

**Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA)
Protocol for Dealing with Stranded Marine Wildlife**

January 2021



Cuvier's beaked whale, Portballintrae (December 2014)

Sustainability at the heart of a living, working, active landscape valued by everyone

Contents

Background	4
Responsibilities and obligations	5
Key organisations	7
Role of the on-call officer	8
Dealing with stranded marine wildlife	8
Seals	9
Response to live stranded seal	9
Response to dead stranded seal	11
Cetaceans (whales, dolphins and porpoises)	12
Response to live stranded cetacean	12
Response to dead stranded cetacean	13
Other marine wildlife (sharks, marine turtles, jellyfish)	15
Sharks	15
Marine turtles	15
Jellyfish	16
Training	18
Live Strandings Response Workshop, Crawfordsburn Country Park, 2016	18
Actions going forward	18
Relevant Risk Assessments	19
Annex A – Process map	21
Annex B – List of contacts (including Exploris, Belfast Coastguard, vets)	22
Annex C – List of equipment for use in stranding events	23
Seals	23
Cetaceans	23
Annex D – DAERA Strandings Notice	25
Annex E – Stranding form	26
Annex F - Guidance for Local Authorities, their partners and members of the public	27
Response to live stranded animal	27
Seals	27
Cetaceans (whales, dolphins and porpoises)	28
Other marine animals (sharks, marine turtles)	29
Response to dead stranded animal	30

Foreword

DAERA Marine and Fisheries Division is the statutory body responsible for protecting the marine environment and its associated species.

This protocol has been developed to provide advice and information for DAERA staff, other competent authorities, environmental bodies and members of the public in relation to dealing with live and dead stranded marine wildlife.



Harbour porpoise, Geoff Campbell

Background

The seas around our coast are rich in marine wildlife and occasionally some animal species that normally spend their all or much of their lives at sea can come ashore. In general, stranding is defined as the occurrence of a marine animal immobilized ashore, though this is dependent on the species, as seal pups may be highly mobile while still requiring attention. Some may strand accidentally and simply require rescue but others may be ill or injured and need medical attention. Some die soon after arrival or they may have already been dead and are washed up as a decaying carcass. The actions required will depend on whether or not the animal is still living.

Typical species include whales, porpoises and dolphins (which are classed in a group of marine mammals known as cetaceans), along with seals, marine turtles, basking sharks and seabirds. Cetaceans and seals frequently strand on public beaches and can attract local attention which may escalate to large scale media attention when larger whales become stranded. Some cetaceans are also associated with mass stranding events which is the stranding of two (except mother with calf) or more animals close in time and space. This has not occurred recently in Northern Ireland, however, the risk needs to be considered when developing

protocols. Marine turtles and basking sharks are also known to occasionally come ashore.

Marine wildlife can become stranded for numerous reasons. Common causes of stranding include storms, infectious disease, starvation, predation, entanglement in fishing gear and noise disturbance. Stranding events are difficult to predict although seals can have seasonal peaks associated with their pups getting into difficulties during respective Harbour seal and Grey seal breeding and pupping seasons. Major pollution events (e.g. oil spill) have the potential to impact multiple species and cause numerous casualties.

Other animals that can attract public and media attention as a result of strandings include jellyfish, starfish and ragworms which can come ashore in large numbers.



Responsibilities and obligations

In the UK, certain marine species, including whales, dolphins, porpoises, seals, marine turtles and basking sharks, are protected throughout their natural range by international agreements and national wildlife legislation. This includes protection from intentional or reckless disturbance, taking, harming and killing, and in some

cases, possession or sale. The two relevant pieces of nature conservation legislation for Northern Ireland are:

- The Conservation (Natural Habitats, etc.) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1995 (as amended) which protects cetaceans, seals and marine turtles, and
- The Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985 (as amended) which protects seals, basking sharks and seabirds.

Table 1 outlines offences relating to marine protected species and DAERA has a duty to investigate whether an animal has stranded as a result of an offence being committed.

