

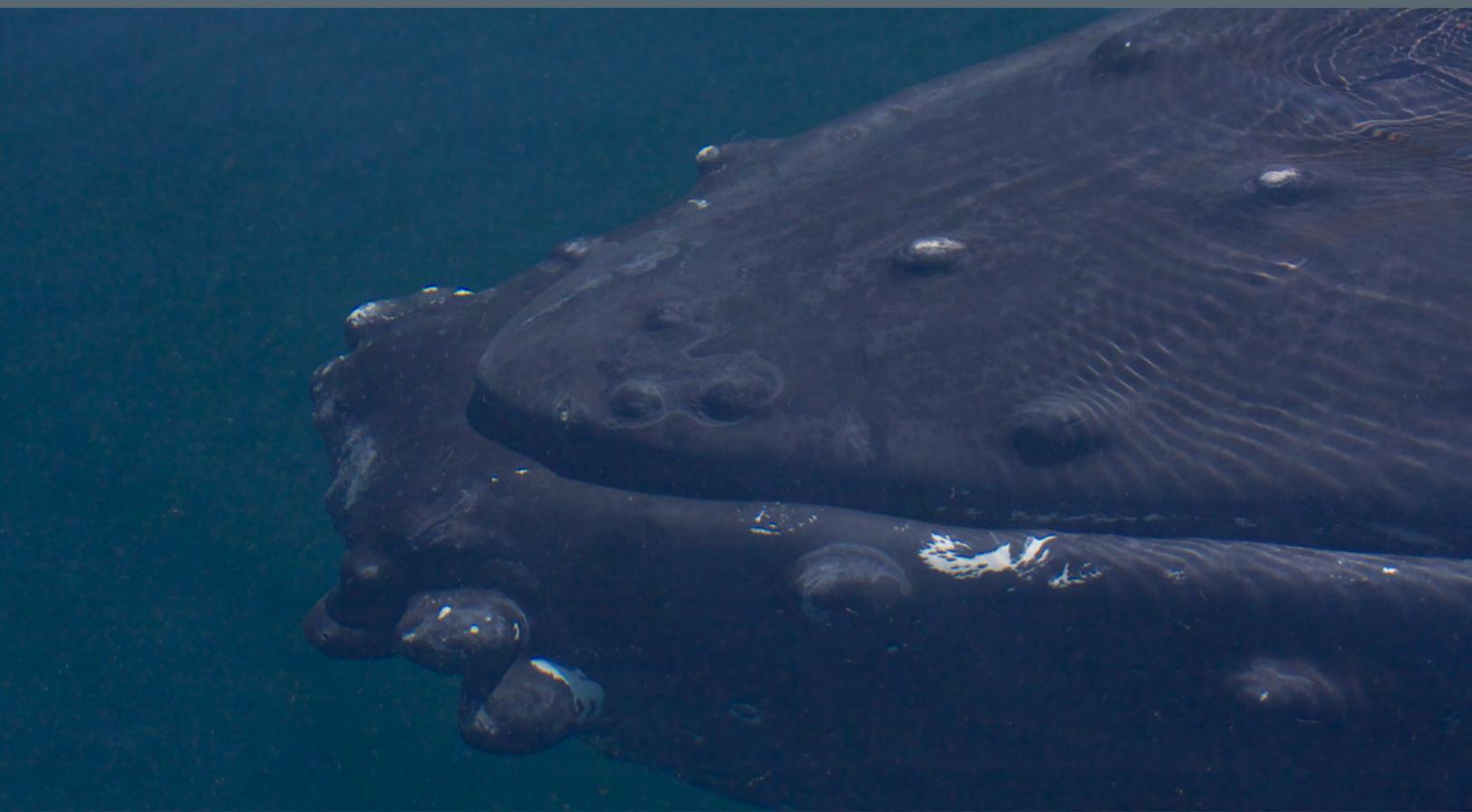


Pêches et Océans
Canada

Fisheries and Oceans
Canada

MARINE MAMMAL RESPONSE PROGRAM

SARA Incidents for 2017



Canada[!]

