



Pêches et Océans
Canada

Fisheries and Oceans
Canada

MARINE MAMMAL RESPONSE PROGRAM

SARA Incidents for 2015



Canada[!]

In 2015, there were a total of 814 reported incidents involving 1,070 animals. Of the total number of incidents reported there were 410 responses. Often incidents reported are for sightings of animals (no response required but information is collected) or are repeat reports for the same incident (each call that comes in is recorded to show the level of activity of the hotlines) which is why the number of responses is different from the number of reports received. Of the total number of incidents reported, 237 were incidents involving SARA species. Out of the 237 incidents reported involving SARA species, 161 of those incidents were responded to. Often incidents reported are for sightings of animals (for which no response is required but information is recorded) or are repeat reports for the same incident which is why the number of responses is different from the number reported.

The types of incidents included: entanglements, close vessel approaches, harassment, collisions, live strandings, injured / sick, sightings / free swimming, dead (beached and floating), distress, shooting, and animals interacting with the public.

The types of responses included: freeing entangled whales and pinnipeds, collecting samples and performing necropsies on dead animals, reuniting stranded animals with their pods, responding to harassment calls, refloating live beached animals, monitoring sick animals, monitoring close approaches by vessels, and warming cold stunned sea turtles.

Of all the incidents there are a few worthy of note:

- Three dead Fin Whales washed ashore in Pacific Region on the same beach, all were necropsied to try and determine cause of death.
- A dead Killer whale calf discovered in Pacific Region that was necropsied was found to be from the Alaskan transient population.
- In July, a North Atlantic Right whale off the coast of Cape Breton was freed from snow crab gear by the Whale Release and Strandings Group of Newfoundland. The whale was identified as “White Cloud” a catalogued whale (#3120) known to researchers in Canada and the US.
- Two Leatherback Sea Turtles were reported as released gear free by fishermen in Newfoundland. Another Leatherback stranded and was relocated to deeper waters by the Whale Release and Strandings Group of Newfoundland.
- A Cuvier’s beaked whale (live swimming) and a True’s beaked whale (dead stranded) were positively identified in Newfoundland. These are the first records of these two species in Newfoundland waters which is at the edge of their northward range.
- A solitary social beluga took up residence in Grates Cove, Newfoundland during the fall of 2015. Its presence in the area generated a lot of public interest and concern from Fisheries Officers for the animal’s safety. Samples were taken to determine its origin.

Incident Numbers by Region

Please Note: Often incidents reported are for sightings of animals (no response required but information is collected) and/or are repeat reports for the same incident (each call that comes in is recorded to show the level of activity of the hotlines) which is why the number of responses is different from the number of reports received.

Pacific:

There were a total of 483 incidents reported and 215 responses performed. Of the response performed 96 were for SARA listed species.

Quebec:

There were a total of 114 incidents reported and 76 responses performed. Of the responses performed, 27 were for SARA listed species.

Gulf:

There were a total of 104 incidents reported and 55 responses performed. Of the responses performed, 4 were for SARA listed species.

Maritimes:

There were a total of 71 incidents reported and 40 responses performed. Of the responses performed, 17 were for SARA listed species.

Newfoundland & Labrador:

There were a total of 42 incidents reported and 24 responses performed. Of the responses performed, 17 were for SARA listed species.

Disentanglement Training

In 2015, the Department's Conservation and Protection branch supported the training of Fisheries Officers in basic cetacean disentanglement responder support training in all regions. Paul Cottrell the Departmental lead in disentanglements for Pacific Region led the sessions based on curriculum developed in conjunction with the IWC Global Whale Entanglement Response Network. Assistance was provided in the delivery of these training sessions from regional external partner organizations that lead responses for marine animals and can provide species, cultural and geographic expertise. These organizations include the Whale Release and Strandings Group and the Marine Animal Response Society.

Disturbance / Harassment

Disturbance and harassment of marine mammals continues to be problematic for Conservation and Protection officers due to the lack of regulatory clarity and backing. Efforts have been made to educate the public with respect to what activities disturb and harass marine mammals but without regulatory backing enforcement remains. Proposed amendments to the Marine Mammal Regulations would help address part of the problem by

defining disturbance and identifying vessel approach distances. In addition, the amendments would also introduce mandatory reporting of accidental contact which would allow regional response networks assist in gear retrieve and the documentation of high entanglement risk and vessel strike areas.