

**APPENDIX E**  
**CETACEAN STRANDING REPORT**

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# E Cetacean Stranding Report

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## E.1 What is a Stranded Marine Mammal?

When a live or dead marine mammal swims or floats onto shore and becomes “beached” or incapable of returning to sea, the event is termed a “stranding” (Geraci et al., 1999; Perrin and Geraci, 2002; Geraci and Lounsbury, 2005; NMFS, 2007). The legal definition for a stranding within the United States is that “ (A) a marine mammal is dead and is (i) on a beach or shore of the United States; or (ii) in waters under the jurisdiction of the United States (including any navigable waters); or (B) a marine mammal is alive and is (i) on a beach or shore of the United States and is unable to return to the water; (ii) on a beach or shore of the United States and, although able to return to the water, is in need of apparent medical attention; or (iii) in the waters under the jurisdiction of the United States (including any navigable waters), but is unable to return to its natural habitat under its own power or without assistance.” (16 United States Code [U.S.C.] 1421h).

The majority of animals that strand are dead or moribund (NMFS, 2007). For those that are alive, human intervention through medical aid and/or guidance seaward may be required for the animal to return to the sea. If unable to return to sea, rehabilitation at an appropriate facility may be determined as the best opportunity for animal survival.

Three general categories can be used to describe strandings: single, mass, and unusual mortality events. The most frequent type of stranding is a single stranding, which involves only one animal (or a mother/calf pair) (NMFS, 2007).

Mass stranding involves two or more marine mammals of the same species other than a mother/calf pair (Wilkinson, 1991), and may span one or more days and range over several miles (Simmonds and Lopez-Jurado, 1991; Frantzis, 1998; Walsh et al., 2001; Freitas, 2004). In North America, only a few species typically strand in large groups of 15 or more and include sperm whales, pilot whales, false killer whales, Atlantic white-sided dolphins, white-beaked dolphins, and rough-toothed dolphins (Odell, 1987, Walsh et al., 2001). Some species, such as pilot whales, false-killer whales, and melon-headed whales occasionally strand in groups of 50 to 150 or more (Geraci et al., 1999). All of these normally pelagic off-shore species are highly sociable and usually infrequently encountered in coastal waters. Species that commonly strand in smaller numbers include pygmy killer whales, common dolphins, bottlenose dolphins, Pacific white-sided dolphin, Fraser’s dolphins, gray whale and humpback whale (West Coast only), harbor porpoise, Cuvier’s beaked whales, California sea lions, and harbor seals (Mazzuca et al., 1999, Norman et al., 2004, Geraci and Lounsbury, 2005).

Unusual mortality events (UMEs) can be a series of single strandings or mass strandings, or unexpected mortalities (i.e., die-offs) that occur under unusual circumstances (Dierauf and Gulland, 2001; Harwood, 2002; Gulland, 2006; NMFS, 2007). These events may be interrelated:

for instance, at-sea die-offs lead to increased stranding frequency over a short period of time, generally within one to two months. As published by the NMFS, revised criteria for defining a UME include (Hohn et al., 2006b):

- (1) A marked increase in the magnitude or a marked change in the nature of morbidity, mortality, or strandings when compared with prior records.
- (2) A temporal change in morbidity, mortality, or strandings is occurring.
- (3) A spatial change in morbidity, mortality, or strandings is occurring.
- (4) The species, age, or sex composition of the affected animals is different than that of animals that are normally affected.
- (5) Affected animals exhibit similar or unusual pathologic findings, behavior patterns, clinical signs, or general physical condition (e.g., blubber thickness).
- (6) Potentially significant morbidity, mortality, or stranding is observed in species, stocks or populations that are particularly vulnerable (e.g., listed as depleted, threatened or endangered or declining). For example, stranding of three or four right whales may be cause for great concern whereas stranding of a similar number of fin whales may not.
- (7) Morbidity is observed concurrent with or as part of an unexplained continual decline of a marine mammal population, stock, or species.

Unusual environmental conditions are probably responsible for most UMEs and marine mammal die-offs (Vidal and Gallo-Reynoso, 1996; Geraci et al., 1999; Walsh et al., 2001; Gulland and Hall, 2005). Table E-1 provides an overview of documented UMEs attributable to natural causes over the past four decades worldwide.

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## **E.2 United States Stranding Response Organization**

Stranding events provide scientists and resource managers information not available from limited at-sea surveys, and may be the only way to learn key biological information about certain species such as distribution, seasonal occurrence, and health (Rankin, 1953; Moore et al., 2004; Geraci and Lounsbury, 2005). Necropsies are useful in attempting to determine a reason for the stranding, and are performed on stranded animals when the situation and resources allow.

Table E-1

**Marine Mammal Unusual Mortality Events Attributed to or  
Suspected from Natural Causes 1978-2005**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Species and number</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Cause</b>
1978	Hawaiian monk seals (50)	NW Hawaiian Islands	Ciguatoxin and maitotoxin
1979-80	Harbor seals (400)	Massachusetts	Influenza A
1982	Harbor seals	Massachusetts	Influenza A
1983	Multiple pinniped species	West coast of US, Galapagos	El Nino
1984	California sea lions (226)	California	Leptospirosis
1987	Sea otters (34)	Alaska	Saxitoxin
1987	Humpback whales (14)	Massachusetts	Saxitoxin
1987-88	Bottlenose dolphins (645)	Eastern seaboard (New Jersey to Florida)	Morbillivirus; Brevetoxin
1987-88	Baikal seals (80-100,000)	Lake Baikal, Russia	Canine distemper virus
1988	Harbor seals (approx 18,000)	Northern Europe	Phocine distemper virus
1990	Striped dolphins (550)	Mediterranean Sea	Dolphin morbillivirus
1990	Bottlenose dolphins (146)	Gulf Coast, US	Unknown; unusual skin lesions observed
1994	Bottlenose dolphins (72)	Texas	Morbillivirus
1995	California sea lions (222)	California	Leptospirosis
1996	Florida manatees (149)	West Coast Florida	Brevetoxin
1996	Bottlenose dolphins (30)	Mississippi	Unknown; Coincident with algal bloom
1997	Mediterranean monk seals (150)	Western Sahara, Africa	Harmful algal bloom; Morbillivirus
1997-98	California sea lions (100s)	California	El Nino
1998	California sea lions (70)	California	Domoic acid
1998	Hooker's sea lions (60% of pups)	New Zealand	Unknown, bacteria likely
1999	Harbor porpoises	Maine to North Carolina	Oceanographic factors suggested
2000	Caspian seals (10,000)	Caspian Sea	Canine distemper virus
1999-2000	Bottlenose dolphins (115)	Panhandle of Florida	Brevetoxin
1999-2001	Gray whales (651)	Canada, US West Coast, Mexico	Unknown; starvation involved
2000	California sea lions (178)	California	Leptospirosis
2000	California sea lions (184)	California	Domoic acid
2000	Harbor seals (26)	California	Unknown; Viral pneumonia suspected
2001	Bottlenose dolphins (35)	Florida	Unknown
2001	Harp seals (453)	Maine to Massachusetts	Unknown
2001	Hawaiian monk seals (11)	NW Hawaiian Islands	Malnutrition

Table E-1 (cont'd)

**Marine Mammal Unusual Mortality Events Attributed to or  
Suspected from Natural Causes 1978-2005**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Species and number</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Cause</b>
2002	Harbor seals (approx. 25,000)	Northern Europe	Phocine distemper virus
2002	Multispecies (common dolphins, California sea lions, sea otters) (approx. 500)	California	Domoic acid
2002	Hooker's sea lions	New Zealand	Pneumonia
2002	Florida manatee	West Coast of Florida	Brevetoxin
2003	Multispecies (common dolphins, California sea lions, sea otters) (approx. 500)	California	Domoic acid
2003	Beluga whales (20)	Alaska	Ecological factors
2003	Sea otters	California	Ecological factors
2003	Large whales (16 humpback, 1 fine, 1 minke, 1 pilot, 2 unknown)	Maine	Unknown; Saxitoxin and domoic acid detected in 2 of 3 humpbacks
2003-2004	Harbor seals, minke whales	Gulf of Maine	Unknown
2003	Florida manatees (96)	West Coast of Florida	Brevetoxin
2004	Bottlenose dolphins (107)	Florida Panhandle	Brevetoxin
2004	Small cetaceans (67)	Virginia	Unknown
2004	Small cetaceans	North Carolina	Unknown
2004	California sea lions (405)	Canada, US West Coast	Leptospirosis
2003	Florida manatees (96)	West Coast of Florida	Brevetoxin
2005	Florida manatees, bottlenose dolphins (ongoing Dec 2005)	West Coast of Florida	Brevetoxin
2005	Harbor porpoises	North Carolina	Unknown
2005	California sea lions; Northern fur seals	California	Domoic acid
2005	Large whales	Eastern North Atlantic	Domoic acid suspected
2005-2006	Bottlenose dolphins	Florida	Brevetoxin suspected
Note: Data from Gulland and Hall (2007): citations for each event contained in Gulland and Hall (2007).			

In 1992, Congress passed the Marine Mammal Health and Stranding Response Act (MMHSRA) which authorized the Marine Mammal Health and Stranding Response Program (MMHSRP) under authority of the Department of Commerce, National Marine Fisheries Service. The MMHSRP was created because of public concern over marine mammal mortalities. Its objectives are twofold: to formalize the response process and to focus efforts being initiated by numerous local stranding organizations.

Major elements of the MMHSRP include the following (NMFS, 2007):

- National Marine Mammal Stranding Network
- Marine Mammal UME Program
- National Marine Mammal Tissue Bank (NMMTB) and Quality Assurance Program
- Marine Mammal Health Biomonitoring, Research, and Development
- Marine Mammal Disentanglement Network
- John H. Prescott Marine Mammal Rescue Assistance Grant Program (a.k.a. the Prescott Grant Program)
- Information Management and Dissemination.

