

Incidental entrapments and entanglements of cetaceans and leatherback sea turtles and strandings and harassments reported to the Whale Release and Strandings Group in Newfoundland and Labrador and a summary of the Whale Release and Strandings Program during 2017

A Report to the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, Canada –  
Newfoundland and Labrador Region

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January 2018

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## **Acknowledgements**

Thanks to Glen Temple and Malte Nielsen for their assistance with the disentanglement team during 2017.

Thanks to Julie Diamond of DFO for coordinating the program in 2017

Thanks to Lenny and Lisa Gear and to the many residents of Bell Island who assisted in capturing and transporting the white beak dolphins over icy rocks and beach to the marina at Lance Cove and for their help monitoring the animals. It was quite the learning and educational experience to have these “our dolphins” in their own little aquarium for 10 days in early April.

Thanks to Alex Heusch for his assistance with the Bell Island dolphins and help shepherding them out of the marina. It was a trying week for members of the WRS being ice bound on Bell Island and trying to figure out what and how to deal with the animals these 10 days.

Thanks to the Stephenville detachment for their assistance in transporting members of the WRS to and in locating and assisting in the release of the Stephenville minke whale on 31<sup>st</sup> May – 4<sup>th</sup> June.

Thanks to Trevor Dinn and Joanne Pilgrim for assistance with the Witless Bay whale on 22<sup>nd</sup> July.

Thanks to the Navigator magazine for running reduced fee ads advertising of the toll-free number to fishers with details of whom to call when you have or see a marine animal entrapped or stranded.

The Canadian Coast Guard Marine Traffic and Light Station Centers diligently report entrapped and stranded marine animals and sightings regularly to the hot line. Thanks for the service. Thank you to the Town of Portugal Cove-St. Philip’s. To the fishers of this Region who have continued to support this program throughout its long history, the success of our work releasing entrapped animals would not be possible without your continued support and participation.

## **Whale Release and Strandings Group**

The Whale Release and Strandings Group (Tangly Whales, Inc.) is a non-profit environmental organization responsible for the disentanglement and strandings of marine animals in Newfoundland and Labrador since 2000 and incorporated in July 2002. The organization has a board of directors.

The Mission statement for the Whale Release and Strandings Group is:

- To conserve biodiversity
- To release whales from fishing gear
- To attempt to save fishing gear to the extent possible during a disentanglement
- To coordinate strandings on marine animals
- To conduct research work on marine animals
- To conduct all other work on marine animals as seen fit.

From 1978 through 2017 assistance has been offered to fishers in the Newfoundland Region who incidentally have large whales, leatherback sea turtles and basking sharks entangled in their fishing gear and for live stranded marine animals. This service has been provided with cooperation from the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, Canada.

### **Summary reports**

During this time-period (1978-2017) information from fishers regarding whale interactions has been recorded and monitored, included are the incidences of entrapments, strandings and sightings of leatherback sea turtles, sharks and 20 different species of cetaceans have that been recorded in continuous reports and summaries from 1978 - 2017.

This report represents the forty (40) of such reports in a similar format produced by the Whale Research Group and the Whale Release and Strandings Group. The purpose of these reports is to summarize yearly activities of important events such as entrapments/entanglements/strandings of animals under study and research and educational studies undertaken. These reports are catalogued at the Memorial University Library and Fisheries and Oceans Canada and with the Whale Release and Strandings Group. One of the benefits of these reports is quick access to changes in entrapments and entanglements in this region related to changes in fishing gear and distributions of large marine animals as well as the various strandings, ice-entrapments and strandings and sightings of rare animals and animals under study.

### **Introduction**

The program, which has been run by the Whale Release and Strandings Group from 2001-2017, plus providing during 2000 a one-year mentorship with the Canadian Coast Guard, uses methods of which the most important are working stakeholders for disentangling large whales from fishing gear, which were pioneered by Dr. Jon Lien (Lien 1980) and with a few modifications remain those of choice today.

The disentanglement program in use today was designed and developed for the highly rural nature of over 800 fishing communities spread over the 17,000 km coastline of Newfoundland and Labrador. The disentanglement assistance program has benefited fishers, whales, leatherback sea turtles and the people of Canada. It provides assistance to often financially stretched fishers, saving them thousands of dollars in what would be lost fishing gear and downtime if they did not have skilled support in releasing a large whale entrapped in their gear. It releases large and often endangered whales, leatherback sea turtles and basking shark from fishing gear and allows them to continue their life processes. We have the largest feeding population of humpbacks in the northwest Atlantic, with about 5,000 individuals visiting NL waters during spring, summer and fall. These whales are the basis for a large tourism industry in the region.

The program also responds to all reported live and dead cetaceans and sea turtles, as well as pack ice entrapments.