Table 1 listing species groups and relevant legislation for protection

Species Group	Marine Species	Legislation	Offences
European Protected Species	All Whales, Dolphins and Porpoises All Turtles	Conservation Regulations – Schedule 2	Kill, injure, disturb, take, transport (for the purpose of sale), trade
Seals	Common (harbour) seals and grey seals	Conservation Regulations – Schedule 3	Kill or take by specific methods
		Wildlife Order – Schedules 5, 6 & 7	Kill, injure, disturb, take, transport (for the purpose of sale), trade
Sharks	Basking shark Angel shark	Wildlife Order – Schedules 5, 6 & 7	Kill, injure, disturb, take, transport (for the purpose of sale), trade

The UK is a signatory to ASCOBANS (Agreement on the Conservation of Small Cetaceans of the Baltic, North Sea, Irish and North Seas) and has committed to establish a system for reporting and retrieving stranded specimens. This includes

carrying out autopsies in order to collect tissues for further studies, to reveal the potential cause of death and to understand food composition. The UK Cetacean Strandings Investigation Programme (CSIP) was established to fulfil the ASCOBANS obligations. The Irish Whale and Dolphin Group (IWDG) maintains a strandings database for the island of Ireland. DAERA reports strandings data and post mortems results to both CSIP and IWDG.

Strandings data also contributes towards the monitoring obligations for Marine Mammals (Descriptors 1&4) under the UK Marine Strategy.

Key organisations

A range of different organisations have a role to play in dealing with stranded marine wildlife. These are summarised below.

- DAERA Marine and Fisheries Division, Marine Conservation and Reporting Team (MCRT) – responsible for protecting the marine environment and associated species through designation, monitoring and management. The Marine Protected Area (MPA) Officers will carry out in situ assessments of stranded marine mammals where required.
- DAERA Marine Wildlife Team (within MCRT) – responsible for wildlife licensing and enforcement in relation to disturbance of protected species. Also collates data on stranded (dead or live) marine mammals for reporting purposes. Liaise with the MPA Officers on actions taken for stranded marine mammals where required.
- NIEA Regional Operations – responsible for the management and maintenance of NIEA country parks. Provides assistance in assessing stranded marine mammals where required.
- Exploris (Seal Sanctuary) – responsible for the rescue, rehabilitation and release of harbour and grey seal pups.
- Maritime & Coastguard Agency – responsible for implementing British and international maritime law and safety policy. Houses the Receiver of Wreck position who is responsible for disposing 'Royal Fish' (dead whales, dolphins, porpoises and sturgeon).

- AFBI, Veterinary Science Division – carries out post mortems on dead cetaceans, seals, basking shark and marine turtles, where required.
- AFBI, Fisheries and Aquatic Ecosystems – monitoring cetacean populations and impact of noise through deployment of acoustic buoys. Retrieval of carcasses if required and can provide temporary refrigerated storage (Newforge).
- Irish Whale and Dolphin Group (IWDG) – operates a sighting and stranding scheme for cetaceans covering the island of Ireland. Can provide assistance in assessing stranded cetaceans where required.

Role of the on-call officer

During normal office hours reports relating to stranded marine wildlife should come into the DAERA Marine Wildlife Team, either by email or telephone. During out of office hours (evenings and weekends) contact details for an on-call officer will be provided on the Marine Wildlife Team voicemail. The on-call officer will take over to receive calls and assess the situation, i.e. whether a visit is required or if this can be left until normal office hours resume. If a visit is required then the on-call officer will contact relevant trained DAERA staff that have been identified as content to provide weekend support (overtime will be available should a visit be carried out). A live stranded mammal will require a quicker response than a dead one – this is detailed in the relevant sections below.

Dealing with stranded marine wildlife

The stranding response will vary depending on the location of the stranding, species, number of animals and whether the animal is dead or alive. As such, it is not possible to describe a prescriptive course of action that will be taken for each and every incident but this protocol will be used to inform decisions and act as a guide to the approach that will be selected. This protocol has been separated into dealing with live stranded animals and dead stranded animals. Annex A illustrates the procedure to be followed.

Seals



Harbour seal, Alain Le Garsmeur

Response to live stranded seal

The most recent condition assessments (2019) have shown that Harbour seal populations are not in favourable conservation status thus the rehabilitation of sick or injured Harbour seals will continue. Grey seal populations have met favourable conservation status and therefore the rehabilitation of sick or weak Grey seal pups is no longer a necessary conservation measure.

The rehabilitation of seal pups (note not juveniles or adults) at the seal sanctuary at Exploris is considered to be a conservation measure that contributes towards restoring seal populations to favourable conservation status. Exploris will only rehabilitate Grey seal pups that are subject to persistent human disturbance and show signs of injury.

In general, DAERA's advice will be to contact Exploris on 07701 372623 or 028 4272 8062 for live seals that appear to be injured or sick, and abandoned seal pups.

Reports should include location, approximate size, details of any injuries and photos if possible. While Exploris will take the lead on seal pup rescue, there may be situations

(due to location or available resources) where DAERA Environment, Marine and Fisheries Group (EMFG) staff will be required to respond.