The United States has a well-organized network in coastal states to respond to marine mammal strandings. Overseen by the NMFS, the National Marine Mammal Stranding Network is comprised of smaller organizations manned by professionals and volunteers from nonprofit organizations, aquaria, universities, and state and local governments trained in stranding response. Through a National Coordinator and six regional coordinators, NMFS authorizes and oversees stranding response activities and provides specialized training for the network.

The following is a list of NMFS Regions and Associated States and Territories:

- NMFS Northeast Region- ME, NH, MA, RI, CT, NY, NJ, PA, DE, MD, VA
- NMFS Southeast Region- NC, SC, GA, FL, AL, MS, LA, TX, PR, VI
- NMFS Southwest Region- CA
- NMFS Northwest Region- OR, WA
- NMFS Alaska Region- AK
- NMFS Pacific Islands Region- HI, Guam, American Samoa, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI)

Stranding reporting and response efforts over time have been inconsistent, although effort and data quality within the United States have been improving within the last 20 years (NMFS, 2007). Given the historical inconsistency in response and reporting, however, interpretation of long-term trends in marine mammal stranding is difficult (NMFS, 2007). Nationwide, from 1995-2004, there were approximately 700-1500 cetacean strandings per year and between 2000-4600 pinniped strandings per year (NMFS, 2007). Detailed regional stranding information including most commonly stranded species can be found in Zimmerman (1991), Geraci and Lounsbury (2005), and NMFS (2007).

## E.3 Threats to Marine Mammals and Potential Causes for Stranding

Like any wildlife population, there are normal background mortality rates that influence marine mammal population dynamics, including starvation, predation, aging, reproductive success, and disease (Geraci et al., 1999; Carretta et al., 2007). Strandings may be reflective of this natural cycle or, more recently, may be the result of anthropogenic sources (i.e., human impacts). Current science suggests that multiple factors, both natural and man-made, may be acting alone or in combination to cause a marine mammal to strand (Geraci et al., 1999; Culik, 2002; Perrin and Geraci, 2002; Hoelzel, 2003; Geraci and Lounsbury, 2005; NRC, 2006). While post-stranding data collection and necropsies of dead animals are attempted in an effort to find a possible cause for the stranding, it is often difficult to pinpoint exactly one factor that is responsible for any given stranding. An animal suffering from one ailment becomes susceptible to various other influences because of its weakened condition, making it difficult to determine a primary cause. In many stranding cases, scientists never learn the exact reason for the stranding.

Specific threats and potential stranding causes may include the following:

- Natural causes
  - Disease
  - Natural toxins
  - Weather and climatic influences
  - Navigation errors
  - Social cohesion
  - Predation
  
- Anthropogenic (human influenced) causes
  - Fisheries interaction
  - Vessel strike
  - Pollution and ingestion
  - Noise

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### E.3.1 Natural Threats/Stranding Causes

#### E.3.1.1 Overview

Significant natural causes of mortality, die-offs, and stranding discussed below include disease and parasitism; marine neurotoxins from algae; navigation errors that lead to inadvertent stranding; and climatic influences that impact the distribution and abundance of potential food resources (i.e., starvation). Other natural mortality not discussed in detail includes predation by other species such as sharks (Cockcroft et al., 1989; Heithaus, 2001), killer whales (Constantine et al., 1998; Guinet et al., 2000; Pitman et al., 2001), and some species of pinniped (Hiruki et al., 1999; Robinson et al., 1999).

### E.3.1.2 Disease

Like other mammals, marine mammals frequently suffer from a variety of diseases of viral, bacterial, and fungal origin (Visser et al., 1991; Dunn et al., 2001; Harwood, 2002). Gulland and Hall (2005; 2007) provide a more detailed summary of individual and population effects of marine mammal diseases.

Microparasites such as bacteria, viruses, and other microorganisms are commonly found in marine mammal habitats and usually pose little threat to a healthy animal (Geraci et al., 1999). For example, long-finned pilot whales that inhabit the waters off of the northeastern coast of the United States are carriers of the morbillivirus, yet have grown resistant to its usually lethal effects (Geraci et al., 1999). Since the 1980s, however, virus infections have been strongly associated with marine mammal die-offs (Domingo et al., 1992; Geraci and Lounsbury, 2005). Morbillivirus is the most significant identified marine mammal virus and suppresses a host's immune system and increases risk of secondary infection (Harwood, 2002). The largest bottlenose dolphin die-off associated with morbillivirus occurred in 1987, when hundreds of coastal dolphins succumbed to the virus (Lipscomb et al., 1994). A bottlenose dolphin UME in 1993 and 1994 was caused by morbillivirus. Die-offs ranged from northwestern Florida to Texas, with an increased number of deaths as it spread (NMFS, 2007). A 2004 UME in Florida was also associated with dolphin morbillivirus (NMFS, 2004). Influenza A was responsible for the first reported mass mortality in the U.S., occurring along the coast of New England in 1979-1980 (Geraci et al., 1999; Harwood, 2002). Canine distemper virus has been responsible for large scale pinniped mortalities and die-offs (Grachev et al., 1989; Kennedy et al., 2000; Gulland and Hall, 2005), while a bacteria, *Leptospira pomona*, is responsible for periodic die-offs in California sea lions about every four years (Gulland et al., 1996; Gulland and Hall, 2005). It is difficult to determine whether microparasites commonly act as a primary pathogen, or whether they show up as a secondary infection in an already weakened animal (Geraci et al., 1999). Most marine mammal die-offs from infectious disease in the last 25 years, however, have had viruses associated with them (Simmonds and Mayer, 1997; Geraci et al., 1999; Harwood, 2002).

Macroparasites are usually large parasitic organisms and include lungworms, trematodes (parasitic flatworms), and protozoans (Geraci and St.Aubin, 1987; Geraci et al., 1999). Marine mammals can carry many different types, and have shown a robust tolerance for sizeable infestation unless compromised by illness, injury, or starvation (Morimitsu et al., 1987; Dailey et al., 1991; Geraci et al., 1999). *Nasitrema spp.*, a usually benign trematode found in the head sinuses of cetaceans (Geraci et al., 1999), can cause brain damage if it migrates (Ridgway and Dailey, 1972). As a result, this worm is one of the few directly linked to stranding in the cetaceans (Dailey and Walker, 1978; Geraci et al., 1999).

Non-infectious disease, such as congenital bone pathology of the vertebral column (osteomyelitis, spondylosis deformans, and ankylosing spondylitis), has been described in several species of cetacean (Paterson, 1984; Alexander et al., 1989; Kompanje, 1995; Sweeny et al., 2005). In humans, bone pathology such as ankylosing spondylitis, can impair mobility and increase vulnerability to further spinal trauma (Resnick and Niwayama, 2002). Bone pathology

has been found in cases of single strandings (Paterson, 1984; Kompanje, 1995), and also in cetaceans prone to mass stranding (Sweeny et al., 2005), possibly acting as a contributing or causal influence in both types of events.

### E.3.1.3 Naturally Occurring Marine Neurotoxins

Some single cell marine algae common in coastal waters, such as dinoflagellates and diatoms, produce toxic compounds that can accumulate (termed bioaccumulation) in the flesh and organs of fish and invertebrates (Geraci et al., 1999; Harwood, 2002). Marine mammals become exposed to these compounds when they eat prey contaminated by these naturally produced toxins, (Van Dolah, 2005). Figure E-1 shows U.S. animal mortalities from 1997-2006 resulting from toxins produced during harmful algal blooms.



Figure E-1

#### Animal Mortalities from harmful algal blooms within the United States from 1997-2006.

(Source: Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute (WHO)  
<http://www.whoi.edu/redtide/HABdistribution/HABmap.html>)

In the Gulf of Mexico and mid- to southern Atlantic states, “red tides,” a form of harmful algal bloom, are created by a dinoflagellate (*Karenia brevis*). *K. brevis* is found throughout the Gulf of Mexico and sometimes along the Atlantic coast (Van Dolah, 2005; NMFS, 2007; Goldstein et al. 2008)). It produces a neurotoxin known as brevetoxin. Brevetoxin has been associated with several marine mammal UMEs within this area (Geraci, 1989; Van Dolah et al., 2003; NMFS, 2004; Flewelling et al., 2005; Van Dolah, 2005; NMFS, 2007). On the U.S. West Coast and in

the northeast Atlantic, several species of diatoms produce a toxin called domoic acid which has also been linked to marine mammal strandings (Geraci et al., 1999; Van Dolah et al., 2003; Greig et al., 2005; Van Dolah, 2005; Brodie et al., 2006; NMFS, 2007). Other algal toxins associated with marine mammal strandings include saxitoxins and ciguatoxins and are summarized by Van Dolah (2005).

### **E.3.1.4 Weather Events and Climate Influences**

Severe storms, hurricanes, typhoons, and prolonged temperature extremes may lead to localized marine mammal strandings (Geraci et al., 1999; Walsh et al., 2001). Hurricanes may have been responsible for mass strandings of pygmy killer whales in the British Virgin Islands and Gervais' beaked whales in North Carolina (Mignucci-Giannoni et al., 2000; Norman and Mead, 2001). Storms in 1982-1983 along the California coast led to deaths of 2,000 northern elephant seal pups (Le Boeuf and Reiter, 1991). Ice movement along southern Newfoundland has forced groups of blue whales and white-beaked dolphins ashore (Sergeant, 1982). Seasonal oceanographic conditions in terms of weather, frontal systems, and local currents may also play a role in stranding (Walker et al., 2005).