The purpose of the assistance is: (1) to assist fishers in releasing whales from fishing gear, thus decreasing downtime and damage to fishing gear. The length of time a large marine animal is entrapped in fishing gear is directly correlated to greater gear damage and loss of income due to the gear not fishing properly or at all (Lien 1983), (2) to release entrapped marine animals as quickly and safely as possible to allow them to continue their life processes, such as feeding, migrating, mating, rearing its young, (3) to communicate with fishers and communities about marine animals, including species at risk, habitat protection, and (4) to add to the scientific knowledge of cetaceans, leatherback sea turtles and sharks that inhabit Newfoundland and Labrador waters.

Fish harvesters have come to realize that calling a government sponsored program offers them a faster and more efficient alternative to dealing with a gear-entrapped animal than attempting a release on their own. Fishers and untrained persons who take whales out of gear often leave large amounts of fishing gear on the animal perhaps because they do not or cannot look underwater to see all the gear that is on the entrapped animal. Whales caught in crab gear that are cut loose by fishers and other untrained persons are often released with vast amounts of rope and pots still attached (Ledwell and Huntington 2001, 2002, 2006). This provides more opportunity for whale re-entrapment and more gear damage and allows the animal to move from the vicinity in which it was entrapped and be difficult to relocate, and/or difficult to catch to remove the gear still on it. A timely response by experienced personnel results in the removal of most if not all gear from the animals, less gear damage and fishing downtime, particularly important to the economically marginalized inshore fishers.

From 1979 to 2017 one thousand and eighty-eight (1088) humpback whales (*Megaptera novaeangliae*), one hundred and sixty-two (162) minke whales (*Balaenoptera acutorostrata*), fourteen (14) fin whales (*Balaenoptera physalus*), two right whales (*Eubalaena glacialis*), one bowhead whale (*Balaena mysticetus*) and eighty-seven (87) unknown large whales were reported entrapped or entangled in fishing gear in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Eighty-two (82) leatherback turtles (*Dermochelys coriacea*) have been reported entangled in fishing gear in this region with a mortality of 25%. There have been fourteen (14) reported leatherback turtle strandings with 10 of those being dead animals reported in the region. Two (2) live leatherbacks that had stranded were rescued and returned to sea by members of the WRS group. A loggerhead turtle (*Caretta caretta*) was collected cold stunned in Hermitage harbour and returned to ocean from the Harbour Breton harbour after it was rewarmed (Ledwell and Huntington 2007).

Entrapments, strandings and sightings of other cetaceans either unusual to the area or under study or animals free swimming but in poor health and marine animals such as sea turtles, sharks, walrus have also been documented (Lien 1994; Ledwell and Huntington 2000-2012; Ledwell, Huntington and Sacrey 2013-2015).

From 1992 to 2000 funding for a marine animal release program was varied and at times non-existent.

The most common types of fishing gear associated with entanglements in this region currently includes gillnets (cod, herring, mackerel, lumpfish, flounder, monk, skate and turbot) snow crab pots, whelk pots, toad crab pots, box traps (caplin, cod, herring, mackerel and squid), unspecified and illegal gillnets, ropes/buoys and moorings. In other words, most types of fishing gear have the potential to incidentally catch whales and they do. In recent years fishing effort in Newfoundland and Labrador has shifted offshore. This shift in gear has led to an increase in the number of offshore entrapments reported and offshore entanglements have primarily involved snow crab and whelk pot gear.

## **Methods**

Whale, leatherback sea turtle and basking shark entanglements in fishing gear and strandings and sightings of marine animals were reported to the Whale Release and Strandings Program in 2017 by calling an advertised toll-free number (1-888-895-3003) which can be accessed 24 hours a day seven-days a week year around. A trained release team responds by providing suitable, safe advice or sending expert personnel to the site for needed assistance. The trained crew is equipped and ready to deploy immediately with an inflatable zodiac and necessary specialized tools for disentanglement of whales, leatherback sea turtles and basking sharks. The objective of each disentanglement is the safe, clean release of the whale or other marine animals from the fishing gear and minimal or no damage to the fishing gear involved in the entanglement. The disentanglement crew also responded to whale and leatherback sea turtle strandings. Calls concerning entanglements, strandings and dead floating animals were also forwarded to the group by DFO Conservation Officers, Coast Guard Centers, fishers, Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), Crime Stoppers and the general public. Fisheries and Oceans Canada funded the program in 2017. Additional funding was provided through Mountain Equipment Co-op (MEC), Canadian Wildlife Federation (CWF), Habitat Stewardship Program (HSP) Environment Canada, the Community Sector Council NL Student Work and Services Program (SWASP), and the Town of Portugal Cove-St. Philip's.

