



PAMBANSANG PUNONGHIMPILAN TANOD BAYBAYIN NG PILIPINAS

(National Headquarters Philippine Coast Guard)

139 25th Street, Port Area

1018 Manila

NHPCG/CGVET

21 March 2023

STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURE

NUMBER.....04-23

RESPONSE OF PCG PERSONNEL TO STRANDED MARINE MAMMALS

I. AUTHORITY:

- A. Republic Act 9993 - Philippine Coast Guard Law of 2009 and its Implementing Rules and Regulations.
- B. Republic Act 9147 - An act providing for the Conservation and Protection of Wildlife Resources and their Habitats, Appropriating Funds therefore and for other purposes.
- C. Republic Act 10654 – An act to Prevent, Deter and Eliminate illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing, amending Republic Act No. 8550, otherwise known as “The Philippine Fisheries Code of 1998”, and for other purposes.

II. REFERENCES:

- A. Marine Mammal Stranding Response Manual. 2nd Ed. A guide for the Rescue, Rehabilitation, and Release of Stranded Cetaceans and Dugongs in the Philippines
- B. Philippine Aquatic Wildlife Rescue and Response Manual Series: Marine Mammals

III. PURPOSE:

This Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) shall prescribe the guidelines and procedures for PCG personnel in response to stranded marine mammals within the Philippine maritime jurisdiction.

IV. SCOPE:

This SOP shall cover the guidelines and procedures for the rescue, release and proper disposition of stranded and dead marine mammals for PCG personnel as responders on site.

V. DEFINITION OF TERMS:

- a) **Blowhole** - similar to the nostril; single for toothed whales and one pair for baleen whales.
- b) **Cetacean** - any member of an entirely aquatic group of mammals commonly known as whales, dolphins and porpoises.
- c) **Dorsal fin** - single fin on the back of whales absent in dugongs and some cetaceans.
- d) **Dugong** - is a marine mammal. It is one of four living species of the order *Sirenia*, which also includes three species of manatees. It is the only living representative of the once-diverse family *Dugongidae*.
- e) **Flukes** - refers to the tail of the marine mammal.
- f) **Grave** - denoting symptoms of a serious or dangerous situation.
- g) **Pectoral fin** - flipper closest to the head of the animal.
- h) **Pupil** - the black opening in the center of the eye.
- i) **Release** – action when a marine mammal is brought back to its natural habitat.
- j) **Rescue** - to free or deliver from confinement or danger.
- k) **Response** - to act on a report of a marine wildlife incident.
- l) **Stranding** - is an event in which an individual or group of marine mammals washes ashore after death or is found on the beach or shore in a helpless situation unable to return to the water on their ability.

VI. GENERAL POLICY:

- 1) When a report is received about stranded marine mammals (cetacean or dugong), it is usually an emergency case, it can be dead or distressed. Every response begins with a report, and gathering of information from the informant. This includes the type of animal (ex. dolphin, whale, or dugong), status (ex. dead or alive), location, informant's name and contact details.
- 2) Immediately coordinate the response with local authorities, particularly the coastal barangay officials, the local government unit, and competent authorities like the Department of Agriculture – Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (DA-BFAR) if the stranded marine mammal is cetacean (ex. dolphin



and whale) and Department of Environment and Natural Resources – Protected Areas and Wildlife Bureau (DENR-PAWB) in the case of Dugong.

- 3) Create a response team composed of an Officer-in-charge (OIC) or Petty Officer-in-charge (POIC) as team leader and ideally three (3) members performing different functions such as crowd controller, data collector, and documenter. If a Coast Guard Veterinary Officer is available in the area of responsibility, immediately include him/her in the response team.
- 4) The response team must have an available response kit ready and accessible (Annex A).
- 5) Upon arrival at the location, the assigned crowd controller will cordon off the animal and the vicinity area of the responder. Ensure that there is enough space or work area for the response team to do their tasks. Accessibility to the sea without blockage is important and necessary for stranded animals.
- 6) As a law enforcer, implement minimum cordon distances. Don't allow the crowd to interfere in the work area, this is to avoid touching or riding the animal, taking pictures within the cordoned-off area, or getting animal parts for any other purposes.

VII. PROCEDURES:

A. Stranding Incident: Response procedures for **LIVE MARINE MAMMAL**

- 1) Assess the animal and the environment.
 - a. Do not immediately approach the animal, instead prepare a plan and observe.
 - b. Approach the animal slowly, calmly and cautiously. If possible, avoid loud noises, abrupt movements or bright lights.
 - c. Check the location and position of the animal relative to the water edge, houses and infrastructure, both in water and on land, and the presence of reef/mangrove/intertidal flats.
 - d. Keep clear of the fluke (tail) and mouth.
 - e. Check the sea conditions such as waves, currents and tides.
- 2) Check vital signs.

