

A celebrity 'Russian spy' whale spotted with harness found dead in Norwegian waters

September 2 2024, by Jari Tanner



In this photo taken in April 2019 a beluga whale found in Arctic Norway is fed.
Credit: Jorgen Ree Wiig, Norwegian Directorate of Fisheries via AP

A white beluga whale named "Hvaldimir," first spotted in Norway not far from Russian waters with a harness that ignited rumors he may be a Moscow spy, has been found dead.

The Norwegian public broadcaster NRK reported that the whale carcass

was found floating at the Risavika Bay in southern Norway Saturday by a father and son who were fishing.

The [beluga](#), named by combining the Norwegian word for whale—hval—and Russian President Putin's first name Vladimir, was lifted out of the water with a crane and taken to a nearby harbor where experts will examine it.

"Unfortunately, we found Hvaldimir floating in the sea. He has passed away but it's not immediately clear what the cause of death is," marine biologist Sebastian Strand told NRK, adding that no major external injuries were visible on the animal.

Strand, who has monitored Hvaldimir's adventures for the past three years on behalf of the Norway-based Marine Mind non-profit organization, said he was deeply affected by the whale's sudden death.

"It's absolutely horrible," Strand said. "He was apparently in good condition as of (Friday). So we just have to figure out what might have happened here."

The 4.2-meter (14-foot) long and 1,225-kilogram (2,700-pound) whale was first spotted by fishermen near the northern island of Ingøya, not far from the Arctic city of Hammerfest, in April 2019 wearing a harness and what appeared to be a mount for a small camera and a buckle marked with text "Equipment St. Petersburg".



In this photo taken in April 2019 a beluga whale found in Arctic Norway swims next to a vessel. Credit: Jorgen Ree Wiig, Norwegian Directorate of Fisheries via AP

That sparked [allegations](#) that the beluga was "a spy whale." Experts said the Russian navy is known to have trained whales for military purposes.

Over the years, the beluga was seen in several Norwegian coastal towns and it quickly became clear that he was very tame and enjoyed playing with people, NRK said.

NGO Marine Mind said on its site that Hvaldimir was very interested in people and responded to hand signals.

"Based on these observations, it appeared as if Hvaldimir arrived in Norway by crossing over from Russian waters, where it is presumed he was held in captivity," it said.

Norwegian media have speculated whether Hvaldimir could have been used as "a therapy whale" of some sort in Russia.

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Citation: A celebrity 'Russian spy' whale spotted with harness found dead in Norwegian waters (2024, September 2) retrieved 2 September 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2024-09-celebrity-russian-spy-whale-harness.html>

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