## **Results and Discussion**

Results of the Entrapment Assistance Program from previous years have been summarized in annual reports to Fisheries and Oceans and the Newfoundland and Labrador Department of Fisheries (Lien 1980; Lien and Aldrich 1982; Lien et al. 1982; 1983; 1984; 1985; 1986; 1987; 1988; 1989; Lien 1990; 1991; 1992; 1993; 1994; 1995; 1996; Ledwell, Huntington and Lien 2000; Ledwell and Huntington 2001; 2002; 2003; 2004; 2005; 2006; 2007; 2008; 2009; Ledwell, Huntington and Kelly 2010; Ledwell and Huntington 2011; 2012; Ledwell, Huntington and Sacrey 2013; 2014; 2015. Ledwell and Huntington 2016; 2017.

### **Humpback Whales**

Twenty-eight (28) humpback whales were reported to the Whale Release and Strandings Group entrapped/entangled in various fishing gears during 2017 (Table 1). Two (2) whales were reported dead. One in Newtown Bonavista Bay had been dead for at least a month but there was evidence of deep rope cuts to the peduncle area. The second dead humpback was discovered dead in a cod trap off of Marticotte Island Placentia Bay

#### **Week of 1<sup>st</sup> July – 1<sup>st</sup> entrapment**

A report came in from Sea Watch – The Fisheries Observer program of a dangerous situation involving a large humpback caught in snow crab gear in the Carson Canyon on the nose of the Grand Banks. W. Ledwell contacted the captain of the FV Cindy Michelle, a 65 footer. The humpback was caught through the mouth and around the tail stock in one end of a 100 pot set. The animal was at first calm as the crew pulled in alongside using the crab pot hauler. While working to cut the rope from the whale it became enraged “shaking the vessel with rope going everywhere and one of the crew became ensnared around his leg. The whale pulled him to the rail and fortunately his book came loose, saving him from going overboard”. The captain was also thrown across the deck as the rope hooked behind his legs pulling him off balance and he landed hard on a manhole cover. They cut the rope from the hauler and went to the other end of the gear and when they hauled up to the whale they cut the rope when close to it. The captain said there was no gear left on the whale.

#### **Week of 1<sup>st</sup> July - 2<sup>nd</sup> Entrapment**

The next day in the same set of crab gear they had a second humpback entrapped. The whale was again caught in the haul up rope and the crew cut it free. The Captain said it had no gear left on it when they cut it out. He also said that these were the only two large whales seen during the trip. This is possible as it is often foggy on the banks and fishers are usually not looking to spot whales

#### **4<sup>th</sup> - 22<sup>nd</sup> July**

A large fast-moving humpback was released from a herring net and 200 metres of trailing rope in Witless Bay harbour by members of the WRS. This is the same whale from the 4<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> of July that was moving around the Southern Shore and seen repeated times but each time we searched for the animal it had moved on. The whale became aggressive during the disentanglement towing the disentanglement zodiac for approximately a mile before we released the gear from it. The animal still had about 6 metres of the head rope

with a small red Styrofoam float attached and with the rope through the mouth on the left side.

### **22<sup>nd</sup> July**

Fishers cut the standing rope of the whale anchored in herring nets. The whale towed the gear together with a large cod trap anchor before becoming anchored again. They thought the whale may drown cut away the anchor rope allowing the animal to swim away entangled and towing the two herring nets.

### **28 July**

A large humpback was released gear free from the doorways of a caplin trap on the morning of the 28<sup>th</sup>. The animal was reported entrapped on the evening of the 27<sup>th</sup> and members of the WRS arrived early morning of the 28<sup>th</sup>. The whale was entangled through the mouth, around right pectoral fin and heavily entangled around the tail and peduncle. There was also a piece of driftwood ensnarled in the entangled ropes and twine. The animal was fairly aggressive, and it took the team 4 hours to clear it completely of gear. The caplin trap was ruined from both the whale and the cutting to clean up the whale.

### **1 August**

A small female humpback was discovered dead in the leader of a cod grow out trap off Marticotte Island in Placentia Bay. The captain requested our team's assistance in removing the whale since the technique we use does little damage to the already damaged trap. When we arrived on the morning of the 2<sup>nd</sup> after leaving St. Philips at 0500 the crew had cut the tail off the animal and peeled it back out of the gear and towed it ashore to an isolated cove.

### **4 August**

The Whale Release and Strandings Group received 3 calls of a possible entangled humpback off Harcourt Trinity Bay on the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> August. We had recreational fishers and the local DFO detachment check the area and all said there was a whale seen very infrequently but no gear was seen, and the animal was believed not to be entangled. On the morning of the 4<sup>th</sup> after another call WRS decided to check the area and discovered there was an entrapped whale with mobility of 300-400 metres, surfacing very infrequently. The whale was bridled through the mouth and around its right pectoral fin. The disentanglement took approximately 3 hours before we cleaned the animal of all gear. The whale had been entrapped in snow crab gear that had been reported missing due to shifting pack ice earlier that spring and the whale had picked it up as derelict gear.

