a sudden the ones that were in the water that were still alive left and went out to sea," Wiese said.

"They may well decide to come back to shore somewhere on another beach nearby or something—that often happens, but we're hopeful that they won't," Wiese added.

The Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions has yet to confirm the rescues.

A team of wildlife officers, [marine scientists](#) and veterinarians had earlier reached the scene and reported 26 dead among up to 160 stranded.

At that time, an additional 20 whales were in a pod about 1.5 kilometers (almost a mile) offshore and 110 whales formed a pod closer to the

beach, the department said.

Regional wildlife officer Pia Courtis said the pod of 110 whales was "sticking together offshore" and was likely to come toward the beach.

"Unfortunately the outcome for our pilot whales once they strand on the [beach](#) is generally not good. We have high numbers of animals that end up dying," Courtis said.

In July, almost 100 long-finned pilot whales died or were euthanized after a two-day rescue attempt in a mass stranding on Cheynes Beach near the former whaling station of Albany, 355 kilometers (220 miles) southeast of Dunsborough.

Dunsborough is 285 kilometers (177 miles) by road south of Perth, Western Australia state's capital and largest city.

Based on previous strandings, including the 2023 Cheynes Beach event, euthanizing the beached whales is usually the most humane outcome, the department said in a statement.

"We always hope for the best outcome," the statement said.

Wiese said Thursday was the third mass stranding he had responded to and the result was by far the best.

"It's been a very good story today because normally with these sorts of strandings, you wind up with a 100 whales beaching and five or six being saved," Wiese said.

Courtis said the whales were believed to have become stranded early Thursday.

The dead whales were dragged from the water so that their carcasses didn't attract sharks.

Dunsborough was the scene of a [mass](#) stranding of 320 long-finned pilot whales in 1996. Only 20 died on that occasion, with rescuers returning the rest to sea.

Scientists don't know what causes whales to strand, although it appears their location systems can be confused by gently sloping, sandy beaches.

Theories include that they are avoiding predators such as [killer whales](#), or following a sick leader ashore. Human-made undersea noise could also interfere with their navigation.

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