



7th April 2026

Minister Dr. Till Backhaus
Ministry for Climate Protection, Agriculture, Rural Areas & Environment Mecklenburg-Prepommeranian
Paulshoeher Weg 1
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Statement of the IWC Strandings Expert Panel *Humpback Whale Stranding, Poel Island, Baltic Sea, Germany*
April 2026

The International Whaling Commission Strandings Expert Panel (IWC SEP) brings together leading international experts in whale stranding events. The IWC SEP has been providing advice and support to the German team handling the difficult case of the humpback whale stranded off Poel Island near Wismar.

This has been an extremely challenging case with extensive efforts undertaken to refloat the whale. These were initially successful, but, each time, the animal stranded again shortly after. Therefore, the IWC SEP fully supports the difficult decision taken by the German authorities to halt further active rescue attempts.

This animal has stranded four times over the course of two weeks. It was already in a weakened state due to serious entanglement in fishing gear, and each stranding event has caused serious physical harm, including pressure injuries, breathing difficulties, and circulatory stress which further weakens the animal. For a whale of this size and condition, the chances of survival are now negligible, and further continued attempts to refloat would only cause additional suffering.

The IWC SEP further recognises that, in the present circumstances, euthanasia of a partially buoyant cetacean of this size in shallow waters poses extraordinary logistical, personnel and public safety challenges and is therefore not possible. It is medically impossible to remove any remaining nets and ropes from the digestive tract. Similarly, taking blood or any other samples and treatment will only further stress the animal in its current situation and are not recommended from either an animal welfare or public safety perspective.

Chair: Nick Gales (Australia)

Vice-Chair: Urbain Thibauthéon Arron Sonagnon Brito (Benin)

Executive Secretary: Martha Rojas Urrego



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The IWC SEP commends the palliative care (e.g. keeping the animal wet and maintaining a calm and quiet environment) presently being provided as the only responsible, humane, and pragmatic response to a situation in which no straightforward solution exists. The outcome everyone hopes for when a whale strands is a successful return to safe waters. Every stranding situation is different and there is no standard protocol. No-one works harder to secure this outcome than the teams involved, but it is not always possible.

The IWC SEP commends all agencies and individuals involved for their dedication and compassion throughout this exceedingly challenging event.

Signed on behalf of the Strandings Expert Panel

Dr. Andrew Brownlow MRCVS
Chair of the IWC SEP

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