Marine Mammal Stranding First Aid

Photo: Julia Cumes/AP Photo

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Initial Assessment

- Is the animal/s alive?
- Is the animal/s dead?
- How many animals are there?
- Do they appear to have any other injuries or entanglements?
Under the Australian state and federal legislation it is an offence to handle, harass, or possess any marine mammal (or part of) without permits.

**Call Local NPWS office (or licensed NGO)**
- Take note of exact location – where is the nearest access point rescue teams can use?
- Condition of the animal
- Give as much information to Duty Rangers as possible
Live Cetaceans

- Ensure your safety – your safety is of primary importance
  - If the animal is in the water – be extra careful! – it is best left to the experts
  - Do not spent more than 20mins in the water at a time (generally 20mins in, 40mins out)
  - For your personal health:
    - Hydrate
    - Be sunwise (ensure you have hat & sun protective clothing)
    - Fatigue
    - Sunburn
    - Hypothermia
    - Injuries
    - Eye strain
    - Do not handle the animal if you are intoxicated or under the influence of drugs!
Stranding for the animal is a great stress! It’s important not to make it worse for the animal!

- Do not attempt to push, roll or carry the animal back into the water
  - Animals have stranded for a reason – leave it to the incident controller to make an assessment whether the animal is in a state to be returned to sea or in ill health and requires rehabilitation or euthanasia

Director of SOS Rescate de Fauna Marina rehabilitation center, Mr Richard Tesore - See more at: http://cutepics.org/baby-dolphin-rescue#sthash.nTmJyMyM.dpuf
• Make sure that the blowhole is clear (but do not put your face over the blowhole or obstruct)
  ○ You can clear obstructions from the blowhole as the animal breaths
• Do not obstruct or touch the animals eyes
• Do not pull the animal by it’s pectoral fins or dorsal fin
  ○ Specialist equipment will be used by trained personnel to transport the animal
• Stay away from the tail fluke
  ○ The animal will often thrash or throw it’s powerful tail which can cause injury
• Position the head of the animal towards land (not sea)
• Make sure the pectoral fins are not under pressure or clear of debris – strain can be relieved by digging around them and filling the hole with water which can assist to keep the animal cool

• If the animal is on the beach, it is important that they are kept cool and moist
  ○ Place wet towels on the animal or gently pour water over it ensuring that the blowhole, eyes, flippers and fins are kept clear (don’t pour water down the blow hole or cover with a towel!)
  ○ Make sure there is minimal sand on towels and in water being poured over animal
• Make sure that all bystanders remain clear from the animal (3-4 people assisting the animal is enough)
• If the animal is on it’s side, or not upright, you can gently roll it over ensuring that the pectoral fins are tucked flush against it’s body.
- Keep noise to a minimum
- Keep all dogs away from the animal
Monitor

- It is helpful to rescue teams to know if the condition of the animal has changed
  - You can record:
    - Record respiratory rates
    - Movements/behaviour
    - Take photographs
    - Identify species
    - Sex
    - Potential age
    - Any evident scars, injuries, entanglement
Follow Instructions

- Once rescue teams arrive, follow their instructions
Dead Cetaceans

- If the animal is dead you can make note of the following which will assist NPWS and researchers:
  - Date
  - Location
  - Time
  - Type of cetacean
  - Condition (is it decomposed, fresh, etc.)
  - Is there signs of injury, entanglement, disease?
  - Sex
  - Age (adult/calf)
  - Take photographs!
Notes on Pinnipeds

- It is not unusual for a pinniped (or seal) to haul out on beaches
- Don’t touch the animal! Stay 30m away from the animal and call regional NPWS office (this is for your safety)
- Do not attempt to pick the animal up or transport!