In 2017, there were a total of 1,254 reported incidents involving 1,371 animals. Of the total number of incidents reported there were 516 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, 310 were incidents involving SARA species (42 incidents were listed as an unknown species; therefore, the number of incidents involving SARA species could be higher). Out of the 310 incidents reported involving SARA species, 261 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 reported and responded to, there are a few worthy of note:

- A solitary juvenile beluga was first reported in the Nipisiguit River on June 2. By June 7 it appeared clear that low water levels prevented him from leaving the area. An operation was mounted on June 16 where the beluga was removed from the river, taken to the airport in an enclosed trailer, loaded into a charter plane, flown to Riviere du Loup, QC, then loaded onto pontoons at the Cacouna pier and taken out and released close to a group of other belugas from the St. Lawrence population. The beluga was tagged with a tracking device with showed significant movement (338 km) before it stopped communicating a week later.
- May 23, a Sea Lion Pulled a four year old girl into the water at Steveston dock. Signs and public education programs have since been initiated by DFO to educate the public on the dangers of feeding wild marine mammals.
- A blue whale was first sighted on April 9th (reported April 10th) approximately 40 nm south of Sherbrooke. It was resighted about 13 nm South East of Sambro on April 21 by DND. They thought it was a minke and only 7m long. A response was made with help from Coast Guard and a skin sample was obtained. Tangly whales confirmed it was the same whale reported near Port aux Basque, NL on March 23, 2017, the resighted on April 28th off of Polluck Point. It beached itself at Andrew's Head, East Berlin on May 2. The whale was moved from there and was taken to the necropsy location on May 11th. Necropsy completed May 12-14th.

Incidents that involved non-listed species:

- Report of a dead whale off Henry Island. Estimated to be about 35 feet long. Had rope on it with a yellow plastic buoy. Appeared to be an abrasion mark cutting across its ventral grooves. Nets were wrapped around the tail. Numerous shark bites.
- Report of an entangled humpback whale (species not confirmed) in the end line of a 36 lobster trap trawl. Whale was estimated to be approximately 40-50 feet long. It was bobbing at the surface and did not seem to be struggling to reach the surface. After a delay of a couple hours, DFO provided permission to attempt a disentanglement. Unfortunately, by this point conditions were no longer favourable and a decision was made to wait until the following morning. Fisherman returned to the entangled whale on the morning of Sept 19th to find the whale and about 10 of his 30 traps gone.

Photo credit: Gregory Smith (cover)

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 690 incidents reported and 332 responses performed. Of those, 192 were for SARA listed species.

Quebec:

There were a total of 300 incidents reported and 84 responses performed. Of the responses performed, 39 were for SARA listed species.

Gulf:

There were a total of 147 incidents reported and 23 responses performed. Of the responses performed, 19 were for SARA listed species.

Maritimes:

There were a total of 61 incidents reported and 25 responses performed. Of the responses performed, 3 were for SARA listed species.

Newfoundland & Labrador:

There were a total of 56 incidents reported and 52 responses performed. Of the responses performed, 8 were for SARA listed species.

NARW in the Gulf

In 2017, a large number of whales had moved from the historically confined summer feeding area in the Bay of Fundy to feed over a much broader range of the Gulf of St. Lawrence and Estuary. We had seen a higher than expected loss of individuals from the population of NARWs in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. The concentration of NARW in the Gulf of St. Lawrence and the Estuary is unprecedented. Over the summer of 2017, approximately 112 individuals, of an estimated population of 500, were seen in the area as opposed to the usual average of 10 whales in the area.

Should a similar situation arise in the future, DFO will continue to make the best available use of in-season management measures such as Variation Orders to address increasing risks as they become apparent. Information gathered through Science research activities will be used to inform pre-season adjustments to the timing and location of fisheries like the snow crab to reduce the likelihood of gear-whale conflicts.

In addition, gear configurations and potential modifications will need to be considered in collaboration with industry. These could include modifications of how the gear is set and whether different configurations may mitigate entanglement, along with reviewing soak times and the number of pots per line. Other gear modifications to reduce the likelihood of entanglement will also be considered, in cooperation with industry.

Whale Review

In November 2016, the Government of Canada announced a \$1.5 billion investment in the Oceans Protection Plan. This is a national initiative to improve marine safety and protect Canada's marine environment, including addressing threats to marine mammals in Canadian waters. As part of the plan, Fisheries and Oceans Canada was asked to conduct a science-based review of the effectiveness of the current management and recovery actions for 3 endangered whales, which are the North Atlantic Right Whale, St. Lawrence Estuary Beluga and Southern Resident Killer Whale.

DFO scientists have completed a review of current recovery activities for each of these 3 whales. They've assessed whether actions to date have been effective at reducing the threats. They have also identified areas for immediate improvement in recovery efforts and priorities for new or enhanced action efforts. Summer of 2017, the Government of Canada engaged stakeholders, First Nations and the public on how we can work together to best implement recovery actions for these whales. The scientific assessment, alongside the feedback we receive during engagement, will inform further discussions and action planning for enhanced recovery efforts for these whale populations. A What Was Heard report on the science based review is available on the DFO website.

The Government is also seeking to strengthen the Marine Mammal Regulations and has begun work on a number of initiatives in accordance with the 2018 Budget announcement to recover and protect SRKW, NARW and SLEB.