

Last whale dies in mass Australian beaching

November 17 2011



Officials from Australia's Parks and Wildlife Service tagging deceased sperm whales on Ocean Beach in Tasmania on November 14, 2011. The last of a large pod of sperm and minke whales stranded on the beach has died despite extensive efforts to return it to the ocean.

The last of a huge pod of sperm and minke whales washed onto a southern Australian beach and nearby sandbank has died despite an extensive operation to set it free, officials said.

The 12-metre-long sperm whale died as Parks and [Wildlife officials](#) attempted to get it to the entrance of Macquarie Harbour, in southern Tasmania, where it got stuck on a sandbank in a mass beaching of whales on Saturday.

"We did everything possible to save this whale," said rescue coordinator Chris Arthur.

"We were fortunate in that we were able to assist two whales to return to the [open ocean](#) on Sunday, but we were unable to save the sperm whales that remained in the harbour," he added.

Twenty-two sperm whales died after washing onto nearby Ocean Beach, with two [minke whales](#) and another sperm whale perishing inside the harbour before this last death, which took the final toll to 26.

Arthur said the whales on the beach would be left to break down on the sand, while those inside the harbour would be "deflated" so they could decompose underwater.

"We learn from every stranding and every stranding prepares us better for the next one," he added.

[Bad weather](#) had forced the rescue operation to be called off on Tuesday.

Seven [sperm whales](#) were saved after a similar stranding in the harbour in 2007 and rescuers had been confident of freeing the surviving mammal in this latest incident after managing to refloat and push two whales back out to sea over the weekend.

Whale beachings are relatively common in Australia and they usually occur in the summer months, particularly around Tasmania, but scientists do not know why they happen.

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