### **5<sup>th</sup> August**

The morning of the 5<sup>th</sup> August the Whale Release and Strandings Group received a call that a humpback whale was towing 2 large red poly buoys off Kelly's Island Conception Bay. Luckily, we live on this bay and put out of our home port at St. Philip's and were on scene within 40 minutes after receiving the call. The whale was towing 3 cod gillnets plus the poly buoys trailing about 400 metres behind the whale. When the whale surfaced the nets and rope floated. There were recreational boaters speeding in between the whale and the poly buoys who were unaware that there was gear there or that the whale was



entangled. Others were coming to whale watch again unaware that the whale was towing gear or entangled. Had one of these boats crossed the gear and hooked their propeller in it the result could have been life threatening.

The entangled whale towed the gear 6 nm from where it had been set off Holyrood. Then it towed us ½ nm while we disentangled it gear free with the fishers who were on scene retrieved their nets.

### **5<sup>th</sup> August**

WRS received a call at 1345 of a whale towing gear off Cape Spear. Because of a new ruling whereby we had to contact the DFO in Vancouver to get the go ahead to respond at 1612 the whale had moved on and we didn't respond as these whales require backups to be organized and vessels to do search patterns and weather conditions. We just would not have had time to respond.

### **27<sup>th</sup> – 31<sup>st</sup> August**

A humpback towing rope and a small red poly buoy first sighted off Bonavista we believe is the same animal which traveled from Bonavista to the Wadhams and back into Bonavista Bay. The gear description matched on all sightings. The animal was moving too fast for an attempt at interception and due to weather, the distances involved and the manner in which it was travelling we did not mount an attempt to intercept it.

### **4<sup>th</sup> September**

A humpback reported entangled by a fisher was released gear free by members of the WRS late evening of the 4<sup>th</sup>. The animal had been observed by locals about a mile off shore earlier in the week but thought to be not entangled. The whale was anchored in shallow water (8 fathoms) and had towed both ends of the gear together. Had we not released it that evening strong winds moved into the area that would have created breaking seas where it was anchored, and the winds did not abate for a week. We believe the animal would not have survived had we not gotten to and freed it

### **4<sup>th</sup> September**

DFO reported to WRS that the fisheries patrol vessel Cowley was in the area where a humpback was entangled in snow crab gear including a high flyer and large poly buoy 18 nm outside the FPSO on the Grand Banks. The whale was moving slowly if at all. WRS geared up to go awaiting security clearance from DFO. A DFO surveillance plane and the Cowley were unable to relocate the whale on the 5<sup>th</sup> September and strong winds for the next week precluded searching. This is interesting as this whale was seen entangled in snow crab gear 2 months after the snow crab season closed. The commercial fishing vessel number (CFV) was either not seen on the balloon or not relayed. As every fisher has to clearly mark their floats with their CFV number this is one of the first steps our group does to determine not only who owns gear but what it is, when it was lost and how much gear was lost and what the fisher knows about the incident.

### **13 October**

Sept Isle Quebec

Humpback entangled in whelk pot gear off Sept Isle. DFO Quebec and NL asked us on the evening of the 13<sup>th</sup> to respond and we geared up to respond immediately with a surveillance flight ready for us when needed or a commercial flight. In consultation with Dean Simms DFO supervisor Blanc Sablon, we decided that it would be best to wait until there was another sighting of the animal on Saturday as it was calling for windy weather after Saturday mid day. DFO could not find the whale in the morning and did not find it all week. It was related to W. Ledwell by the Mingian Island Cetacean Group that that someone from their group had attempted to free the whale and had cut a line holding the whale in position and it moved on with gear entangled on it.

### **Minke whales**

Two (2) minke whales were reported to the Whale Release and Strandings Group entrapped in fishing gear in 2017 (Table 2). One of these was released alive and gear free by members of the WRS and the other dies in herring nets before a response could be mounted

### **31<sup>st</sup> May – 4<sup>th</sup> June**

A whale reported to be a humpback was reported entangled in lobster pot gear on the 31<sup>st</sup> May off Fischels on the SW coast. Members of the WRS drove across the island, a distance of 770 km and on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of June searched for the whale with members of the DFO Stephenville detachment. The crew left for the area at 7am and after a 3-hour search pattern while in the reported entanglement area 48 19 207N, 58 59 460W located what was a minke entangled through the mouth and around the rostrum with 3cm braided rope and with 2 poly buoys and a small styrofoam float attached. After a 2-hour effort the animal was freed totally of the gear.