The vital signs need to be checked to properly assess the wellness of the animal. In the case of mass stranding, the individual animal requires different procedures.



a. Breathing

- If the animal is alive, it will exhale through the blowhole/s or nostril forcefully with a strong sound.
- If breathing is weak and non-continuous, it is an indication that there is something wrong with the animal.
- Increased or faster breathing indicates that the animal is stressed.
- **PROTECT THE BLOWHOLE.** This is the most important rule in stranding responses. The blowhole is the nostril on top of the head.

b. Blinking reflex of the eye.

- Put light pressure near or around the eye (not directly on the eye itself). If the animal blinks, it is an indication that the animal is responsive to stimuli.

c. Muscle movement

- Look out for movement of the jaw, flippers, flukes, and muscle contractions in the body.

If any of the reflexes are present, the animal is alive. If it is not observed, the animal might be dead. If the animal is alive, assess the severity of its condition, it can be classified as **alert, weakly responsive, non-responsive, or grave.**

3) Other considerations

- PROTECT and SECURE PECTORAL FINS.** These fins serve as their flippers to properly swim. Damage or dislocations may compromise the animal's ability to steer through the water. If the animal is out of the water, digging holes under the fins helps relieve the pressure on these fins.
- Check the body condition. A more rounded body indicates that the animal is in 'Good Condition.' A depression or sunken parts of the body near the dorsal fin indicates malnutrition and disease.
- Check for wounds. Skin abrasions like scratches, shallow fresh wounds or scars are not lethal and sometimes even normal to the animal and should not require treatment.
- Common rounded-shaped wounds are caused by the bite of a cookie-cutter shark.



- e. **KEEP THE SKIN MOIST.** Wet sheets, towels or any available clothing must be used in covering the animal. Keep the material moist by periodically dousing or spraying with water.
- 4) Release of the Animal
 - a. After a thorough assessment, if the animal is found to be well, then it is fit for release.
 - b. Alert and responsive animals need little assistance and would swim away quickly, probably the animal is just disoriented.
 - c. A weak, non-responsive or grave animal needs immediate veterinary attention. Call the competent authority immediately. Do not release the animal.
 - d. Release efforts should always consider the welfare of the animal and the responder.
 - e. Re-stranding must always be noted. Dolphins and whales may re-strand if ever it is unable to find their proper orientation, depth or access to the open sea.
- B. Stranding Incident: Response procedures for **DEAD MARINE MAMMAL**
- 1) Assess the animal
 - a. After a thorough assessment and finding out the absence of vital signs, immediately report to the competent authority. If ever they are present at the scene, assist them in the examination and carcass disposal.
 - b. The only competent authority to declare that the animal is dead is BFAR and DENR personnel.
 - 2) Carcass Disposal
 - a. After the competent authority examined the dead carcass, PCG personnel shall assist in the disposal of the carcass.
 - b. The burial site or location must not be in an area where it could be a hazard to communities, including scavenging wildlife and domestic animals.
 - 3) Methods of Disposal
 - a. Burial
 - After identifying the burial site, choose a dry area and dig a 2-meter-deep hole big enough for the carcass to fit.
 - Make sure to put a mark or identification of the burial site.



- There are some burial facilities identified for large marine vertebrates located in Dagupan, Pangasinan; Sta. Lucia, Puerto Princesa, Palawan; Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Center (SEAFDEC) Office, Iloilo; and in the BFAR Office in Bicol.

b. Disposal at sea

- Another option is to tow the carcass out to the sea. This should be done far enough from the shore to prevent it from being washed ashore again.
- Check the depths of the area where the animal will be left, at least 100 meters in depth.
- The carcass should never be disposed of in a reef area.

VIII. DUTIES and RESPONSIBILITIES

A. District Commander

- 1) Issue a directive for the creation of the Marine Mammal Stranding Response Team (SRT);
- 2) Shall monitor and supervise the implementation of this SOP in response to marine mammal stranding; and
- 3) Shall submit reports to the National Headquarters, PCG (Attn: CG-3).

B. Marine Mammal Stranding Response Team (SRT)

The composition of SRT shall include but not limited to personnel from CG Field Veterinary Unit, Marine Environmental Protection Unit, and Coast Guard District/Station/Sub-Station and one must act as:

- 1) Team Leader (TL) – shall act as the overall coordinator of the response team; coordinate with BFAR/DENR, local officials, government agencies, and experts for technical assistance or logistical requirements; verify or validate the veracity of the information; responsible for necessary actions to be taken depending on the need or situation on-scene; and submit report with the attached Marine Mammal Stranding Response Form (Annex B) to the CG District.
- 2) Data Collector – The data collector shall handle the distressed animal, checking vital signs and other relevant data based on the provided Marine Mammal Stranding Form.
- 3) Documenter – shall be responsible for recording data obtained from the data collector, and taking photos and videos on-site.

4) Crowd Controller – shall be in charge of cordoning the periphery of the stranding site. However, the crowd controller must not alienate the crowd, as they can be utilized as additional manpower if needed.