Exploris or DAERA Staff will assess the situation and decide which of the options described below applies. It should be noted that where there is no obvious sign of injury seal pups should be left in situ for 24 hours after initial visit as its mother may have left it there and will return to feed it or it may be a newly weaned pup resting.

- Harbour seal requiring care – lift and rehabilitate at Exploris.
- Harbour seal requiring rest only – remove from scene if subject to persistent disturbance and release in a sheltered spot. If it cannot be relocated a cordon or traffic cone with signage should be erected to advise the public that the animal has been assessed and to keep their distance.
- Grey seal requiring rest only – remove from scene if subject to persistent disturbance and release in a sheltered spot. If the pup is less than 18-21 days old (identified by white fluffy coat) do not remove as it is dependent on its mother. If the animal is weaned (older than 3 weeks) relocation can be attempted. If it cannot be relocated a cordon or traffic cone with signage should be erected to advise the public that the animal has been assessed and to keep their distance.
- Grey seal sick but with no obvious injury – leave in-situ, relocate to sheltered location if subject to persistent disturbance. If the pup is less than 18-21 days old (identified by white fluffy coat) do not remove as it is dependent on its mother. If the animal is weaned (older than 3 weeks) relocation can be attempted. If necessary arrange for euthanasia on/off site using vet (refer to attached list Annex B) or at Exploris. It is advised that these seals should not be rehabilitated at Exploris.
- Grey seal requiring care due to human disturbance/influence (e.g. injury, fish hook in mouth) – lift and rehabilitate at Exploris.

Refer to Annex C for list of equipment for use in rescuing seals.

Staff will aim to respond to calls about live seals within 5 hrs of the initial report and act accordingly depending on which of the above options is appropriate. Staff will not

respond outside of normal working hours (in the evenings, at weekends or during the hours of darkness).

If staff responding to a marine wildlife stranding encounter any problems with members of the public (such as persistent disturbance or threat to safety of staff) then they should contact the PSNI on 101.

Response to dead stranded seal

Any dead seals should be reported to the DAERA Marine and Fisheries Division Marine Conservation and Reporting Team (MCRT), using the Marine.Wildlife@daera-ni.gov.uk mailbox or 028 905 69421 (Exploris do not have any involvement with dead seals). Reports should include location, approximate size, details of any injuries and photos if possible. MCRT will take the lead, directing the Marine Conservation Reporting Team Officers or NIEA Regional Operations staff (where required) to assess and investigate in cases of suspicious deaths. DAERA staff will endeavour to respond to calls about dead seals within 24 hrs of initial report. Once assessed these should be tagged (refer to Annex D for tag), indicating they have been inspected and that the appropriate authorities are dealing with the carcass.

If an offence is suspected, discuss with MCRT and then contact the PSNI on 101 and state that you believe it is a 'wildlife crime'. Always ask for a reference number so that you can trace the progress of the case and follow up with the PSNI Wildlife Liaison Officer. If a post mortem is required DAERA staff will be responsible for removing the carcass. Where post mortem is not required then DAERA staff will notify the relevant Council or beach manager; removal of the carcass will be at their discretion.

Cetaceans (whales, dolphins and porpoises)



Response to live stranded cetacean

The stranding response will most likely involve a multi-agency approach and MCRT will provide advice and assistance. Where appropriate, assistance will be necessary from NIEA Regional Operations, landowners, the Maritime & Coastguard Agency (MCA), PSNI, veterinarians and voluntary organisations that respond to wildlife strandings. In most cases, individual animals will be stranded, however, there may be unusual circumstances where a mass stranding event may occur.

When a stranding is reported, either using Marine.Wildlife@daera-ni.gov.uk or 028 905 69421, MCRT will assess the information provided and make contact with relevant partners dependent on location and nature of the event (landowner/manager, council, MCA, PSNI, veterinarian, DAERA Press Office, etc.). DAERA Staff will aim to respond to live cetacean stranding reports within 2 hrs of the initial report.

On arrival at the scene the DAERA staff member will assume the role of Beach Master if another authority has not already taken control of the situation. The Beach Master will not become physically involved in the rescue operation but will direct and coordinate the process. All staff that respond should be wearing appropriate branded and High Vis PPE (DAERA or NIEA) so they can be easily recognised as authorised officers and identifiable to members of the public. The Beach Master will further assess

the response and call in additional resources including stranding equipment if required (refer to Annex C).

It is important that the Beach Master liaises closely with the MCA which has a statutory responsibility with respect to stranded cetaceans, termed Royal Fish¹.