### **WRS Report**

Saturday morning June 3, 2017 we got a call from a fisher from the Bay St. George area. He had just come in from hauling his crab gear and he saw a whale with a lot of blue and green rope trailing on either side of its head. He said the whale was in one place caught in the crab gear lines on the inside of his crab gear. His call put us into action and we got ready to drive out to Stephenville with the hope that we could get to the whale before dark and release it. The fisher gave us the whales Latitude and Longitude location, 11 nautical miles into Bay St. George from Port Harnum, Stephenville.

Unfortunately, when we arrived at 5 pm on Saturday in Stephenville there were white caps and there was thunder and lightning, so we postponed our search to find the whale until the following morning. We met with the DFO Conservation Officers at 7 am and headed out to the whale's last known position. It took us an hour to get to that location, but the whale was not at that location anymore and we did a search pattern for almost two hours during which time we saw half a dozen free swimming minkes and humpback whales before we finally saw a blow alongside a large red buoy.

Kim and I loaded our equipment onto the inflatable boat that had been towed out and went to assess the entangled whale. We slowly approached the whale and looked under water to see the extent of the entanglement. There was a small buoy and two large orange buoys on the surface when the whale came up. We noted a rope tight to the whale's head and through its mouth. There were no ropes on the whale's tail or side fins. The rope was around the whale's lower jaw and this rope was about eight ropes wrapped together about 3 cm in diameter, then it went to one rope which went down to whatever gear was holding in place.

The one to two metre waves made the situation challenging and the whale was up and down and had mobility of 100 meters. We began to cut the ropes leaving the rope that held it in place for last. We used most of the different types of tools we had, even cutting the rope was difficult as it was about two meters under water and we could not get the purchase on it to cut through the many strands. Finally, we were successful and the whale starting swimming free, we followed it as it surfaced four times and we did not see any more gear on it before it left the area.

This disentanglement was successful due to the cooperation of the fisher and DFO Conservation Officers towing us out, helping find the whale and standing by to help. It takes a cooperative team to safely and successfully release a whale.

#### **4<sup>th</sup> September**

The minke was seen from shore by locals alive entrapped in a herring net. The weather was too windy for a response until the next day when the whale had died overnight. WRS was not called and discovered it through a newspaper article and contacted the fisher who said they pulled it ashore and took the herring net off of it. Pictures were sent, and it was identified as a female

### **Strandings**

#### **Humpback**

A full-grown humpback was entrapped by heavy pack ice in Cooks Cove, Old Perlican, Trinity Bay from the 31<sup>st</sup> of March until the 2<sup>nd</sup> of April. The area and region were experiencing multi-year heavy pack ice. The whale was forced into the shallow, heavily bouldered cove by easterly winds. It was impossible to navigate any vessel into the cove to attempt to get the whale to deeper water. The whale was resting on large boulders at low tide and unable to move. The ice began clearing out of the cove on the 2<sup>nd</sup> April. The whale, even though it was now floating in deeper water and had access to open water, was unable to swim and moved back towards the beach where it was pushed by a now large swell and large pans of ice onto the tidal area and was crushed there by the ice.

#### **White beaked dolphins**

Eleven white beak dolphins, *Lagenorhynchus albirostris*, were forced ashore by heavy multi-year pack ice at Lance Cove Conception Bay on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of April. Five of these animals were rescued by locals on advice from W. Ledwell who was in Cooks Cove with

the ice entrapped humpback at the time. The dolphins were placed in a small marina that was protected from the pack ice due to a shallow entrance but open to the waters of the bay. Three of the dolphins left the marina on the 5<sup>th</sup> April as ice pressure began to ease a little in the adjacent waters. However, the ice moved back tight to land that night and the 3 of these animals died in the pack ice. The remaining 2 dolphins stayed in the marina and unlike the other 3 never ventured towards the opening even as more open water became available. With ice clearing out of the bay and access opened towards the open sea members of the WRS shepherded the 2 remaining dolphins (who were unwilling to go on their own and even with attempts to drive them out) out through the channel. Once clear of the channel they were observed swimming together clearing the island towards the ocean.

### **Striped Dolphin – A first stranding record in NL waters**

A female striped dolphin *Stenella coeruleoalba* live stranded on the 15<sup>th</sup> July multiple times and was moved to deeper water by locals on advice from W. Ledwell. The animal died later in the day and was collected by W. Ledwell on the 16<sup>th</sup>. A necropsy was conducted by members of the WRS on the 17<sup>th</sup>. This stranding represents the first record in NL waters. Muscle, blubber, heart, lungs, kidney tissue was taken together with the ovaries and are stored at DFO Marine Mammals in St. John's.

Striped dolphin morphometrics	cm
LOA	227
Snout- anterior dorsal	101
Snout-posterior dorsal	128
Snout-anterior pectoral	48
Snout-posterior pectoral	60
Snout-center genital opening	140
Snout-center eye	33
Fluke width	44
Girths	
Ant. Pectoral	86
Post. Pectoral	101
Anterior dorsal	102
Pectoral length	28
Blubber thickness post. pectoral	1.5

### **Harassments**

The WRS group received numerous reports of harassments of humpback whales by sea - doos and fast speedboats this summer. These reports have been steadily increasing over the years as concerned citizens witness aggressive behavior by recreational boaters around the animals.