The effect of large scale climatic changes to the world's oceans and how these changes impact marine mammals and influence strandings is difficult to quantify given the broad spatial and temporal scales involved, and the cryptic movement patterns of marine mammals (Moore, 2005; Learmonth et al., 2006). The most immediate, although indirect, effect is decreased prey availability during unusual conditions. This, in turn, results in increased search effort required by marine mammals (Crocker et al., 2006) and potential starvation if foraging is not successful. Stranding may follow either as a direct result of starvation or as an indirect result of a weakened and stressed state (e.g., succumbing to disease) (Selzer and Payne, 1988; Geraci et al., 1999; Moore, 2005; Learmonth et al., 2006; Weise et al., 2006).

Two recent papers examined potential influences of climate fluctuation on stranding events in southern Australia, including Tasmania, an area with a history of more than 20 mass strandings since the 1920s (Evans et al., 2005; Bradshaw et al., 2006). These authors note that patterns in animal migration, survival, fecundity, population size, and strandings will revolve around the availability and distribution of food resources. In southern Australia, movement of nutrient-rich waters pushed closer to shore by periodic meridional winds (occurring about every 12 to 14 years) may be responsible for bringing marine mammals closer to land, thus increasing the probability of stranding (Bradshaw et al., 2006). The papers conclude, however, that while an overarching model can be helpful for providing insight into the prediction of strandings, the particular reasons for each one are likely to be quite varied.

### **E.3.1.5 Navigational Error**

*Geomagnetism*- It has been hypothesized that, like some land animals, marine mammals may be able to orient to the Earth's magnetic field as a navigational cue, and that areas of local magnetic anomalies may influence strandings (Bauer et al., 1985; Klinowska, 1985; Kirschvink et al.,

1986; Klinowska, 1986; Walker et al., 1992; Wartzok and Ketten, 1999). In a plot of live stranding positions in Great Britain with magnetic field maps, Klinowska (1985, 1986) observed an association between live stranding positions and magnetic field levels. In all cases, live strandings occurred at locations where magnetic minima, or lows in the magnetic fields, intersect the coastline. Kirschvink et al. (1986) plotted stranding locations on a map of magnetic data for the East Coast of the U.S., and were able to develop associations between stranding sites and locations where magnetic minima intersected the coast. The authors concluded that there were highly significant tendencies for cetaceans to beach themselves near these magnetic minima and coastal intersections. The results supported the hypothesis that cetaceans may have a magnetic sensory system similar to other migratory animals, and that marine magnetic topography and patterns may influence long-distance movements (Kirschvink et al., 1986). Walker et al. (1992) examined fin whale swim patterns off the northeastern U.S. continental shelf, and reported that migrating animals aligned with lows in the gradient of magnetic intensity. While a similar pattern between magnetic features and marine mammal strandings at New Zealand stranding sites was not seen (Brabyn and Frew, 1994), mass strandings in Hawaii typically were found to occur within a narrow range of magnetic anomalies (Mazzuca et al., 1999).

*Echolocation Disruption in Shallow Water-* Some researchers believe stranding may result from reductions in the effectiveness of echolocation within shallow water, especially with the pelagic species of odontocetes who may be less familiar with coastline (Dudok van Heel, 1966; Chambers and James, 2005). For an odontocete, echoes from echolocation signals contain important information on the location and identity of underwater objects and the shoreline. The authors postulate that the gradual slope of a beach may present difficulties to the navigational systems of some cetaceans, since it is common for live strandings to occur along beaches with shallow, sandy gradients (Brabyn and McLean, 1992; Mazzuca et al., 1999; Maldini et al., 2005; Walker et al., 2005). A contributing factor to echolocation interference in turbulent, shallow water is the presence of microbubbles from the interaction of wind, breaking waves, and currents. Additionally, ocean water near the shoreline can have an increased turbidity (e.g., floating sand or silt, particulate plant matter, etc.) due to the run-off of fresh water into the ocean, either from rainfall or from freshwater outflows (e.g., rivers and creeks). Collectively, these factors can reduce and scatter the sound energy within echolocation signals and reduce the perceptibility of returning echoes of interest.

### **E.3.1.6 Social cohesion**

Many pelagic species such as sperm whales, pilot whales, melon-head whales, and false killer whales, and some dolphins occur in large groups with strong social bonds between individuals. When one or more animals strand due to any number of causative events, then the entire pod may follow suit out of social cohesion (Geraci et al., 1999; Conner, 2000; Perrin and Geraci, 2002; NMFS, 2007).

### E.3.2 Anthropogenic Threats/Stranding causes

#### E.3.2.1 Overview

With the exception of historic whaling in the 19th and early part of the 20th century, during the past few decades there has been an increase in marine mammal mortalities associated with a variety of human activities (Geraci et al., 1999; NMFS, 2007). These include fisheries interactions (bycatch and directed catch), pollution (marine debris, toxic compounds), habitat modification (degradation, prey reduction), vessel strikes (Laist et al., 2001), and gunshots. Figure E-2 shows potential worldwide risk to small-toothed cetaceans by source.

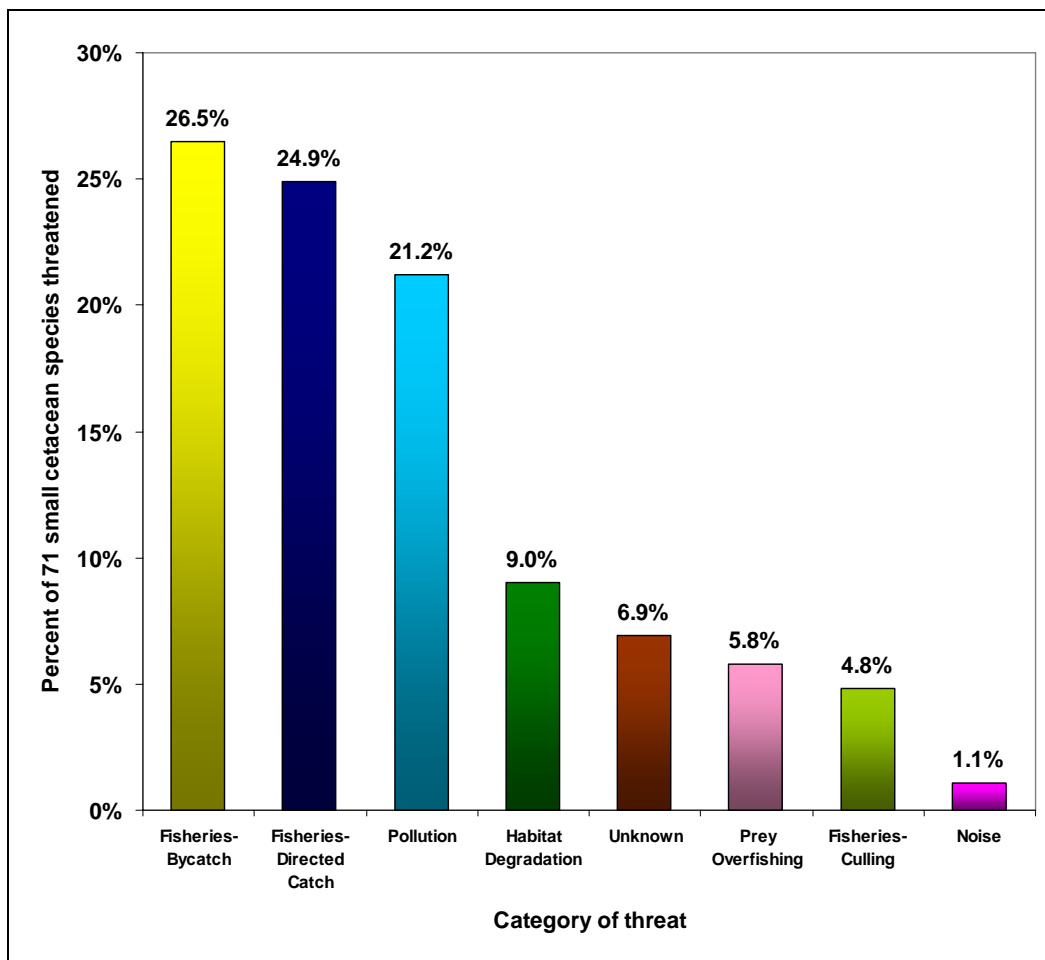


Figure E-2

Human threats to world wide small cetacean populations.

(Source: Culik 2002)

### E.3.2.2 Fisheries Interaction: By-Catch and Entanglement

The incidental catch of marine mammals in commercial fisheries is a significant threat to the survival and recovery of many populations of marine mammals (Geraci et al., 1999; Baird, 2002; Culik, 2002; Carretta et al., 2004; Geraci and Lounsbury, 2005; NMFS, 2007). Interactions with fisheries and entanglement in discarded or lost gear continue to be a major factor in their deaths worldwide (Geraci et al., 1999; Nieri et al., 1999; Geraci and Lounsbury, 2005; Read et al., 2006; Zeeber et al., 2006).

*By-catch-* By-catch is the catching of non-target species within a given fishing operation and can include non-commercially used invertebrates, fish, sea turtles, birds, and marine mammals (NRC, 2006). Read et al. (2006) estimated the magnitude of marine mammal by-catch in U.S. and global fisheries. Data for the United States was obtained from fisheries observer programs, reports of entangled stranded animals, and fishery logbooks. In U.S. fisheries, the mean annual by-catch of marine mammals between 1990 and 1999 was 6,215 animals (SE = +/- 448). Eighty-four percent of cetacean by-catch occurred in gill-net fisheries, with dolphins and porpoises constituting the majority of these. The authors noted a 40 percent decline in marine mammal by-catch in the years 1995 through 1999 compared to 1990 through 1994, and suggested that effective conservation measures implemented during the later time period played a significant role.