Stranding events often attract considerable public interest and the use of appropriate authorities to assist with crowd control is strongly recommended. The MCA should be informed as it can advise on potential navigational issues and provide information to boat users. The PSNI should also be notified (using the 101 number) to assist with traffic disruption which may result from public interest. Where relevant, DAERA Corporate Comms (0300 200 7850) should also be informed.



Live stranded Bottlenose dolphin, Ballycastle 2008

Response to dead stranded cetacean

Similar to live strandings, DAERA MCRT will assess the information provided and make contact with relevant partners dependent on location and nature of the event. The Lead Officer will visit the stranding site and determine the appropriate response:

- Assess cause of death and complete Stranding Form Annex D.

¹ The term Royal Fish is an ancient law (Edward II) in which all Sturgeon, Whales, Dolphins and Porpoises washed up on crown or public land are deemed Royal fish and should be offered up to the reigning monarch.

- Post mortem should be carried out on strandings where the cetacean is in good condition plus all incidents where it is suspected that the animal has stranded due to a wildlife offence having been committed.
- If an offence is suspected then implement enforcement procedures (refer to DAERA MFD – Marine Staff Enforcement Guidance). The PSNI (101) may need to be contacted.
- It is important that the Lead Officer secures supporting evidence such as photos, nets and ropes and tags and bags evidence in accordance with Marine Staff enforcement guidance and records notes in their notebook.

Staff will aim to respond to dead cetacean stranding reports within 24 hrs of the initial report and these should be tagged, indicating they have been inspected and that the appropriate authorities are dealing with the carcass (refer to Annex D). Where post mortem is not required the landowner/manager will be advised to contact local council for advice on disposal.

Other marine wildlife (sharks, marine turtles, jellyfish)

Similar to cetaceans, other marine animals such as sharks, marine turtles or jellyfish spend the majority of their lives at sea, with marine turtles surfacing to breathe air.

Sharks



Basking shark, stock image

The basking shark is the largest shark in UK waters and the second largest fish in the world, with adults typically reaching 7.9m in length. These filter feeding sharks may be seen individually, in small groups, or in large schools. They are frequently observed in coastal waters during summer and autumn months but less commonly strand on the shore; as they cannot breathe on land they will most likely be dead if found stranded.

Marine turtles



Leatherback turtle, Jeremy Rodgers

Of the seven marine turtle species, five have been recorded in the UK. Leatherback turtles migrate to the UK to feed on jellyfish while the other four species (loggerhead, Kemp's ridley, green and hawksbill turtles) usually occur as stray juveniles carried by currents from warmer seas. Leatherback turtles, if found stranded on beaches, are often weak, dead or dying. Loggerhead, Kemp's ridley, green and hawksbill turtles, if found stranded are usually cold stunned juveniles and should not be returned to the sea. Exploris have experience and facilities to rehabilitate turtles.

Jellyfish



There are five native jellyfish species which inhabit the waters around the UK; Moon, Compass, Lion's mane, Barrel and Blue. The Portuguese Man O'War and By-the-wind-sailor, are not true jellyfish but are closely related to the jellyfish family and occasionally appear in waters off the coast. Larger numbers of jellyfish are often observed during the late spring/early summer months in response to inshore plankton blooms. Their numbers are considered to be increasing as they benefit from warming waters associated with climate change and a reduction in predators and competitors as a result of fishing. Generally, large numbers of jellyfish washed up on beaches are due to strong currents or storm events. These should be avoided as some species may still sting even when dead. If possible signage should be posted advising members of the public of risk of injury to humans and pets

If a basking shark or marine turtle is found stranded contact DAERA Marine Conservation and Reporting Team (MCRT) on 028 905 69421 or Marine.Wildlife@daera-ni.gov.uk providing information on location, size, state etc. Alternately contact Environmental Crime on 0800 80 70 60.

- Basking sharks - if the animal is alive place wet seaweed or clothing over it and pour water over its head (gills) to keep it wet and oxygenated.
- Leatherback turtle – if apparently uninjured this can be carefully dragged back to sea. Enlist the help of others to pull the shell (do not pull the flippers). Do not drag the animal over rocks.
- Hard-shelled turtles (Loggerhead, Kemp’s ridley, green and hawksbill) – should not be returned to the sea. Wrap the animal in wet clothing or seaweed keeping the nostrils clear. If the animal is inactive raise the back end of the shell so it is resting at approximately 30° to drain the lungs. The only feasible option for the recovery of hard shelled turtles is to arrange transport to Exploris for rehabilitation and possible repatriation.