1. On 15 July a whale tour boat was observed harassing humpbacks while they were feeding close to the beach at English Harbour, Trinity Bay. Onlookers complained to WRS who passed message to DFO.
2. On 21<sup>st</sup> July harassment by sea doos off Bauline North. Information relayed to DFO.

### **New disentanglement tools/Tool kits**

The Whale Release and Strandings Group designed a new cutting knife and cutting grapple in 2017. These tools are designed for cutting heavier ropes, are larger with double the cutting capacity. The fish union (FFAW-UNIFOR) purchased a quantity of Tangly Whale knives for delivery to fishers to have onboard their vessels if they have or see leatherback sea turtles entangled.

Two disentanglement tool kits were purchased with monies from federal and provincial Department of Fisheries and Oceans and were placed in St. Lewis Labrador and St. Anthony NL. Because of the distances to these areas members of the WRS can now fly into the areas if there is an entanglement and pick up the kits

### **Education activities**

Stickers advertising the assistance program were sent to all Harbour Authorities, all DFO, Canadian Coast Guard, Crime Stoppers, coastal municipal offices, SPCA, Humane Society, media outlets and outdoor marine adventure companies throughout the region as well as to groups and fishers who requested them. An ad was also placed throughout the year in the fisheries trade magazine – The Navigator.

The Whale Release and Strandings Group made Leatherback Sea Turtle presentations on the Connaigre Peninsula to community groups and at the following schools:

The Whale Release and Strandings Group helped organize the sixth “Whale Day” at Cape Spear with support of Parks Canada and participated by displaying a full minke whale skeleton and life size humpback canvas rollout as part of their “bones, barnacles and baleen” educational presentations. A full-size fiberglass replica of a leatherback sea turtle that stranded here was also displayed.

The Group also carried out various presentations to schools in the St. John’s area with the “bones, barnacles and baleen” theme.

### **Recommendations**

**Recommendation 1.** Funding agreements should be in place and funds available before entrapment season begins. Agreements need to be established that are assurances to provide support to an organized program over a period of years. Programs that do not have these assurances will be very difficult to maintain and staff on an on-going basis (Lien 2004).

**Recommendation 2.** All vessels in the Newfoundland region should have the toll-free number stickers onboard alerting them who to call when they have an entrapped or stranded whale or see an entrapped or stranded whale or leatherback sea turtle. By having the toll-free number visible in the wheelhouse fishers may decide to call for expert advice when they have or see a whale or leatherback entrapped and not attempt to cut animals free and leave them with large amounts of gear attached which may cause the animal to die or become re-entrapped. This situation can be at least partially avoided if boats have the entrapment assistance hot line number easily visible onboard and upon calling can be advised on the proper release procedures or be advised that a release team is available to attend to the entanglement. This may lessen the number of whales or sea turtles each season swimming around with large amounts of snow crab and other gear attached. See Appendix I for toll-free sticker.

**Because of the dangers inherent in fishing boats encountering entangled large whales in their fishing gear in the offshore especially snow crab gear fishing groups need to be advised by an experienced disentanglement group on procedures to lessen gear loss and protect lives.**

**Table 1.** Humpback whales reported entangled in fishing gear in Newfoundland and Labrador during 2017

Date	Area	Gear type	Description
11 April	Garden Cove, Placentia Bay	Herring nets	Observed becoming entangled in fleet of 2 herring nets off the slipway at 7 pm. Whale swam away with one 10 kg anchor, 2 herring nets and 40 in red poly buoy. Whale said to be in area for 2 weeks feeding on herring.
25 April	Harbour Mille, Fortune Bay	Herring nets	Entangled in fleet of 2 nets. Last seen towing the nets and buoys.
8 June	Salvage Bonavista Bay 48 43 33.3N, 53 30 33.4W	?	Whale reported entangled in unknown gear type. Area rechecked on 9 <sup>th</sup> June but no other reports or sightings.
Week of 1 <sup>st</sup> July	Carson Canyon, 3N Grand Banks	Snow Crab	Whale cut from gear by fisher. The skipper said there was no gear left on animal
Week of 1 <sup>st</sup> July	Carson Canyon, 3N Grand Banks	Snow Crab	Whale caught by same fishing crew in different set of gear. The skipper said there was no gear left on this animal either
4 July	Bay Bulls, Southern Shore	Herring net and approx. 200 metres	Whale swimming north at 0900. Response but couldn't relocate.