To estimate annual global by-catch, Read et al. (2006) used U.S. vessel by-catch data from 1990-1994 and extrapolated to the world's vessels for the same time period. They calculated an estimate of 653,365 of marine mammals caught annually around the world, again with most occurring in gill-net fisheries. The authors concluded that with global marine mammal by-catch likely to be in the hundreds of thousands every year, by-catch in fisheries will be the single greatest threat to many marine mammal populations around the world.

*Entanglement-* Active and discarded fishing gear pose a major threat to marine mammals. Entanglement can lead to drowning and/or impairment in activities such as diving, swimming, feeding and breeding. Stranded marine mammals frequently exhibit signs of previous fishery interaction, such as scarring or gear still attached to their bodies, and the cause of death for many stranded marine mammals is often attributed to such interactions (Baird and Gorgone, 2005; Geraci et al., 1999; Campagna et al., 2007). Because marine mammals that die or are injured in fisheries may not wash ashore and not all animals that do wash ashore exhibit clear signs of interactions, stranding data probably underestimate fishery-related mortality and serious injury (NMFS, 2005a).

Various accounts of fishery-related stranding deaths have been reported over the last several decades along the U.S. coast. From 1993 through 2003, 1,105 harbor porpoises were reported stranded from Maine to North Carolina, many of which had cuts and body damage suggestive of net entanglement (NMFS, 2005d). In 1999, it was possible to determine that the cause of death for 38 of the stranded porpoises was from fishery interactions (NMFS, 2005d). An estimated 78 baleen whales were killed annually in the offshore southern California/Oregon drift gillnet

fishery during the 1980s (Heyning and Lewis 1990). From 1998-2005, based on observer records, five fin whales (CA/OR/WA stock), 12 humpback whales (ENP stock), and six sperm whales (CA/OR/WA stock) were either seriously injured or killed in fisheries off the mainland U.S. West Coast (California Marine Mammal Stranding Network Database 2006).

### **E.3.2.3 Ship Strike**

Marine mammals sometimes come into physical contact with oceangoing vessels, which can lead to injury or death and cause subsequent stranding (Laist et al. 2001; Geraci and Lounsbury, 2005; de Stephanis and Urquiola, 2006). These events, termed “ship strikes,” occur when an animal at the surface is struck directly by a vessel, when a surfacing animal hits the bottom of a vessel, or when an animal just below the surface is cut by a vessel’s propeller. The severity of injuries typically depends on the size and speed of the vessel (Knowlton and Kraus, 2001; Laist et al., 2001; Vanderlaan and Taggart 2007).

The growth in civilian commercial ports has been accompanied by a large increase in commercial vessel traffic. This has, in turn, expanded the threat of ship strikes to marine mammals in recent decades. The Final Report of the NOAA International Symposium on “Shipping Noise and Marine Mammals: A Forum for Science, Management, and Technology” stated that the worldwide commercial fleet has grown from approximately 30,000 vessels in 1950 to over 85,000 vessels in 1998 (NRC, 2003; Southall, 2005). From 1985 to 1999, world seaborne trade doubled to 5 billion tons and currently includes 90 percent of the total world trade, with container shipping movements representing the largest volume of seaborne trade. Current statistics support the prediction that the international shipping fleet will continue to grow at current or greater rates. Vessel densities along existing coastal routes are expected to increase both domestically and internationally. New routes are expected to develop as new ports are opened and existing ports are expanded. Vessel propulsion systems are also advancing toward faster ships operating in higher sea states for lower operating costs; and container ships are expected to become larger along certain routes (Southall, 2005). Given the expected increase in vessel density and operational capability, a concomitant increase in marine mammal ship strikes can be expected.

### **E.3.2.4 Ingestion of Marine Debris and Exposure to Toxins**

Debris in the marine environment poses a health hazard for marine mammals. Not only can they become entangled, but animals may ingest plastics and other debris that are indigestible, and which can contribute to illness or death through irritation or blockage of the stomach and intestines (Tarpley and Marwitz, 1993, Whitaker et al., 1994; Gorzelany, 1998; Secchi and Zarzur, 1999; Baird and Hooker, 2000). There are certain species of cetaceans (e.g. sperm whales) that are more likely to eat trash, especially plastics (Geraci et al., 1999; Evans et al., 2003; Whitehead, 2003).

For example, between 1990 and October 1998, 215 pygmy sperm whales stranded along the U.S. Atlantic coast from New York through the Florida Keys (NMFS, 2005a). Remains of plastic

bags and other debris were found in the stomachs of 13 of these animals. In 1987, a pair of latex examination gloves was retrieved from the stomach of a stranded dwarf sperm whale (NMFS, 2005c). In one pygmy sperm whale found stranded in 2002, red plastic debris was found in the stomach along with squid beaks (NMFS, 2005a). Oliveira de Meirelles and Barros (2007) documented mortality to a rough-toothed dolphin in Brazil from plastic debris ingestion.

Chemical contaminants like organochlorines (PCBs, DDT) and heavy metals may pose potential health risks to marine mammals (Das et al., 2003; De Guise et al., 2003). Despite having been banned for decades, levels of organochlorines are still high in marine mammal tissue samples taken along U.S. coasts (Hickie et al. 2007; Krahn et al. 2007; NMFS, 2007a). These compounds are long-lasting, reside in marine mammal adipose tissues (especially in the blubber), and can be toxic. Contaminant levels in odontocetes (piscivorous animals) have been reported to be one to two orders of magnitude higher compared to mysticetes (planktivorous animals) (Borell, 1993; O'Shea and Brownell, 1994; O'Hara and Rice, 1996; O'Hara et al., 1999).

Chronic exposure to PCBs and/or DDT is immunosuppressive, as has been seen in bottlenose dolphins (Lahvis et al., 1995) and seals (*p. vitulina*) (Ross et al., 1996). Chronic exposure has been linked to infectious disease mortality in harbor porpoises stranded in the UK (Jepson et al., 1999; Jepson et al., 2005), carcinoma in California in sea lions (Ylitalo et al., 2005), and population reductions of Baltic seals (Bergman et al., 2001). High levels of PCBs in immature, pelagic dolphins has been observed (Struntz et al., 2004), raising concern about contaminant loads further offshore. Moderate levels of PCBs and chlorinated pesticides (such as DDT, DDE, and dieldrin) have been found in pilot whale blubber with bioaccumulation levels more similar in whales from the same stranding event than from animals of the same age or sex (NMFS, 2005b). Accumulation of heavy metals has also been documented in many cetaceans (Frodello and Marchand, 2001; Das et al., 2003; Wittnich et al., 2004), sometimes exceeding levels known to cause neurologic and immune system impairment in other mammals (Nielsen et al., 2000; Das et al., 2003; De Guise et al., 2003).

Other forms of habitat contamination and degradation may also play a role in marine mammal mortality and strandings. Some events caused by humans have direct and obvious effects on marine mammals, such as oil spills (Geraci et al., 1999). Oil spills can cause both short- and long-term medical problems for many marine mammal species through ingestion of tainted prey, coating of skin/fur, and adherence to oral and nasal cavities (Moeller, 2003). In most cases, the effects of contamination are likely to be indirect in nature; e.g. effects on prey species availability or an increase in disease susceptibility (Geraci et al., 1999).

### **E.3.2.5 Anthropogenic Sound**

There is evidence that underwater man-made sounds, such as explosions, drilling, construction, and certain types of sonar (Southall et al., 2006), may be a contributing factor in some stranding events. Marine mammals may respond both behaviorally and physiologically to anthropogenic sound exposure, (e.g., Richardson et al., 1995; Finneran et al., 2000; Finneran et al., 2003; Finneran et al., 2005); however, the range and magnitude of the behavioral response of marine

mammals to various sound sources is highly variable (Richardson et al., 1995) and appears to depend on the species involved, the experience of the animal with the sound source, the motivation of the animal (e.g., feeding, mating), and the context of the exposure.

Exposure to sonar signals has been postulated as being a specific cause of several stranding events. Given that it is likely that the frequency of certain sonar systems is within the range of hearing of many marine mammals, the consideration of sonar as a causative mechanism of stranding is warranted. In the following sections, specific stranding events that have been putatively linked to sonar operations are discussed.

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## E.4 Stranding Event Case Studies

Over the past two decades, several mass stranding events involving beaked whales have been documented. A review of historical data (mostly anecdotal) maintained by the Marine Mammal Program in the National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution reports 49 beaked whale mass stranding events between 1838 and 1999. The largest beaked whale mass stranding occurred in the 1870s in New Zealand when 28 Gray's beaked whales (*Mesoplodon grayi*) stranded. Blainsville's beaked whale (*Mesoplodon densirostris*) strandings are rare, and records show that they were involved in one mass stranding in 1989 in the Canary Islands. Cuvier's beaked whales (*Ziphius cavirostris*) are the most frequently reported beaked whale to strand, with at least 19 stranding events from 1804 through 2000 (DoC and DoN, 2001; Smithsonian Institution, 2000). While beaked whale strandings have occurred since the 1800s (Geraci and Lounsbury, 1993; Cox et al., 2006; Podesta et al., 2006), several mass strandings have been temporally and spatially associated with naval operations utilizing mid-frequency active (MFA) sonar (Simmonds and Lopez-Jurado, 1991; Frantzis, 1998; Jepson et al., 2003; Cox et al., 2006).

### E.4.1 Beaked Whale Case Studies

In the following sections, specific stranding events that have been putatively linked to potential sonar operations are discussed. These events represent a small overall number of animals over an 11 year period (40 animals) and not all worldwide beaked whale strandings can be linked to naval activity (ICES, 2005a; 2005b; Podesta et al., 2006). Four of the five events occurred during NATO exercises or events where DON presence was limited (Greece, Portugal, and Spain). One of the five events involved only DON ships (Bahamas). These events are given specific consideration in the case studies that follow.