Training



Live Strandings Response Workshop, Crawfordsburn Country Park, 2016

In 2016, DAERA organised a one day Live Strandings Response Workshop which was delivered by Ulster Wildlife. This workshop covered a response protocol, joint working, health and safety considerations, cetacean biology, role of Lead Officer or On Scene Commander, essential equipment required for the rescue and handling of seals and for the successful re-floatation of small cetaceans and the practical application of these. The course also covered advice on when re-floatation should not be attempted and when to call the services of a veterinary officer for euthanasia purposes.

Actions going forward

- MCRT is currently in discussion with the British Divers Marine Life Rescue (BDMLR) to deliver a marine mammal stranding response workshop with all relevant agencies during 2021.
- MCRT will maintain a list of DAERA officers that can be called upon in the event of a marine response to ensure sufficient cover for the legal and regulatory requirement.
- MCRT will coordinate internal refresher training every three years, providing an opportunity to instruct new personnel and to update contact details. This

will cover processes and protocol in use, risk assessments and supply of PPE required.

- MCRT Marine Conservation Advice Senior Scientific Officer will undertake an annual review of the protocol involving lead officers in the respective teams.
- MCRT, as owners and managers of the Marine Stranding kits stored at WMU Lisburn and RO depot at Quoile, will undertake a review and renewal of these. A list of equipment for use in seal and cetacean stranding events is located at Annex C.

DAERA Staff designated as Cetacean response officers should:

- Attend training provided and read and sign relevant risk assessments (e.g. working on or near water, manual handling, handling marine carcasses, stranded whales, dolphins and porpoises, etc.).
- Maintain PPE in good working order and ensure it is clean, dry and stored ready for use.
- Alert managers to any change in circumstances which may impact on their ability to respond in the Marine environment.

