

# Marine Animal Carcass and Stranding Management

## Policy & Procedure

This policy & procedure is to be used for responding to marine animal presence, carcass or stranding events and to respond to possible H5N1 Avian Influenza.

### Background

Whales, dolphins and seals (Marine Mammals) are common along the South Coast of Western Australia. The presence of wildlife, strandings or carcasses washing up on beaches can occur at any time of the year.

State and Territory governments are responsible for the conservation and protection of whales in coastal waters (out to the 3 nautical mile limit). This includes responding to strandings and entangled whales.

However, when a marine animal is present or a carcass or injured animal washes up on a beach under the management of the City of Albany (City), City staff will be involved in the response.

In addition, on occasion, there are strandings and carcasses of other animals that wash up on the coast such as turtles, large fish and high numbers of smaller fish. Marine animals are also often reported resting on our beaches.

Marine animal carcasses have the potential to attract sharks which pose a significant threat to beach users. They also pose a health issue as they are known to carry Zoonotic agents that are potential pathogens to humans.

The current global outbreak of High Pathogenicity Avian Influenza H5N1 (Avian Influenza or Bird Flu) has spread through Asia, Africa, Europe, North and South America and into the Antarctic mainland. This new strain of Avian Influenza has the potential to reach Australia. Avian Influenza will likely be first detected in wild birds including waterfowl, migratory, and shorebirds. Avian Influenza can also be transmitted to marine mammals and has affected seals, dolphins, and whales. Avian Influenza is zoonotic and has also been transmitted to humans in other parts of the world. In most cases the people had been in contact with infected animals and their contaminated environments.

### Objective

To inform City staff of their responsibilities when responding to marine animal incidents. This includes mass illness or death of marine animals, marine animal presence on beaches, strandings or carcasses on land managed by the City.

### Scope

This procedure relates to avian or marine mammal incidents on land under the management of the City. However, it can also provide guidance when the City receives notification from the public of similar issues on land under the authority of other land managers.

This procedure can also be applied to:

- Fish kills or the management of large individual fish such as a marlin or shark.
- Turtles.

### Responsibility

The Government of Western Australia has a clearly defined policy position on the responsibilities for whale carcass management whereby the land manager is responsible for the carcass.

Where a whale carcass washes up in a populated area, the responsibility for the disposal of the carcass rests with the relevant land manager. If the beach is part of a marine park, national park, or other land/waters managed by DBCA (including the Swan Canning Riverpark), the responsibility for removal rests with DBCA's Parks and Wildlife Service. In all other instances the responsibility rests with the relevant local government or other land manager.

Primary responsibility for responding to reports of marine animal incidents on City managed land will rest with the Manager City Reserves and the Reserves Management Team.

## Legislative and Strategic Context

All fauna is protected under the *Biodiversity and Conservation Act 2016 (BC Act)* including migratory species that occasionally visit our shores.

The Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (DBCA) administers the *BC Act*.

## Review Position and Date

This policy and procedure will be reviewed by the document owner annually.

## Associated Documents

Documents that have a bearing on this policy and that may be useful reference material for users of this policy, follow:

- Beach Closure Policy & Procedure (City)
- Whale Carcass Management.  
<https://www.dbca.wa.gov.au/management/whale-carcass-management>
- Whale Carcass Management.  
[www.sharksmart.com.au](http://www.sharksmart.com.au)
- Fish Kill Events.  
<https://www.wa.gov.au/service/natural-resources/water-resources/fish-kill-events>
- Avian Influenza (bird flu).  
<https://www.agriculture.gov.au/biosecurity-trade/pests-diseases-weeds/animal/avian-influenza>

## Definitions

Key terms and acronyms used in the policy, and their definitions:

**Zoonotic:** Pertaining to a zoonosis: a disease that can be transmitted from animals to people or, more specifically, a disease that normally exists in animals but that can infect humans.

**Avian Influenza:** Referring to the new strain of High Pathogenicity Avian Influenza H5N1.

## Defining Wildlife Incidents

**Stranding:** A **marine animal stranding** refers to an event where a marine animal, such as a whale, dolphin,

seal, sea turtle, or other sea creature, becomes **beached or trapped in shallow water** and is unable to return to deeper water without assistance.

Strandings can occur **individually or in groups** (mass strandings) and may result from a range of factors including illness, injury, navigational errors, environmental disturbances, human activity, or natural phenomena.