Beaked whale stranding events associated with naval operations.

1996	May	Greece (NATO/US)
2000	March	Bahamas (US)
2000	May	Portugal, Madeira Islands (NATO/US)
2002	September	Spain, Canary Islands (NATO/US)
2006	January	Spain, Mediterranean Sea coast (NATO/US)

### **1996 Greece Beaked Whale Mass Stranding (May 12 – 13, 1996)**

**Description:** Twelve Cuvier's beaked whales (*Ziphius cavirostris*) stranded along a 38.2-km (20.6-NM) strand of the coast of the Kyparissiakos Gulf on May 12 and 13, 1996 (Frantzis, 1998). From May 11 through May 15, the NATO research vessel Alliance was conducting sonar tests with signals of 600 Hz and 3 kHz and root-mean-squared (rms) sound pressure levels (SPL) of 228 and 226 dB re: 1  $\mu$ Pa, respectively (D'Amico and Verboom, 1998; D'Spain et al., 2006). The timing and the location of the testing encompassed the time and location of the whale strandings (Frantzis, 1998).

**Findings:** Partial necropsies of eight of the animals were performed, including external assessments and the sampling of stomach contents. No abnormalities attributable to acoustic exposure were observed, but the stomach contents indicated that the whales were feeding on cephalods soon before the stranding event. No unusual environmental events before or during the stranding event could be identified (Frantzis, 1998).

**Conclusions:** The timing and spatial characteristics of this stranding event were atypical of stranding in Cuvier's beaked whale, particularly in this region of the world. No natural phenomenon that might contribute to the stranding event coincided in time with the mass stranding. Because of the rarity of mass strandings in the Greek Ionian Sea, the probability that the sonar tests and stranding coincided in time and location, while being independent of each other, was estimated as being extremely low (Frantzis, 1998). However, because information for the necropsies was incomplete and inconclusive, the cause of the stranding cannot be precisely determined.

### **2000 Bahamas Marine Mammal Mass Stranding (March 15-16, 2000)**

**Description:** Seventeen marine mammals comprised of nine Cuvier's beaked whales, three Blainville's beaked whales (*Mesoplodon densirostris*), two unidentified beaked whales, two minke whales (*Balaenoptera acutorostrata*), and one spotted dolphin (*Stenella frontalis*), stranded along the Northeast and Northwest Providence Channels of the Bahamas Islands on March 15-16, 2000 (Evans and England, 2001). The strandings occurred over a 36-hour period and coincided with DON use of mid-frequency active sonar within the channel. Navy ships were involved in tactical sonar exercises for approximately 16 hours on March 15. The ships, which operated the AN/SQS-53C and AN/SQS-56, moved through the channel while emitting sonar pings approximately every 24 seconds. The timing of pings was staggered between ships and average source levels of pings varied from a nominal 235 dB SPL (AN/SQS-53C) to 223 dB SPL (AN/SQS-56). The center frequency of pings was 3.3 kHz and 6.8 to 8.2 kHz, respectively.

Seven of the animals that stranded died, while ten animals were returned to the water alive. The animals known to have died included five Cuvier's beaked whales, one Blainville's beaked whale, and the single spotted dolphin. Six necropsies were performed and three of the six necropsied whales (one Cuvier's beaked whale, one Blainville's beaked whale, and the spotted dolphin) were fresh enough to permit identification of pathologies by computerized tomography

(CT). Tissues from the remaining three animals were in a state of advanced decomposition at the time of inspection.

**Findings:** All five necropsied beaked whales were in good body condition and did not show any signs of external trauma or disease. In the two best preserved whale specimens, hemorrhage was associated with the brain and hearing structures. Specifically, subarachnoid hemorrhage within the temporal region of the brain and intracochlear hemorrhages were noted. Similar findings of bloody effusions around the ears of two other moderately decomposed whales were consistent with the same observations in the freshest animals. In addition, three of the whales had small hemorrhages in their acoustic fats, which are fat bodies used in sound production and reception (i.e., fats of the lower jaw and the melon). The best-preserved whale demonstrated acute hemorrhage within the kidney, inflammation of the lung and lymph nodes, and congestion and mild hemorrhage in multiple other organs.

Other findings were consistent with stresses and injuries associated with the stranding process. These consisted of external scrapes, pulmonary edema and congestion. The spotted dolphin demonstrated poor body condition and evidence of a systemic debilitating disease. In addition, since the dolphin stranding site was isolated from the acoustic activities of Navy ships, it was determined that the dolphin stranding was unrelated to the presence of Navy active sonar.

**Conclusions:** The post-mortem analyses of stranded beaked whales led to the conclusion that the immediate cause of death resulted from overheating, cardiovascular collapse and stresses associated with being stranded on land. However, the presence of subarachnoid and intracochlear hemorrhages were believed to have occurred prior to stranding and were hypothesized as being related to an acoustic event. Passive acoustic monitoring records demonstrated that no large scale acoustic activity besides the Navy sonar exercise occurred in the times surrounding the stranding event. The mechanism by which sonar could have caused the observed traumas or caused the animals to strand was undetermined. The spotted dolphin was in overall poor condition for examination, but showed indications of long-term disease. No analysis of baleen whales (minke whale) was conducted.

### **2000 Madeira Island, Portugal Beaked Whale Strandings (May 10 – 14, 2000)**

**Description:** Three Cuvier's beaked whales stranded on two islands in the Madeira Archipelago, Portugal, from May 10–14, 2000 (Cox et al., 2006). A fourth animal was reported floating in the Madeiran waters by fishermen, but did not come ashore (no necropsy was performed on this animal) (Ketten, 2005). A joint NATO amphibious training exercise, named "Linked Seas 2000," which involved participants from 17 countries, took place in Portugal during May 2–15, 2000. The timing and location of the exercises overlapped with that of the stranding incident.

**Findings:** Two of the three whales were necropsied. Two heads were taken to be examined. One head was intact and examined grossly and by CT; the other was only grossly examined because it was partially flensed and had been seared from an attempt to dispose of the whale by fire (Ketten, 2005). No blunt trauma was observed in any of the whales. Consistent with prior CT

scans of beaked whales stranded in the Bahamas 2000 incident, one whale demonstrated subarachnoid and peribullar hemorrhage and blood within one of the brain ventricles. Post-cranially, the freshest whale demonstrated renal congestion and hemorrhage, which was also consistent with findings in the freshest specimens in the Bahamas incident.

**Conclusions:** The pattern of injury to the brain and auditory system were similar to those observed in the Bahamas strandings, as were the kidney lesions and hemorrhage and congestion in the lungs (Ketten, 2005). The similarities in pathology and stranding patterns between these two events suggested a similar causative mechanism. Although the details about whether or how sonar was used during “Linked Seas 2000” is unknown, the presence of naval activity within the region at the time of the strandings suggested a possible relationship to Navy activity.

### **2002 Canary Islands Beaked Whale Mass Stranding (24 September 2002)**

**Description:** On September 24, 2002, 14 beaked whales stranded on Fuerteventura and Lanzaote Islands in the Canary Islands (Jepson et al., 2003). Seven of the 14 whales died on the beach and the 7 were returned to the ocean. Four beaked whales were found stranded dead over the next three days either on the coast or floating offshore (Fernández et al., 2005). At the time of the strandings, an international naval exercise called Neo-Tapon, involving numerous surface warships and several submarines was being conducted off the coast of the Canary Islands. Tactical mid-frequency active sonar was utilized during the exercises, and strandings began within hours of the onset of the use of mid-frequency sonar (Fernández et al., 2005).

**Findings:** Eight Cuvier’s beaked whales, one Blainville’s beaked whale, and one Gervais’ beaked whale were necropsied; six of them within 12 hours of stranding (Fernández et al., 2005). The stomachs of the whales contained fresh and undigested prey contents. No pathogenic bacteria were isolated from the whales, although parasites were found in the kidneys of all of the animals. The head and neck lymph nodes were congested and hemorrhages were noted in multiple tissues and organs, including the kidney, brain, ears, and jaws. Widespread fat emboli were found throughout the carcasses, but no evidence of blunt trauma was observed in the whales. In addition, the parenchyma of several organs contained macroscopic intravascular bubbles and lesions, putatively associated with nitrogen off-gassing.

**Conclusions:** The association of NATO mid-frequency sonar use close in space and time to the beaked whale strandings, and the similarity between this stranding event and previous beaked whale mass strandings coincident with sonar use, suggests that a similar scenario and causative mechanism of stranding may be shared between the events. Beaked whales stranded in this event demonstrated brain and auditory system injuries, hemorrhages, and congestion in multiple organs, similar to the pathological findings of the Bahamas and Madeira stranding events. In addition, the necropsy results of Canary Islands stranding event lead to the hypothesis that the presence of disseminated and widespread gas bubbles and fat emboli were indicative of nitrogen bubble formation, similar to what might be expected in decompression sickness (Jepson et al., 2003; Fernández et al., 2005). Whereas gas emboli would develop from the nitrogen gas, fat

emboli would enter the blood stream from ruptured fat cells (presumably where nitrogen bubble formation occurs) or through the coalescence of lipid bodies within the blood stream.

The possibility that the gas and fat emboli found by Fernández et al. (2005) was due to nitrogen bubble formation has been hypothesized to be related to either direct activation of the bubble by sonar signals or to a behavioral response in which the beaked whales flee to the surface following sonar exposure. The first hypothesis is related to rectified diffusion (Crum and Mao, 1996), the process of increasing the size of a bubble by exposing it to a sound field. This process is facilitated if the environment in which the ensonified bubbles exist is supersaturated with gas. Repetitive diving by marine mammals can cause the blood and some tissues to accumulate gas to a greater degree than is supported by the surrounding environmental pressure (Ridgway and Howard, 1979). Deeper and longer dives of some marine mammals, such as those conducted by beaked whales, are theoretically predicted to induce greater levels of supersaturation (Houser et al., 2001). If rectified diffusion were possible in marine mammals exposed to high-level sound, conditions of tissue supersaturation could theoretically speed the rate and increase the size of bubble growth. Subsequent effects due to tissue trauma and emboli would presumably mirror those observed in humans suffering from decompression sickness.