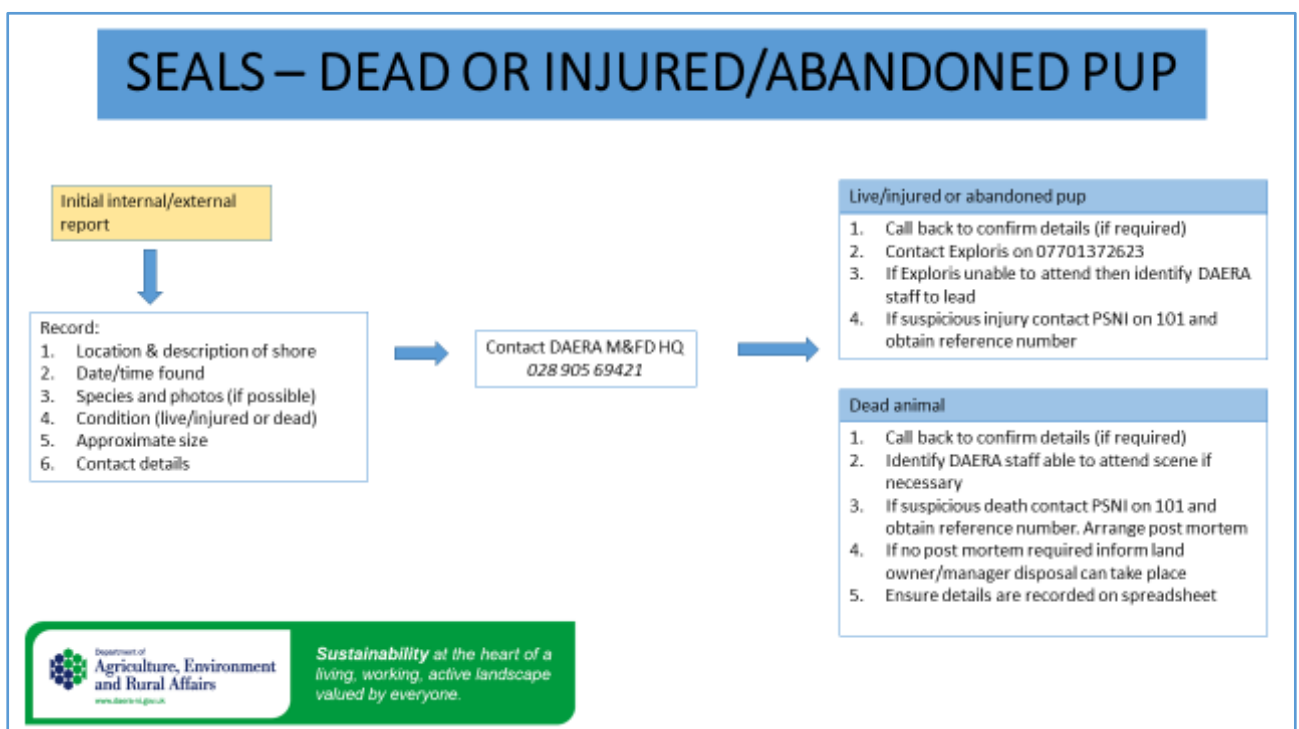
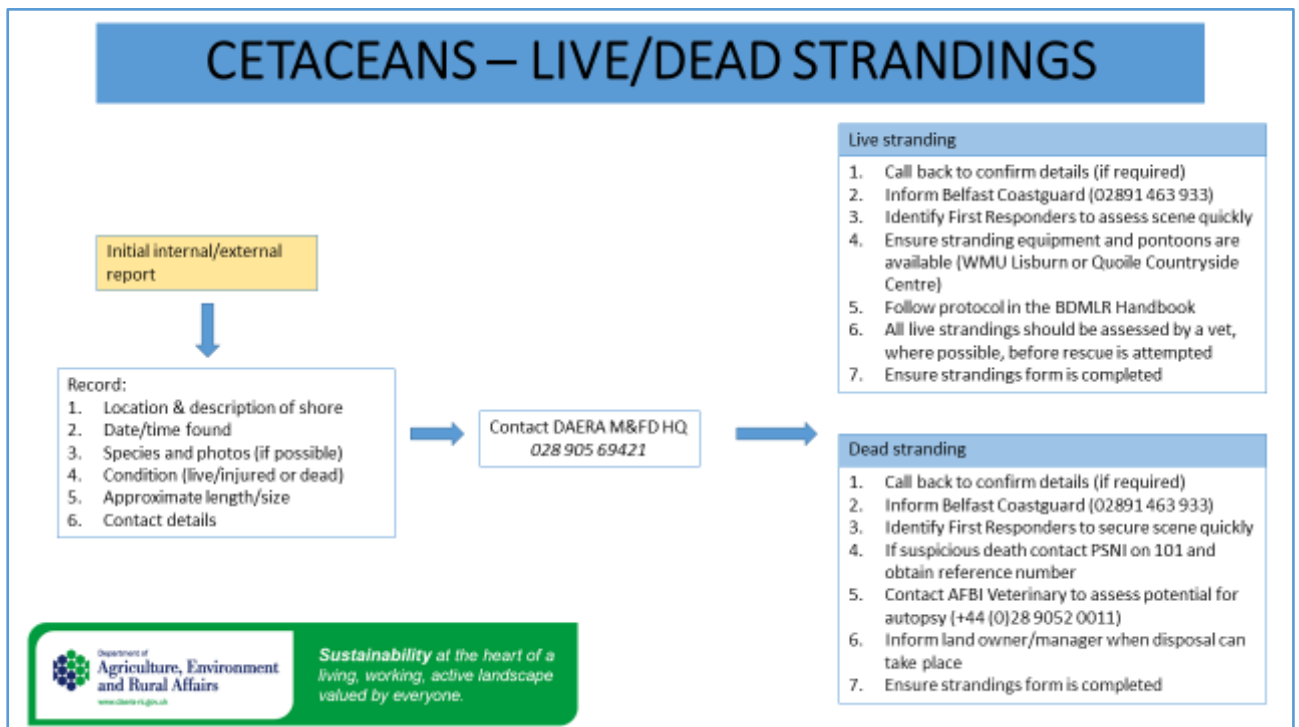
Relevant Risk Assessments

Title	Contents Manager Reference
RA MD 30 Biological Hazards including Zoonotic diseases	AE1/20/370137
RA MD 29 Seals	AE1/20/364266
RA MD 10 Handling dead animals	AE1/19/326044
RA MD 9 Life Jackets	AE1/19/326042
RA MD 5 Working on or near water	AE1/19/326034
RA MD 19 Stranded whales, dolphins and porpoises	AE1/19/325951
RA MD 13 Handling marine carcasses	AE1/19/325943
RA MD 32 – BioCOSHH Risk Assessment – Unintentional exposure to raw sewage	AE1/20/370170

RA MD 33 – BioCOSHH Risk Assessment – Potential exposure to Leptospirosis	AE1/20/370163
RA MD 34 – BioCOSHH Risk Assessment – Potential exposure to toxic or stinging plants and algae	AE1/20/370159
RA MD 35 – BioCOSHH Risk Assessment – Potential exposure to animal bites and stings	AE1/20/370157
RA MD 32 – BioCOSHH Risk Assessment – Zoonotic diseases	AE1/20/370155