**Carcass:** A **marine carcass** is the **dead body of a marine animal** that has washed ashore, floated to the surface, or been found in coastal or marine environments. This can include species such as whales, dolphins, seals, sea turtles, fish, and seabirds.

Marine carcasses may result from natural causes (such as age, disease, or predation), environmental events (like storms or algal blooms), or human-related impacts (such as ship strikes, entanglement, or pollution).

**Animal Presence:** Marine animal presence refers to the occurrence or detection of marine animals within a specific area, such as the open ocean, coastal waters, estuaries, or nearshore environments. This presence may be temporary or permanent, depending on the species' behaviour, including migration, breeding, feeding, or resting patterns.

- A **vagrant marine animal** is an individual that appears **outside its normal geographic range**—in an area where the species is not usually found.
- A **resting marine animal** is a marine species that has temporarily **ceased active movement** and is in a **state of rest**, either at the sea surface, on the seabed, or on the beach.
- A **sick marine animal** is one that is **unwell due to disease, injury, infection, poisoning, or other health issues**, and may display abnormal behaviour or physical signs of illness.

## PROCEDURE

### STEP ONE (1):

*Staff member receiving notification of the marine animal incident to request and record as much information as possible including, but not limited to:*

- (A) Location – as specific as possible (i.e. drop pin, map and coordinates)
- (B) Number of animals involved.
- (C) Determine incident type e.g. carcass, stranding, presence, vagrant, sick.
- (D) Species of animal if known.
- (E) Approximate size of largest animal.
- (F) Name and contact details of person making report.
- (G) Date and time.
- (H) Any obvious cause of injuries or symptoms of illness.

If possible, provide the person making the report with an email address or mobile number to forward all the information to. This will help with passing on accurate information to other agencies if required.

### STEP TWO (2):

*Based on the information provided by the person determine which of the following information to provide to them.*

#### Marine Mammals

*For incidents involving marine mammals (whales, seals, dolphins, sea turtles etc.) provide the following advice to the person making the report.*

#### What NOT to do:

- DO NOT put the safety of yourself or others at risk and avoid contact with sick or dead wildlife.
- DO NOT stand close to the tail or head.
- DO NOT attempt to push the animal back out to sea – this will only add to its suffering.
- DO NOT apply sunscreen even if the animal's skin is burnt.
- DO NOT approach animals that are resting.

#### What to do:

- Advise other patrons in the area to keep dogs on a leash and away from the animal/s and to keep their distance.
- While waiting, try to be quiet.
- Take photos of the animal/s and location, email this information through to [reserves@albany.wa.gov.au](mailto:reserves@albany.wa.gov.au) with as much detail as possible.
- If the person is able to assist with a stranding incident until someone can attend advise them to:
  - Put their safety first. Use appropriate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), in particular disposable latex gloves, and N95 face mask. These should be worn to help prevent the potential spread of zoonotic diseases.
  - Be extra vigilant if animal is in water, due to associated predators and the potential for the animal to roll on people. Large whales should never be approached if still floating or being moved by swell.
  - While waiting, try be quiet.
  - Keep the animal's skin moist with buckets of water if possible, avoiding the blow hole.

#### Birds

*For incidents involving birds provide the following advice to the person making the report.*

#### What NOT to do:

- DO NOT put the safety of yourself or others at risk and avoid contact with the bird/s, keeping at least 2 metres distance from the birds.

#### What to do:

- Ask the person making the report to record what they see and take photos or videos.
- If birds appear to have an unusual sickness or it is a mass mortality event report it to the Emergency Animal Disease Hotline: 1800 675 888. The general rule is to report 5 or more bird deaths or illnesses in one area.
- Ask person making the report to advise other patrons in the area to keep dogs on a leash and away from the bird/s and to keep their distance.
- Advise them that someone will attend as soon as possible.

#### STEP THREE (3):

*Determine responsible agency. Notify essential people and organisations about the situation so relevant alerts and information can be sent out to the public, and to determine the best course of action for managing the situation.*

#### Birds or marine mammals suspected to be carrying avian influenza:

- If you suspect the animal/s could be carrying the avian influenza, call the:
  - Emergency Animal Disease Hotline on 1800 675 888
  - Provide the following information: name, number, location, species, number of animals, and symptoms.
- Secure the site with cones, tape, or with personnel stationed around the perimeters of the site directing people to stay away from the animal/s.
- Wait for the on call DPIRD Field Veterinarian to contact you. They will be contacted by the Emergency Animal Disease Hotline.
  - Follow instructions given to you by the Emergency Animal Disease Hotline or responding DPIRD Veterinarian.
- Confirm which agency is responsible for the management of the situation based on where the animal/s are located (it is generally accepted that this falls with the adjacent landowner/manager of the beach upon which the animals are located).
- Report incident to relevant internal personnel and/or responsible land manger if the incident is on land managed by another agency.