It is unlikely that the short duration of sonar pings would be long enough to drive bubble growth to any substantial size, if such a phenomenon occurs. However, an alternative but related hypothesis has also been suggested: stable bubbles could be destabilized by high-level sound exposures such that bubble growth then occurs through static diffusion of gas out of the tissues. In such a scenario the marine mammal would need to be in a gas-supersaturated state for a long enough period of time for bubbles to become of a problematic size. The second hypothesis speculates that rapid ascent to the surface following exposure to a startling sound might produce tissue gas saturation sufficient for the evolution of nitrogen bubbles (Jepson et al., 2003; Fernández et al., 2005). In this scenario, the rate of ascent would need to be sufficiently rapid to compromise behavioral or physiological protections against nitrogen bubble formation. Zimmer and Tyack (2007) also speculated that if repetitive shallow dives are used by beaked whales to avoid a sound source, they might accumulate higher than normal levels of nitrogen gas because of the increased time spent at depths where gas exchange across the lung still occurs (i.e. above the depth of lung collapse).

Although theoretical predictions suggest the possibility for acoustically mediated bubble growth, there is considerable disagreement among scientists as to its likelihood (Piantadosi and Thalmann, 2004). Sound exposure levels predicted to cause *in vivo* bubble formation within diving cetaceans have not been evaluated and are suspected as needing to be very high (Evans, 2002; Crum et al., 2005). Further, although it has been argued that traumas from recent beaked whale strandings are consistent with gas emboli and bubble-induced tissue separations (Jepson et al., 2003), there is no conclusive evidence supporting this hypothesis and there is concern that at least some of the pathological findings (e.g., bubble emboli) are artifacts of the necropsy.

### 2006 Spain, Gulf of Vera Beaked Whale Mass Stranding (26-27 January 2006)

**Description:** The Spanish Cetacean Society reported an atypical mass stranding of four beaked whales that occurred January 26, 2006, on the southeast coast of Spain near Mojacar (Gulf of Vera) in the Western Mediterranean Sea. According to the report, two of the whales were discovered the evening of January 26 and were found to be still alive. Two other whales were discovered during the day on January 27, but had already died. A following report stated that the first three animals were located near the town of Mojacar and were examined by a team from the University of Las Palmas de Gran Canarias, with the help of the stranding network of Ecologistas en Acción Almería-PROMAR and others from the Spanish Cetacean Society. The fourth animal was found dead on the afternoon of January 27, a few kilometers north of the first three animals.

From January 25-26, 2006, a NATO surface ship group (seven ships including one U.S. ship under NATO operational command) conducted active sonar training against a Spanish submarine within 93 km (50 NM) of the stranding site.

**Findings:** Veterinary pathologists necropsied the two male and two female beaked whales (*Z. cavirostris*).

**Conclusions:** According to the pathologists, a likely cause of this type of beaked whale mass stranding event may have been anthropogenic acoustic activities. However, no detailed pathological results confirming this supposition have been published to date, and no positive acoustic link was established as a direct cause of the stranding.

Even though no causal link can be made between the stranding event and naval exercises, certain conditions may have existed in the exercise area that, in their aggregate, may have contributed to the marine mammal strandings (Freitas, 2004):

- Operations were conducted in areas of at least 1,000 m (3,281 ft) in depth near a shoreline where there is a rapid change in bathymetry on the order of 1,000 to 6,000 m (3,281 to 19,685 ft) occurring a cross a relatively short horizontal distance (Freitas, 2004).
- Multiple ships, in this instance, five MFA sonar equipped vessels, were operating in the same area over extended periods of time (20 hours) in close proximity.
- Exercises took place in an area surrounded by landmasses, or in an embayment. Operations involving multiple ships employing mid-frequency active sonar near land may produce sound directed towards a channel or embayment that may cut off the lines of egress for marine mammals (Freitas, 2004).

## E.4.2 Other Global Stranding Discussions

In the following sections, stranding events that have been putatively linked to DON activity in popular press are presented. As detailed in the individual case study conclusions, the DON believes that there is enough evidence available to refute allegations of impacts from mid-frequency sonar.

### Stranding Events Case Studies

#### 2003 Washington State Harbor Porpoise Strandings (May 2 – June 2, 2003)

**Description:** At 10:40 a.m. on May 5, 2003, the USS SHOUP began the use of mid-frequency tactical active sonar as part of a naval exercise. At 2:20 p.m., the USS SHOUP entered the Haro Strait and terminated active sonar use at 2:38 p.m., thus limiting active sonar use within the strait to less than 20 minutes. Between May 2 and June 2, 2003, approximately 16 strandings involving 15 harbor porpoises (*Phocoena phocoena*) and one Dall's porpoise (*Phocoenoides dalli*) were reported to the Northwest Marine Mammal Stranding Network. A comprehensive review of all strandings and the events involving USS SHOUP on May 5, 2003, were presented in DON (2004). Given that the USS SHOUP was known to have operated sonar in the strait on May 5, and that behavioral reactions of killer whales (*Orcinus orca*) had been putatively linked to these sonar operations (NMFS Office of Protected Resources, 2005), NMFS undertook an analysis of whether sonar caused the strandings of the harbor porpoises.

Whole carcasses of ten of harbor porpoises and the head of an additional porpoise were collected for analysis. Necropsies were performed on ten of the harbor porpoises and six whole carcasses and two heads were selected for CT imaging. Gross examination, histopathology, age determination, blubber analysis, and various other analyses were conducted on each of the carcasses (Norman et al., 2004).

**Findings:** Post-mortem findings and analysis details are found in Norman et al. (2004). All of the carcasses suffered from some degree of freeze-thaw artifact that hampered gross and histological evaluations. At the time of necropsy, three of the porpoises were moderately fresh, whereas the remainder of the carcasses was considered to have moderate to advanced decomposition. None of the 11 harbor porpoises demonstrated signs of acoustic trauma. In contrast, a putative cause of death was determined for five of the porpoises; two animals had blunt trauma injuries and three animals had indication of disease processes (fibrous peritonitis, salmonellosis, and necrotizing pneumonia). A cause of death could not be determined in the remaining animals, which is consistent with expected percentage of marine mammal necropsies conducted within the northwest region.

**Conclusions:** NMFS concluded from a retrospective analysis of stranding events that the number of harbor porpoise stranding events in the approximate month surrounding the USS SHOUP use of sonar was higher than expected based on annual strandings of harbor porpoises (Norman et al., 2004). It is important to note that the number of strandings in the May-June timeframe in

2003 was also higher for the outer coast, indicating a much wider phenomena than use of sonar by USS SHOUP in Puget Sound for one day in May. The conclusion by NMFS that the number of strandings in 2003 was higher is also different from that of The Whale Museum, which has documented and responded to harbor porpoise strandings since 1980 (Osborne, 2003). According to The Whale Museum, the number of strandings as of May 15, 2003, was consistent with what was expected based on historical stranding records and was less than that occurring in certain years. For example, since 1992 the San Juan Stranding Network has documented an average of 5.8 porpoise strandings per year. In 1997, there were 12 strandings in the San Juan Islands with more than 30 strandings throughout the general Puget Sound area. Disregarding the discrepancy in the historical rate of porpoise strandings and its relation to the USS SHOUP, NMFS acknowledged that the intense level of media attention focused on the strandings likely resulted in an increased reporting effort by the public over that which is normally observed (Norman et al., 2004). NMFS also noted in its report that the “sample size is too small and biased to infer a specific relationship with respect to sonar usage and subsequent strandings.”

Seven of the porpoises collected and analyzed died prior to SHOUP departing to sea on May 5, 2003. Of these seven, one, discovered on May 5, 2003, was in a state of moderate decomposition, indicating it died before May 5; the cause of death was determined to be due, most likely, to salmonella septicemia. Another porpoise, discovered at Port Angeles on May 6, 2003, was in a state of moderate decomposition, indicating that this porpoise also died prior to May 5. One stranded harbor porpoise discovered fresh on May 6 is the only animal that could potentially be linked in time to the USS SHOUP’s May 5 active sonar use. Necropsy results for this porpoise found no evidence of acoustic trauma. The remaining eight strandings were discovered one to three weeks after the USS SHOUP’s May 5 transit of the Haro Strait, making it difficult to causally link the sonar activities of the USS SHOUP to the timing of the strandings. Two of the eight porpoises died from blunt trauma injury and a third suffered from parasitic infestation, which possibly contributed to its death (Norman et al., 2004). For the remaining five porpoises, NMFS was unable to identify the causes of death.

The speculative association of the harbor porpoise strandings to the use of sonar by the USS SHOUP is inconsistent with prior stranding events linked to the use of mid-frequency sonar. Specifically, in prior events, the stranding of whales occurred over a short period of time (less than 36 hours), stranded individuals were spatially co-located, traumas in stranded animals were consistent between events, and active sonar was known or suspected to be in use. Although mid-frequency active sonar was used by the USS SHOUP, the distribution of harbor porpoise strandings by location and with respect to time surrounding the event do not support the suggestion that mid-frequency active sonar was a cause of harbor porpoise strandings. Rather, a complete lack of evidence of any acoustic trauma within the harbor porpoises, and the identification of probable causes of stranding or death in several animals, further supports the conclusion that harbor porpoise strandings were unrelated to the sonar activities of the USS SHOUP (DON, 2004).