Annex A – Process map

Refer to Contents Manager AE1/20/1215826



Annex B – List of contacts (including Exploris, Belfast Coastguard, vets)

Exploris	07701372623 or 028 4272 8062
Belfast Coastguard	028 9146 3933
DAERA Marine and Fisheries Division	028 905 69757 or Marine.InfoRequests@daera-ni.gov.uk
DAERA Marine Conservation and Reporting Team (Marine Wildlife Team)	028 905 69421 Marine.Wildlife@daera-ni.gov.uk
DAERA Marine and Fisheries Division – Portrush Coastal Zone	028 7082 3600
DAERA Corporate Comms	0300 200 7850
PSNI	101
IWDG	northernireland@iwdg.ie
Northern Ireland Councils	
Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council	028 9034 0000
Ards and North Down Borough Council	0300 013 3333
Belfast City Council	028 9032 0202
Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council	028 7034 7034
Derry City and Strabane District Council	028 7125 3253
Mid and East Antrim Borough Council	0300 124 5000
Newry, Mourne and Down District Council	0300 103 2233
Veterinary officers	
Downe Veterinary Clinic	028 4461 4425

Annex C – List of equipment for use in stranding events

Seals

Rescue kit containing the following items. One kept in Portrush Coastal Zone.

- Boxes suitable for seals up to 2 ½ feet
- Blankets (for restraining seals)
- Bite-proof gloves x 2 pairs
- Basic seal first aid kit: feeding tube and syringe, antiseptic spray, Life-Aid Xtra powder (oral solution for pups) and ointment for minor eye infections

Exploris have boxes suitable for seals up to 3 feet and 50 kilos.

Cetaceans

Stranding kit containing the following items. One kept at each: Portrush Coastal Zone, the Quoile Countryside Centre and Water Management Unit, Lisburn.

- Tarpaulin x 1
- Plastic jug 1L x 1
- Plastic buckets x 2
- Personal first aid kit x1
- Box 100 Nitrile disposable gloves x 1
- Box 100 Arm length disposable gloves x 1
- 30m measuring tape x 1
- Stanley Maxlife 30lm Plastic LED Torch x 1
- Pack of 8 AA Batteries x 1
- Hand Trowel x 1
- Rescue Whistles x 2
- Weather Writer x 1
- 10x Portable fence stakes x 3
- Rolls High Vis Tape x 2
- 60L Blue storage barrel x 1
- Cotton sheets x 2

- Disposable face mask 20 pack x 1
- Large animal thermometer x 1
- Stranding forms x 5
- Sample containers or vials x 5
- Waterproof labels x 20
- Knives, scissors, scalpel, string, plastic knives
- Body bag for carcass removal
- Antibacterial wipes

In addition there are floatation pontoons (x 2) which are used to re-float live stranded animals. One is kept at the Quoile Countryside Centre and the other at Water Management Unit, Lisburn.

Annex D – DAERA Strandings Notice

The below tag should be fixed to the carcass.

DAERA Environment, Marine and Fisheries staff have examined this carcass and are liaising with the appropriate authorities regarding disposal or post mortem.

DO NOT TOUCH THIS CARCASS; KEEP DOGS AT A SAFE DISTANCE.

No further action is required from any member of the public.



Annex E – Stranding form

<https://bdmlr.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/resources-MARCRecordSheets.pdf>

Annex F - Guidance for Local Authorities, their partners and members of the public

Response to live stranded animal

Seals

Introduction

Two species of seal inhabit the coast and seas around Northern Ireland. The Harbour seal is smaller, has a dog-like face and prefers more sheltered habitats. The Grey seal is larger, has a longer head and is more often seen in exposed areas.

Seals haul out to rest, warm up and breed; they are very sensitive to disturbance, especially during the pupping season. As with any large, wild animal, they may also inflict a powerful bite if they or their young feel threatened. Interference by humans may also lead to mothers abandoning their pups, or vulnerable Grey seal pups, who do not enter the sea until 3-4 weeks old, drowning or succumbing to hypothermia in an attempt to escape potential threats.

Both species are fully protected by law from killing and intentional or reckless disturbance.

What to do if you think a seal is injured or distressed:

- Contact Exploris on 07701372623
- Do not pick the seal up or chase it back into the sea. Instead, observe from a safe distance.
- If possible look for any signs of injury to provide an accurate description of these along with size and species and location (including description of shoreline).
- Keep other people and dogs away as this may result in increased stress or injury to the seal.
- Seals can inflict bites as well as carry infections or diseases which can be transferred so avoid close contact.

