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MARINE MAMMAL RESPONSE PROGRAM

Incident Report for
2019-20



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Marine Mammal Response Program: Annual Report 2019-20

Overview

Between April 2019 and March 2020, there were a total of **1,331** reported incidents involving over **1,854** animals. Of the total number of incidents reported there were **1,074** responses. Of the total number of incidents reported, **454** were incidents involving Species At Risk (SARA). (Several incidents were listed as an unidentifiable species; therefore, the number of incidents involving SARA species could be higher). Responses occurred for **399** of the **454** incidents reported involving SARA species. There are multiple reasons why a response to a report may not be required or may not be possible, e.g. duplicate reports of the same incident, no option for safe response, etc.

The types of incidents included: entanglements, close vessel approaches, harassment, collisions, live strandings, injured /sick, sightings/free swimming, dead (beached and floating), distressed, shootings, 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, a few have been highlighted by our response partners:

- Whale Release and Strandings (WRS) based out of Newfoundland and Labrador, received over 25 reports over the course of the summer of a particular solitary and social beluga hanging around tour boat operations in Witless Bay. Therefore, members from WRS travelled to Witless Bay to educate the public and document the health of the beluga over the course of 2.5 months. Unfortunately, on September 2, 2019, this beluga was struck by a boat and severely injured. WRS continued to monitor the beluga until the animal was no longer seen in the area.
- Through the Marine Animal Response Society (MARS), an entangled humpback whale was reported off Brier Island on December 2, 2019. The Center for Coastal Studies (CCS) Humpback Whale Studies Program had tentatively identified the whale as Kansas. The whale was anchored in 20-trap trawl and two balloons. Under the guidance of Campobello Whale Rescue Team, the Fundy East team managed to cut one wrap and removed one balloon, probably off the right flipper. However, the tail was anchored. The owner of the trawl managed to part the line freeing the whale's tail from the anchoring lines. After the line parted, the whale did tail slaps and started "snaking". At that point, the whale had been lightened up and was no longer anchored and began blowing more normally. It was believed the remaining gear was found on December 6, 2019, and that the whale is now gear free.
- On June 21, 2019, Campobello Whale Rescue Team (CWRT) responded to a live North Atlantic right whale entangled in fishing gear. The animal had fishing line exiting the left side of its mouth extending to a wrap around the tail – "hog-tied". CWRT had attempted to attach a satellite tag twice but both times they were unsuccessful. CWRT cut the line between the mouth and tail and the line was able to leave the mouth. The response took three days to deal with this partial disentanglement but with the trailing line cut and apparent heavy weight released, the whale began swimming more easily, "arching" higher.
- On September 9, 2019, the Bamfield Marine Science Center called the British Columbia Marine Mammal Response network (BCMRRN) to report an entangled humpback calf. The call was on behalf of one of their researchers who located the cow and calf situated on the backside of Seppings Island. The calf appeared to have a "float" wrapped around its tail, and it wasn't able to dive. Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO)'s Pacific Region Marine Mammal Coordinator Paul Cottrell was on the scene with fishery officers from DFO's Conservation and Protection. They discovered multiple wraps of line around the calf's tail stock and around its head. The marine mammal rescue team was able to remove all gear from the animal, and multiple "floats" were removed and kept for identification purpose.

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 **714** incidents reported and **714** responses performed. Of those, **333** were for SARA listed species.

Quebec:

There were a total of 282 incidents reported and 182 responses performed. Of the responses performed, 31 were for SARA listed species.

Gulf:

There were a total of **105** incidents reported and **51** responses performed. Of the responses performed, **11** were for SARA listed species.

Maritimes:

There were a total of **152** incidents reported and **60** responses performed. Of the responses performed, **3** were for SARA listed species.

Newfoundland & Labrador:

There were a total of **78** incidents reported and **67** responses performed. Of the responses performed, **21** were for SARA listed species.