		rope	
4 July	Motion Bay, Petty Harbour	Herring net and approx. 200 metres rope	Whale swimming north at 1600. Windy. No response.
10 July	Point Verde, Placentia Bay	Cod gillnets	Small whale entangled in the end of a set of gillnets while nets were being hauled. Whale self-released with little damage to net.
20 July	Brigus South	Small red float	Reported by hiker late evening. Thought to be whale from 4 July.
22 July	Witless Bay, Southern Shore	Herring net and 200 metres rope	Whale released by members of WRS. Same whale from 4 <sup>th</sup> and 20 <sup>th</sup> July.
22 July	Ship Cove, Great Northern Peninsula	Herring net/anchors	Whale cut from net by fishers, towing large amount of gear.
27 July	Long Cove, Trinity Bay	Caplin trap	Self-release from leader.
28 July	Long Cove, Trinity Bay	Caplin Trap	Whale released gear free from caplin trap. Trap ruined.
1 August	Marticotte Island, Placentia Bay	Cod trap	Small female humpback dead in leader. WRS members assisted in getting the animal out of the trap.
4 August	Harcourt, Trinity Bay	Snow crab gear	Whale released after 3 hours gear free by members of the WRS group.
5 August	Long Pond, Conception Bay	3 cod gillnets	Fast moving whale released gear free from fleet of 3 cod gillnets by Whale Release and Strandings.
5 August	Cape Spear	Small poly float and rope	Thought to be the whale WRS took gear off on the 22 <sup>nd</sup> . No response due to new protocol and lateness of us receiving the go ahead to respond to the whale.
5 August	Long Cove, Trinity Bay	Fishing gear?	Reported towing fishing gear. W. Ledwell called the new DFO protocol at 1715 but got no authority or any communication re response. WRS talked to harbour authority and got contact of local who would check on the whale early morning. No report of the animal.
27 August	Bonavista	Fishing gear?	Reported via DFO officers whale towing small red float. There was wind in the area. WRS called network member Gerry Hussey to check area and be on call for response. G. Hussey checked area and couldn't find the animal.

29 August	Twillingate	Fishing gear?	Reported by DFO officers whale swimming east towards Long Point Lighthouse. Possibly same animal from 27 <sup>th</sup> August.
30 August	Off the Wadhams, Notre Dame Bay, 49 34N, 53 46W	Fishing gear?	Reported by fisher and harbour authority. Matched the 27 August whale in gear description.
31 August	Off lower Amherst Cove, Bonavista	Fishing gear?	Reported by recreational fishers. WRS believe same whale from 27 August.
1 September	Red Cliff, North East Avalon	Faded medium sized poly buoy and rope	Whale towing gear late evening off Red Cliff, sighted by east coast trail hiker.
25 August	Newtown, Bonavista Bay	Dead	Dead whale. Dead for at least 1 month with rope cut deep into peduncle.
4 September	Cappahayden, Southern Shore	Whelk pot gear	Released gear free by WRS.
4 September	47 03.57N, 48 03.45W. Grand Banks 18nm from Hibernia Platform	Snow Crab gear	Whale believed to be anchored and reported by fisheries patrol boat The Cowley. WRS activated but whale could not be relocated the following day and subsequent windy weather for prolonged period.
10 September	Long Point, Twillingate	Fishing gear	Whale reported entangled by hiker. WRS contacted the Twillingate DFO to check area which they did on the morning of the 11 <sup>th</sup> but could not relocate the whale.
13 October	Sept Isle, QC	Whelk Pot gear	Whale towing whelk pot gear. DFO NL QC asked for WRS to respond. WRS on standby for relocation of whale. Whale not relocated.

**Table 2.** Minke whales reported entangled in fishing gear in Newfoundland and Labrador during 2017

Date	Area	Gear type	Description
31 <sup>st</sup> May – 4 <sup>th</sup> June	48 19 207N, 58 59 460W, SW coast, off Stephenville	Lobster pots	Released alive and gear free by members of the Whale Release and Strandings Group.
4 September	St. Carroll's, Great Northern Peninsula	Herring net	Female minke seen alive and was found dead the next day.



**Table 3.** Other whales reported entangled in fishing gear to the Whale Release and Strandings Group in 2017

Date	Area	Species	Description
23 August	Bonaventure, Trinity Bay	beluga	Solitary social juvenile beluga with cod jigger hook in lower lip. WRS unsuccessful in relocating animal.

**Table 4.** Leatherback sea turtles reported stranded in Newfoundland and Labrador during 2016

Date	Area	Description
9 August	Point Lance, St. Mary's Bay	Female in advanced state of decomposition 134 cm carapace. Large green garbage bag found in gut and laced into intestines.
22 September	Garnish, Burin Peninsula	Dead 340 kg. male animal towed in by fisherman. DFO Mar. Mam retrieved it. Necropsy by DFO showed no obvious sign of death. Carcass in advanced state decomposition.
18 November	Bay of Islands	Squid fisher reported LBT in mouth of Hugh's Brook, Bay of Islands. It was there for a few days.