### 2004 Hawai'i Melon-Headed Whale Mass Stranding (July 3-4, 2004)

**Description:** The majority of the following information is taken from the NMFS report on the stranding event (Southall et al., 2006). On the morning of July 3, 2004, 150 to 200 melon-headed whales (*Peponocephala electra*) entered Hanalei Bay, Kauai. Individuals attending a canoe blessing ceremony observed the animals entering the bay at approximately 7:00 a.m. The whales were reported entering the bay in a “wave as if they were chasing fish” (Braun 2005). At 6:45 a.m. on July 3, 2004, approximately 46.3 km (25 NM) north of Hanalei Bay, active sonar was tested briefly prior to the start of an anti-submarine warfare exercise.

The whales stopped in the southwest portion of the bay, grouping tightly, and displayed spy-hopping and tail-slapping behavior. As people went into the water among the whales, the pod separated into as many as four groups, with individual animals moving among the clusters. This continued through most of the day, with the animals slowly moving south and then southeast within the bay. By about 3 p.m., police arrived and kept people from interacting with the animals. At 4:45 p.m. on July 3, 2004, the RIMPAC Battle Watch Captain received a call from a National Marine Fisheries representative in Honolulu, Hawaii, reporting the sighting of as many as 200 melon-headed whales in Hanalei Bay. At 4:47 p.m. the Battle Watch Captain directed all ships in the area to cease active sonar transmissions.

At 7:20 p.m. on July 3, 2004, the whales were observed in a tight single pod 68.6 m (75 yards) from the southeast side of the bay. The pod was circling in a group and displayed frequent tail slapping and whistle vocalizations and some spy hopping. No predators were observed in the bay and no animals were reported as having fresh injuries. The pod stayed in the bay through the night of July 3, 2004.

On the morning of July 4, 2004, the whales were observed to still be in the bay and collected in a tight group. A decision was made at that time to attempt to herd the animals out of the bay. A 213 to 244-m (700- to 800-ft) rope was constructed by weaving together beach morning glory vines. This vine rope was tied between two canoes and with the assistance of 30 to 40 kayaks, was used to herd the animals out of the bay. By approximately 11:30 a.m. on July 4, 2004, the pod was coaxed out of the bay.

A single neonate melon-headed whale was observed in the bay on the afternoon of July 4, after the whale pod had left the bay. The following morning on July 5, 2004, the neonate was found stranded on Lumahai Beach. It was pushed back into the water but was found stranded dead between 9 and 10 a.m. near the Hanalei pier. NMFS collected the carcass and had it shipped to California for necropsy, tissue collection, and diagnostic imaging.

Following the stranding event, NMFS undertook an investigation of possible causative factors of the stranding. This analysis included available information on environmental factors, biological factors, and an analysis of the potential for sonar involvement. The latter analysis included vessels that utilized mid-frequency active sonar on the afternoon and evening of July 2. These vessels were to the southeast of Kauai, on the opposite side of the island from Hanalei Bay.

**Findings:** NMFS concluded from the acoustic analysis that the melon-headed whales would have had to have been on the southeast side of Kauai on July 2 to have been exposed to sonar from naval vessels on that day (Southall et al., 2006). There was no indication whether the animals were in that region or whether they were elsewhere on July 2. NMFS concluded that the animals would have had to swim from 1.4 to 4.0 m/s (3 to 9 mi/hr) for 6.5 to 17.5 hours after sonar transmissions ceased to reach Hanalei Bay by 7:00 a.m. on July 3. Sound transmissions by ships to the north of Hanalei Bay on July 3 were produced as part of exercises between 6:45 a.m. and 4:47 p.m. Propagation analysis conducted by the 3rd Fleet estimated that the level of sound from these transmissions at the mouth of Hanalei Bay could have ranged from 138 to 149 dB re: 1  $\mu$ Pa.

NMFS was unable to determine any environmental factors (e.g., harmful algal blooms, weather conditions) that may have contributed to the stranding. However, additional analysis by Navy investigators found that a full moon occurred the evening before the stranding and was coupled with a squid run (Mobley et al., 2007). In addition, a group of 500 to 700 melon-headed whales were observed to come close to shore and interact with humans in Sasanhaya Bay, Rota, on the same morning as the whales entered Hanalei Bay (Jefferson et al., 2006). Previous records further indicated that, though the entrance of melon-headed whales into the shallows is rare, it is not unprecedented. A pod of melon-headed whales entered Hilo Bay in the 1870s in a manner similar to that which occurred at Hanalei Bay in 2004.

The necropsy of the melon-headed whale calf suggested that the animal died from a lack of nutrition, likely following separation from its mother. The calf was estimated to be approximately one week old. Although the calf appeared not to have eaten for some time, it was not possible to determine whether the calf had ever nursed after it was born. The calf showed no signs of blunt trauma or viral disease and had no indications of acoustic injury.

**Conclusions:** Although it is not impossible, it is unlikely that the sound level from the sonar caused the melon-headed whales to enter Hanalei Bay. This conclusion is based on a number of factors:

1. The speculation that the whales may have been exposed to sonar the day before and then fled to the Hanalei Bay is not supported by reasonable expectation of animal behavior and swim speeds. The flight response of the animals would have had to persist for many hours following the cessation of sonar transmissions. Such responses have not been observed in marine mammals and no documentation of such persistent flight response after the cessation of a frightening stimulus has been observed in other mammals. The swim speeds, though feasible for the species, are highly unlikely to be maintained for the durations proposed, particularly since the pod was a mixed group containing both adults and neonates. Whereas Southall et al. (2006) suggest that the animals would have had to swim from 1.4 to 4.0 m/s (3 to 9 mi/hr) for 6.5 to 17.5 hours, it is improbable that a neonate could achieve the same for a period of many hours.

2. The area between the islands of Oahu and Kauai and the Pacific Missile Range Facility (PMRF) training range have been used in RIMPAC exercises for more than 20 years, and are used year-round for ASW training using mid frequency active sonar. Melon-headed whales inhabiting the waters around Kauai are likely not naive to the sound of sonar and there has never been another stranding event associated in time with ASW training at Kauai or in the Hawaiian Islands. Similarly, the waters surrounding Hawaii contain an abundance of marine mammals, many of which would have been exposed to the same sonar operations that were speculated to have affected the melon-headed whales. No other strandings were reported coincident with the RIMPAC exercises. This leaves it uncertain as to why melon-headed whales, and no other species of marine mammal, would respond to the sonar exposure by stranding.
3. At the nominal swim speed for melon-headed whales, the whales had to be within 2.8 and 3.7 km (1.5 and 2 NM) of Hanalei Bay before sonar was activated on July 3. The whales were not in their open ocean habitat but had to be close to shore at 6:45 a.m. when the sonar was activated to have been observed inside Hanalei Bay from the beach by 7:00 a.m. (Hanalei Bay is very large area). This observation suggests that other potential factors could be causative of the stranding event (see below).
4. The simultaneous movement of 500 to 700 melon-headed whales and Risso's dolphins into Sasanhaya Bay, Rota, in the Northern Marianas Islands on the same morning as the 2004 Hanalei stranding (Jefferson et al., 2006) suggests that there may be a common factor which prompted the melon-headed whales to approach the shoreline. A full moon occurred the evening before the stranding and a run of squid was reported concomitant with the lunar activity (Mobley et al., 2007). Thus, it is possible that the melon-headed whales were capitalizing on a lunar event that provided an opportunity for relatively easy prey capture. A report of a pod entering Hilo Bay in the 1870s indicates that on at least one other occasion, melon-headed whales entered a bay in a manner similar to the occurrence at Hanalei Bay in July 2004. Thus, although melon-headed whales entering shallow embayments may be an infrequent event, and every such event might be considered anomalous, there is precedent for the occurrence.
5. The received noise sound levels at the bay were estimated to range from roughly 95 to 149 dB re: 1  $\mu$ Pa. Received levels as a function of time of day have not been reported, so it is not possible to determine when the presumed highest levels would have occurred and for how long. However, received levels in the upper range would have been audible by human participants in the bay. The statement by one interviewee that he heard "pings" that lasted an hour and that they were loud enough to hurt his ears is unreliable. Received levels necessary to cause pain over the duration stated would have been observed by most individuals in the

water with the animals. No other such reports were obtained from people interacting with the animals in the water.

Although NMFS concluded that sonar use was a “plausible, if not likely, contributing factor in what may have been a confluence of events (Southall et al., 2006),” this conclusion was based primarily on the basis that there was an absence of any other compelling explanation. The authors of the NMFS report on the incident were unaware, at the time of publication, of the simultaneous event in Rota. In light of the simultaneous Rota event, the Hanalei stranding does not appear as anomalous as initially presented and the speculation that sonar was a causative factor is weakened. The Hanalei Bay incident does not share the characteristics observed with other mass strandings of whales coincident with sonar activity (e.g., specific traumas, species composition, etc.). In addition, the inability to conclusively link or exclude the impact of other environmental factors makes a causal link between sonar and the melon-headed whale strandings highly speculative at best.

### **1980- 2004 Beaked Whale Strandings in Japan (Brownell et al. 2004)**

**Description:** Brownell et al. (2004) compared the historical occurrence of beaked whale strandings in Japan (where there are U.S. naval bases) with strandings in New Zealand (which lacks a U.S. naval base) and concluded the higher number of strandings in Japan may be related to the presence of U.S. Navy vessels using mid-frequency sonar. While the dates for the strandings were well documented, the authors of the study did not attempt to correlate the dates of any Navy activities or exercises with the dates of the strandings.

