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MARINE MAMMAL RESPONSE PROGRAM

SARA Incidents for 2016



Canada[!]

In 2016, there were a total of 845 reported incidents involving 965 animals. Of the total number of incidents reported there were 411 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, 259 were incidents involving SARA species (in the Pacific region, 58 incidents were listed as an unknown species; therefore, the number of incidents involving SARA species could be higher). Out of the 259 incidents reported involving SARA species, 155 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:

- In the Pacific region, there were 18 reports of seals found with their heads missing.
- A fishery officer from the Gulf stumbled upon a photo of what appeared to be a dead killer whale on Facebook. She contacted the person for more information. Fishery officers tried on June 20 to reach the whale on foot; it was located at the bottom of a 40' drop, therefore not accessible on foot. On June 21, another crew went out to photograph and take samples. Upon arrival it was discovered that it was in fact a minke and not a killer whale.
- Snow crab harvesters from Red Bank observed and took grainy video of a pod of killer whales travelling in an area referred to as the Dumping off Miscou. This video was shared with Jack Lawson who said the male may be a match to a male that has been observed in the Gulf of St-Lawrence in 1994.
- A Sowerby's beaked whale was first found on a beach on the Quebec side of a bay. Unsuccessful efforts in that province were undertaken to locate the whale, it had been carried away by the tide. The Whale landed in Campbellton, NB; once found, arrangements were made to have the whale removed from the beach and transported to Atlantic Veterinary College for necropsy.
- Campobello Whale Rescue Team responded to an entangled North Atlantic right whale in the Bay of Fundy at 44 36.7, -66 27.2. The whale was moving slowly to the east (0.5-1 knots), diving 3-4 minutes at a time. It had numerous wraps (~15) of green 5/8 polyblend line around the head, both pectoral flippers and the body. The responders could not tell if there were any around the peduncle. The lines around the head appeared to be fairly tight, possibly cutting in a bit. Those around the fins and body did not appear to be as tight. There were also two orange polly buoys (one larger than the other) that were cinched quite closely to the head. Responders could not see if there was any trailing gear nor did they see any netting. They could not tell if there was weight on the lines but it is possible because the whale was moving so slowly. They thought this entanglement may be a couple weeks to months old due the presence of an increased cyamid load on the head. The whale was eventually disentangled. It was identified as the 6 year old male "Franklin Delano Roosevelt".
- Responders in Newfoundland came to the aid of an entrapped Humpback whale that they described was "acting wildly". They were able to get most of gear off and the whale was released with some gear remaining through the mouth. They were able to get the tail and fins free. The responders tried to remove more gear but were unable to catch up to the fast swimming whale.

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 508 incidents reported and 240 responses performed. Of those, 121 were for SARA listed species.

Quebec:

There were a total of 140 incidents reported and 69 responses performed. Of the responses performed, 18 were for SARA listed species.

Gulf:

There were a total of 72 incidents reported and 32 responses performed. Of the responses performed, 4 were for SARA listed species.

Maritimes:

There were a total of 36 incidents reported and 25 responses performed. Of the responses performed, 5 were for SARA listed species.

Newfoundland & Labrador:

There were a total of 81 incidents reported and 45 responses performed. Of the responses performed, 7 were for SARA listed species.

Education activities

Stickers advertising the assistance program were sent to all Harbour Authorities, all DFO regions, 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 helped organize the sixth “Whale Day” at Cape Spear 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 kids in the St. John’s area with the “bones, barnacles and baleen” theme.

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 intro-

duce 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.