**Table 5.** Leatherback sea turtle sightings reported in Newfoundland and Labrador during 2016

Date	Area	Description
28 August	Terrenceville, Fortune Bay	Free swimming.
6 September	46 49.5N, 55 41W, Lord's Cove Placentia Bay	Free swimming.
4 October	Irelands Eye, Trinity bay	Free swimming.
18 November	Hughes Brook, Bay of Islands	Free swimming. Been in area couple days.

**Table 7.** Ice entrapped, stranded and dead floating cetaceans reported in Newfoundland and Labrador during 2017

Date	Area	Species	Description
17 March	3nm off Port aux Basques	Blue	Freshly dead- drifting in ice. No sampling.
31 March - 2 April	Cooks Cove, Old Perlican, Trinity Bay	Humpback	Live ice entrapped in shallow cove in heavy pack. Animal

			crushed.
2-10 April	Lance Cove, Bell Island, Conception Bay	11 white beaked dolphins	Live ice entrapped in heavy pack ice. 5 rescued and placed in small marina. 2 survived for open water rescue.
8 April	Old Bonaventure. Trinity Bay	humpback	Freshly dead humpback drifting in pack ice.
22 May	Logy Bay, North East Avalon	humpback	Adult humpback dead on beach.
13 <sup>th</sup> – 14 <sup>th</sup> June	Biscay Bay, Southern Avalon	minke	Female live stranded multiple times and died. Gross necropsy by DFO Marine Mammals. No entanglement, trauma, thin blubber.
19 June	McDougal's Beach, Codroy Valley, South West coast	fin	48.5 ft. male freshly dead.
21 June	47 433N, 59 40W, off Port aux Basques	Sei??	Possible Sei, dead drifting.
26 June	49 51 04N, 54 28 99W. 10nm off Twillingate	25-30ft?	Dead drifting NE. Tried unsuccessful contact with fishing vessel through Coast Guard for species confirmation.
28 June	Church Pte, Trout River	right	Dead, decomposed
26 June	Port aux Choix, Great Northern Peninsula	minke	Approximately 4 metre minke live stranded and after repeated refloating by locals re-stranded during the night and died.
6 July	Cape Ray	right	Daed decomposed
8 July	Fox Island River, Port au Port SW coast	sperm	Large whale live stranded on sandbar 150 yard offshore. Whale was not seen on morning of 9 <sup>th</sup> .
9 July	Frenchman's Cove, Fortune Bay	pilot	Dead stranded. Empty stomach.
15 July	Deadman's Bay, Bonavista Bay	striped dolphin	Live stranded and died.
17 July	Bay of Islands 49 00N, 58 32W	Humpback?	Large dead floating. Reported by sailboat. Thought to be a humpback.
25 July	Lark Harbour, West coast	Right whale	Dead decomposed.
29 July	Salvage, Bonavista Bay	Sei	15 metre sei whale was discovered live stranded on the

			morning of the 29 <sup>th</sup> and died that evening. DFO Mar. Mam. took morphometrics and tissue sample. Whale extremely thin with vertebrae and ribs showing and depression cranially.
9 August	Dover, Bonavista Bay	White sided-dolphin	Swimming outside harbour with mayo jar size injury out of side and possible injuries to tail flukes.
23 September	47 54.8N, 60 24.4W, 40 nm west Cape Anguille, South West coast	~ 6 m dead	Whale dead drifting reported by Bulk Carrier "Bulk Transport".
10 October	Lamaline, Placentia Bay	humpback	Small whale dead stranded. Been dead for at least a week. No evidence of trauma or entanglement.

**Table 7.** Miscellaneous cetaceans reported in Newfoundland and Labrador during 2017

Date	Area	Species	Description
21 July	Newman's Sound, 48 39N, 53 31W	Sperm whales	3 whales reported by sailboat 'Atlas' as entangled together in crab gear in 486 metres water. W. Ledwell talked to the boat and determined that what they were looking at were sperm whales that were logging and not entrapped.
27 June	Fogo, North East coast	6 killer whales	One large with bent dorsal and small calf with group.
31 July	Fogo, North East coast	beluga	Solitary social beluga outside harbour.
9 August	Dover, Bonavista Bay	White-sided dolphin	Dolphin with mayo size chunk out of its side and tail injuries swimming in circles outside harbour.

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## Appendix I

### **WHALE AND TURTLE NOTICE**

# **1-888-895-3003**

If you have a **WHALE** or **TURTLE** or basking shark (live or dead) caught in your fishing gear, call this toll-free number and a trained crew will respond to assist you. If you see any whales, turtles or dolphins (live or dead) on a beach, please call. Should you see any leatherback sea turtles please call.