To fully investigate the allegation made by Brownell et al. (2004), the Center for Naval Analysis (CNA) looked at the past U.S. Naval exercise schedules from 1980 to 2004 for the water around Japan in comparison to the dates for the strandings provided by Brownell et al. (2004). None of the strandings occurred during or within weeks after any DON exercises. While the CNA analysis began by investigating the probabilistic nature of any co-occurrences, the results were a 100 percent probability that the strandings and sonar use were not correlated by time. Given there was no instance of co-occurrence in over 20 years of stranding data, it can be reasonably postulated that sonar use in Japanese waters by DON vessels did not lead to any of the strandings documented by Brownell et al. (2004).

### **2004 Alaska Beaked Whale Strandings (June 17 to July 19, 2004)**

**Description:** Between June 17 and July 19, 2004, five beaked whales were discovered at various locations along 2,575 km (1,389.4 NM) of the Alaskan coastline, and one was found floating (dead) at sea. Because the DON exercise Alaska Shield/Northern Edge 2004 occurred within the approximate timeframe of these strandings, it has been alleged that sonar may have been the probable cause of these strandings.

The Alaska Shield/Northern Edge 2004 exercise consisted of a vessel-tracking event followed by a vessel-boarding search-and-seizure event. There was no ASW component to the exercise, no

use of mid-frequency sonar, and no use of explosives in the water. There were no events in the Alaska Shield/Northern Edge exercise that could have caused any of the strandings over this 33 day period.

### **2005 North Carolina Marine Mammal Mass Stranding Event (January 15-16, 2005)**

**Description:** On January 15 and 16, 2005, 36 marine mammals consisting of 33 short-finned pilot whales, one minke whale, and two dwarf sperm whales stranded alive on the beaches of North Carolina (Hohn et al., 2006a). The animals were scattered across a 111-km (59.9-NM) area from Cape Hatteras northward. Because of the live stranding of multiple species, the event was classified as a UME (Unusual Mortality Event). It is the only stranding on record for the region in which multiple offshore species were observed to strand within a two- to three-day period.

The DON indicated that from January 12 to 14, some unit level training with mid-frequency active sonar was conducted by vessels that were 93 to 185 km (50.2 to 99.8 NM) from Oregon Inlet. An expeditionary strike group was also conducting exercises to the southeast, but the closest point of active sonar transmission to the inlet was 650 km (350.7 NM) away. The unit level operations were not unusual for the area or time of year and the vessels were not involved in antisubmarine warfare exercises. Marine mammal observers on board the vessels did not detect any marine mammals during the period of unit level training. No sonar transmissions were made on January 15-16.

The National Weather Service reported that a severe weather event moved through North Carolina on January 13 and 14 (Figure E-3). The event was caused by an intense cold front that moved into an unusually warm and moist air mass that had been persisting across the eastern United States for about a week. The weather caused flooding in the western part of the state, considerable wind damage in central regions of the state, and at least three tornadoes that were reported in the north central part of the state. Severe, sustained (one to four days) winter storms are common for this region.

Over a two-day period (January 16-17), two dwarf sperm whales, 27 pilot whales, and one minke whale were necropsied and tissue samples collected. Twenty-five of the stranded cetacean heads were examined; two pilot whale heads and the heads of the dwarf sperm whales were analyzed by CT.

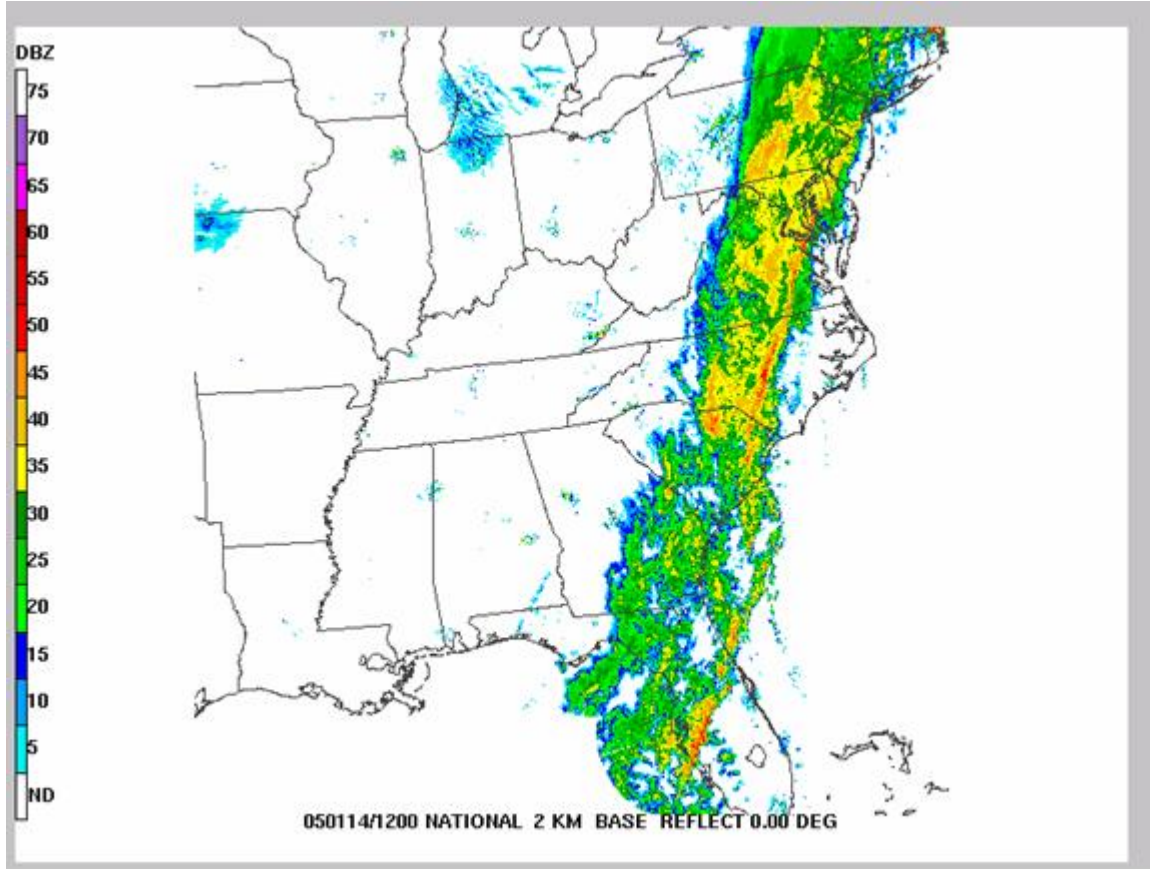


Figure E-3

Regional radar imagery for the East Coast (including North Carolina) on July 14.

Note: The time of the image is approximately 7 a.m.

**Findings:** The pilot whales and dwarf sperm whale were not emaciated, but the minke whale, which was believed to be a dependent calf, was emaciated. Many of the animals were on the beach for an extended period of time prior to necropsy and sampling, and many of the biochemical abnormalities noted in the animals were suspected of being related to the stranding and prolonged time on land. Lesions were observed in all of the organs, but there was no consistency across species. Musculoskeletal disease was observed in two pilot whales and cardiovascular disease was observed in one dwarf sperm whale and one pilot whale. Parasites were a common finding in the pilot whales and dwarf sperm whales but were considered consistent with the expected parasite load for wild odontocetes. None of the animals exhibited traumas similar to those observed in prior stranding events associated with mid-frequency sonar activity. Specifically, there was an absence of auditory system trauma and no evidence of distributed and widespread bubble lesions or fat emboli, as was previously observed (Fernández et al., 2005).

Sonar transmissions prior to the strandings were limited in nature and did not share the concentration identified in previous events associated with mid-frequency active sonar use (Evans and England, 2001). The operational/environmental conditions were also dissimilar (e.g., no constrictive channel and a limited number of ships and sonar transmissions). NMFS noted that environmental conditions were favorable for a shift from up-welling to down-welling conditions, which could have contributed to the event. However, other severe storm conditions existed in the days surrounding the strandings and the impact of these weather conditions on at-sea conditions is unknown. No harmful algal blooms were noted along the coastline.

**Conclusions:** All of the species involved in this stranding event are known to strand in this region. Although the cause of the stranding could not be determined, several whales had preexisting conditions that could have contributed to the stranding. Cause of death for many of the whales was likely due to the physiological stresses associated with being stranded. A consistent suite of injuries across species, which was consistent with prior strandings where sonar exposure is expected to be a causative mechanism, was not observed.

NMFS was unable to determine any causative role that sonar may have played in the stranding event. The acoustic modeling performed, as in the Hanalei Bay incident, was hampered by uncertainty regarding the location of the animals at the time of sonar transmissions. However, as in the Hanalei Bay incident, the response of the animals following the cessation of transmissions would imply a flight response that persisted for many hours after the sound source was no longer operational. In contrast, the presence of a severe weather event passing through North Carolina during January 13 and 14 is a possible contributing factor to the North Carolina UME of January 15.

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## E.5 Stranding Section Conclusions

Marine mammal strandings have been a historic and ongoing occurrence attributed to a variety of causes. Over the last fifty years, increased awareness and reporting has led to more information about species effected and raised concerns about anthropogenic sources of stranding. While there has been some marine mammal mortalities potentially associated with mid-frequency sonar effects to a small number of species (primarily limited numbers of certain species of beaked whales), the significance and actual causative reason for any impacts is still subject to continued investigation. ICES (2005a) noted, that taken in context of marine mammal populations in general, sonar is not a major threat, nor a significant contributor to the overall ocean noise budget. However, continued research based on sound scientific principles is needed in order to avoid speculation as to stranding causes, and to further our understanding of potential effects or lack of effects from military mid-frequency sonar (Bradshaw et al., 2006; ICES 2005b; Barlow and Gisiner, 2006; Cox et al. 2006).

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