

Cetacean Bycatch Evidence Evaluation Project (BEEP)

Evaluation of external evidence of bycatch in stranded small cetaceans

Introduction

Background

At present, diagnosing bycatch in cetaceans from observations made on the beach lacks credibility among the scientific community. Consequently bycatch statistics are based solely on animals that undergo a post-mortem examination by a veterinary pathologist. As a result, a lot of valuable information from animals that are not subject to post-mortem is lost or ignored and the current data do not reflect the true scale of bycatch mortalities.

Objective of BEEP

To establish credibility and acceptance of this method of diagnosing bycatch.

The study

The aims of the project are to:

- Develop a protocol for collecting standardised recording of external signs on animals on the beach, regardless of their origin.
- Test the data to establish which signs can be uniformly recorded by a wide range of observers, including many with limited training and experience.
- Test the observed signs statistically and in particular, compare these with post-mortem results (where these are available) to identify which patterns are reliable indicators of bycatch or of other causes of death.
- Publish the finally agreed method in cooperation with veterinary pathologists to establish a firm basis for the future credibility and value of this kind of diagnosis.

The project will exploit the wide availability of digital photography to allow independent checking of the records and assessments made on the beach. Ideally, this study will bring together observers and data from several countries to establish the general validity of the method.

Data collection

Each observer will have:

- 1) The Reference Manual, which:
 - explains what data are required and how to collect them
 - provides some photographs as reference standards and others purely for illustration
 - gives health and safety advice.
- 2) The Recording Form:
 - on which observations will be recorded. This has the same headings as the Reference Manual.

Sending us your records

Note: Photos should not be reduced in size or edited.

By post

Send the completed BEEP Assessment Form, a CD or DVD of your images, plus any net samples together with the standard Cetacean Strandings Record Form, to:

Jeff & Jan Loveridge, Higher Trewardreva, Trewardreva, Falmouth TR11 5QB

By email

If you prefer to email your images rather than burn a CD or DVD, please send them to:

records@cwtstrandings.org