C. Commanding Officer, Field Veterinary Unit (FVU)

1) Provide first aid or other veterinary-related concerns. This includes proper monitoring and supervising of the health status and welfare of stranded marine mammals;

2) Shall coordinate with BFAR or DENR for training, workshop and other related activities concerning marine mammal stranding.

3) Conduct Troop Information and Education (TI&E) to CG personnel especially those assigned at CG Stations and Sub-Stations and stakeholders regarding appropriate response if there is a marine mammal stranding in their respective area of responsibility.

IX. INTER-AGENCY COORDINATION

The PCG, through the CG Veterinary Service, shall establish a coordination mechanism with the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR), Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) and other non-government agencies like the Philippine Marine Mammal Stranding Network (PMMSN) for inter-agency collaborations, response to marine mammal stranding, training acquisition and other related matters concerning marine mammals.

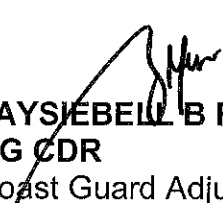
X. EFFECTIVITY

This SOP shall take effect upon approval. All issuances which are inconsistent herewith are hereby repealed, amended and modified accordingly.

BY COMMAND OF CG ADMIRAL ABU:

OFFICIAL:

TITO ALVIN G ANDAL
CG COMMO
Chief of Coast Guard Staff


JAYSIEBELL B FERRER
CG CDR
Coast Guard Adjutant

Annexes: 1) *General Equipment and Supply*
2) *Marine Mammal Stranding Response Form*

Annex A

**MARINE MAMMAL STRANDING RESPONSE
GENERAL EQUIPMENT AND SUPPLIES**

The following are the minimum items to be taken during marine mammal stranding response. Other materials not taken by the team would have to be sourced on-site. Each team member should also bring their own personal needs.

| EQUIPMENT/SUPPLIES | PURPOSE/DESCRIPTION |
|--|---|
| Flashlight | Used as a source of artificial light that is most useful at night, and as a tool to check eye reflex. A waterproof flashlight with extra batteries is recommended. |
| Cordon/Rope | Used to cordon-off the crowd, allowing the rescue team to perform its task without interference from onlookers. |
| Stretcher | Made up of a tarpaulin, canvas, or any soft, smooth but sturdy material strong enough to carry the weight of the animal during transport. Must be built with a handle. |
| Umbrella/Canvas/Tarpaulin/Tent | Any material that can provide shade to minimize stress to the animal and protect the rescue team from the sun's heat or rain. |
| Bucket, and water dipper (tabo) | To hold water. |
| Sponge and large towels | To keep the animal wet and protected from exposure to sunlight. |
| Gloves | To protect the responders when handling the animal. |
| First Aid Kit | For personnel used in case of injury or emergency. |
| Communication equipment | To facilitate coordination and exchange of information. A mobile phone or handheld radio is required. |
| Notebook or ballpen | Used for recording data or any other purposes. |
| OTHER IMPORTANT PERSONAL KIT | |
| Team Member Personal Kit | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Drinking water - Food - Extra cash - Pair of slippers - Hat - Extra clothes - Towel - Toiletries - Rash guard |

Annex B

MARINE MAMMAL STRANDING RESPONSE FORM

Date: _____ Time: _____

Coast Guard District: _____

Coast Guard Station: _____

Coast Guard Sub-Station: _____

Coast Guard Unit/Office: _____

Source of Report: _____

Contact Details of the Informant: _____

Address: _____

Stranding location (*Sitio, Barangay, Municipality, City, Province*):

GPS Coordinates : _____

Other information:

| Environmental Condition (<i>check appropriate box</i>) | | | | | | | | | |
|--|--|-------------------|--|------------|--|------------|--|-------|--|
| Topography | | Weather Condition | | | | Sea states | | Tides | |
| Sandy Beach | | Sunny | | Rainy | | Calm | | High | |
| Rocky Beach | | Overcast | | Heavy rain | | Rough | | Low | |
| | | | | | | | | | |

Animal Information:

| Stranding Code (<i>Check appropriate box</i>) | | | Stranding Type (<i>Check appropriate box</i>) | | |
|---|----------------------------------|--|---|--|--|
| 1 | Alive | | Single animal | | |
| 2 | Freshly Dead | | Mother and Calf | | |
| 3 | Decomposed but organs are intact | | Multiple Stranding | | |

| | | | | |
|---|--|--|----------------------------|--|
| 4 | Advance decomposition | | Multiple Species Stranding | |
| 5 | Skeletal remains | | Others: | |
| 6 | Destroyed (<i>burned or slaughtered</i>) | | | |

Sex

Male Female Undetermined

Animal Condition

Alert Weakly responsive Non-responsive Grave

Body Condition

Good Moderate Thin Emaciated

Physical Condition of the animal (*describe the animal*)

Draw marks and lesion