*Note: marine mammals can carry Avian Influenza, if this is a suspected, please report it.*

#### Birds or marine mammals not suspected of carrying avian influenza:

- If the animal/s are alive call the:
  - Wildcare Helpline on (08) 9474 9055.
  - Or for seabirds contact WA Seabird Rescue on (08) 6102 8464.
- Confirm which agency is responsible for the management of the situation based on where the animal/s are located (it is generally accepted that this falls with the adjacent landowner/manager of the beach upon which the animals are located).
  - If another agency is the responsible land manager refer to the marine animal contact list attached to find the best contact.
  - If the City is responsible, follow the below procedures and notify the following positions at the City of Albany:
    - The Manager City Reserves (0419 192 481); or
    - The most senior member of the Reserves Management Team available who will in turn:
- Organise for members of the City's Reserves Team to attend and determine the most appropriate on-ground actions required to address the situation. Ensure appropriate PPE is used and basic personal and equipment hygiene is maintained. Initial actions may include:

- Erecting signs so people are aware that the animal/s are being monitored
- Closing the area to the public or installing bunting to encourage people to stay away from the site
- Staff presence on site to inform and control spectators
- For deceased birds not suspected of carrying avian influenza collect birds and place them in plastic bags (double bagged).
- For fish kills report incident to FishWatch (24-hour reporting) on 1800 815 507.
- Report marine mammal incidents to the DBCA South Coast Office (08) 9842 4500. Additional contacts can be found on the attached contact list. DBCA can provide further advice and assistance with whale carcasses and stranding incidents.
- If just bone with no fresh flesh (i.e. been dead for a long time), remove the material after notifying DBCA, with no requirement to notify any other below mentioned organisations.
- For marine animal incidents that may attract sharks:
  - Report the incident to Water Police and Shark Watch on (09) 9442 8600.
  - Report to Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (DPIRD):
    - Supervising District Fisheries & Marine Officer 0427 216 800
    - Shark Operations (08) 6163 0935. Photos and location details can also be sent to 0429 019 314.
- Notify the City's Ranger Team:
  - (08) 6820 3999 to implement the City's Beach Closure Policy and Procedure.
  - For after-hours ring the on-call number 0429 019 314
- Notify the City's Communications Team: (08) 6820 3007

#### STEP FOUR (4):

*Contribute information on animal/s to research and education.*

- City staff are to photograph and measure the animal/s as a minimum. Completion of the Cetacean Data Record form provided by DBCA is also desirable if possible.
- If a seal, penguin or turtle, notify DBCA of the event and record information (as per the Cetacean Data Sheet) and take photos.
- If a mass fish kill or large fish, notify DPIRD on 1800 815 507 as they may be interested in inspecting and collecting information on the animal/s.

#### STEP FIVE (5):

*Disposal method of carcass to be approved by DBCA.*

- If a whale or dolphin carcass, contact Whale World (9844 4021) to determine if they would like the carcass for their museum display. DBCA must confirm that this is an appropriate method of disposing of the carcass.
- If animal/s is not required for museum purposes, carcass/s must be removed to an approved disposal site (Hanrahan Tip). Contact City Waste Management Operations Coordinator (0476 074 344) to notify them of incoming dead animal/s for burial.
- Disposal method of fish carcasses should be advised by DPIRD but would generally be to a waste disposal site.
- Disposal method of mass bird carcasses should be advised by DPIRD.
- Disposal of individual or small number of birds to go to waste disposal site (Hanrahan Tip).

*Note: Burial on the beach, towing out to sea and use of explosives are not approved methods of disposal, and must not be implemented by City staff.*

- In some cases, the best course of action might be to leave the carcass on the beach. Assessment based on:
  - Location and risk to humans (i.e., proximity to popular sites; remote);

- Accessibility (i.e., access being limited and able to be cordoned off or warning signs used); or
- Size and numbers.

**STEP SIX (6):**

*Register any relevant correspondence and photos on Synergy file EM.ANW.2.*

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