Cetaceans (whales, dolphins and porpoises)

Introduction

Whales, dolphins and porpoises are entirely aquatic although they must come to the surface to breathe air through their lungs. These animals do not strand under normal circumstances, therefore, if present on the shore they will likely require assistance especially if still alive.

What to do if you come across a live stranded cetacean:

- Contact DAERA Marine Wildlife Team 028 905 69421 or Marine.Wildlife@daera-ni.gov.uk. Alternately contact Environmental Crime on 0800 80 70 60.
- If possible, stay with the animal until the rescue team arrives.
- Do not put the animal back into the sea without advice from the DAERA Marine Wildlife Team or a vet.
- If possible, look for signs of injury to provide an accurate description of these along with size and species and location (including description of shoreline). Any photographs you can send will be useful.
- Maintain control and keep other people and dogs away as this may result in increased stress or injury to the animal.
- Reduce noise and keep sudden movement to a minimum to avoid further stress to the animal.
- Keep the animal's skin wet to prevent it cracking and to keep it cool. Also provide shade to the animal from the sun. Using seaweed or wet sheets on its back will help. Spray or douse gently with water over the body.
- Do not cover or allow any water to enter the blowhole (nostril) sited on top of the animal's head. This will cause the animal great distress or may even kill it.
- Cetaceans can carry infections or diseases and when stressed may thrash out with their tails so avoid getting too close. Also avoid working over the blowhole and inhaling its breath.

Other marine animals (sharks, marine turtles)

Introduction

Similar to cetaceans, other marine animals such as sharks or marine turtles spend all or most of their lives at sea, with marine turtles surfacing to breathe air. Marine turtles haul out onto land to lay eggs but not in UK/Irish waters.

The basking shark is the largest shark in UK waters and the second largest fish in the world, with adults typically reaching 7.9m in length. These filter feeding sharks may be seen individually, in small groups, or in large schools. They are frequently observed in coastal waters during summer and autumn months but less commonly strand on the shore; as they cannot breathe on land they will most likely be dead if found stranded.

Of the seven marine turtle species, five have been recorded in the UK. Leatherback turtles migrate to the UK to feed on jellyfish while the other four species (loggerhead, Kemp's ridley, green and hawksbill turtles) usually occur as stray juveniles carried by currents from warmer seas.

There are five native jellyfish species which inhabit the waters around the UK: Moon, Compass, Lion's mane, Barrel and Blue. The Portuguese Man O'War and By-the-wind-sailor, are not true jellyfish but are closely related to the jellyfish family and occasionally appear in waters off the coast. Larger numbers of jellyfish are often observed during late the spring/early summer months in response to inshore plankton blooms. Their numbers are considered to be increasing as they benefit from warming waters associated with climate change and a reduction in predators and competitors as a result of fishing. Generally, large numbers of jellyfish washed up on beaches are due to strong currents or storm events. These should be avoided as some species may still sting even when dead.

What to do if you come across other live stranded marine animals

- Contact DAERA Marine Wildlife Team 028 905 69421 or Marine.Wildlife@daera-ni.gov.uk. Alternately contact Environmental Crime 0800 80 70 60.

- Do not put the animal back into the sea without advice from the DAERA Marine Wildlife Team or a vet.
- Basking shark - if the animal is alive place wet seaweed or clothing over it and pour water over its head (gills) to keep it wet and oxygenated.
- Leatherback turtle – if apparently uninjured this can be carefully dragged back to sea. Enlist the help of others to pull the shell (do not pull the flippers). Do not drag the animal over rocks.
- Hard-shelled turtles (Loggerhead, Kemp’s ridley, green and hawksbill) – should not be returned to the sea. Wrap the animal in wet clothing or seaweed keeping the nostrils clear. If the animal is inactive raise the back end of the shell so it is resting at approximately 30° to drain the lungs. The only feasible option for the recovery of hard shelled turtles is to arrange transport to Exploris for rehabilitation and possible repatriation.

Response to dead stranded animal

If you come across a dead marine animal (whale, dolphin, porpoise, seal, shark or marine turtle) contact DAERA Marine Wildlife Team on 028 905 69421 or Marine.Wildlife@daera-ni.gov.uk. Please provide information on location, species, size, condition and any photographs if possible.

For further information:

DAERA Marine Conservation and Reporting Team

Klondyke Building

Gasworks Business Park

Belfast

BT7 2JA

Tel: 028 905 69757

Email: Marine.Wildlife@daera-ni.gov.uk

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