

Principles and guidelines for large whale entanglement response efforts

DEDICATION

This document is dedicated to the memory of Tom Smith from Kakaora, near Zuydport. A kind and generous man, Tom was a fisherman and conservationist who tragically died during an attempt to disentangle a humpback whale while he was in the water. Fortunately as a result of this and other human injuries recorded worldwide, an important motivation for these guidelines and principles is to try to prevent similar tragedies and to honour his family.

DISCLAIMER

While these principles and guidelines have been developed to try to maximize safe and successful operations, disentangling operations are complex and can be unpredictable; following these guidelines does not necessarily guarantee personal safety, an animal's successful release, or operation in accordance with national rules and regulations (permits and/or letters of authorization). All responsibility is upon the operator to undertake safe activities under their best judgment. The IWG and the authors of this document are not liable for any actions taken as a result of these guidelines and principles. This is a living document, intended to be dynamic and evolving as new information and experience is gained. It is **not** an instruction manual.

OBJECTIVE

Based on the most recent information, the objective of this document is to provide principles and guidelines for trained persons to safely and effectively respond to reports of entangled live whales at sea. The objective of an entanglement response is to remove all detrimental entangling gear safely from the whale and team as much from the entanglement as possible to ultimately prevent entanglements from occurring. Actions by well-meaning untrained persons can worsen an entanglement, through a lack of subject knowledge and experience.

For example, removing easily accessible trailing gear from entangled whales may leave the most critical components on a whale, making future, repeated disentangling more difficult or even impossible, potentially resulting in severe harm or death to the animal.

Regional entanglement response scenarios and complexities may require different techniques and strategies (see Annex F on capacity building and training).

GOALS OF ENTANGLEMENT RESPONSE

- (i) Human safety
- (ii) Animal welfare
- (iii) Contribution to the conservation of large whale populations, recognizing that prevention is the ultimate goal
- (iv) Data collection to assist with identifying key fisheries and whale populations and thus better specification of actual entanglement problems within a region to assist with mitigation and prevention
- (v) Awareness of issues at all levels to improve reporting and appropriate measures to address issues
- (vi) to (iv)

1. GENERAL SAFETY

- (i) **At no time should an individual enter the water.** It is not necessary given the proper disentangling training, tools and techniques. Over a thousand successful disentangling operations have occurred with a tool-based technique without significant human injury, whereas human life has been lost during dive-based disentangling attempts.
- (ii) Do not put the whale's rescue above human safety of any time.
- (iii) Only trained and authorized operators should participate in disentangling activities.
- (iv) Actions must be thoroughly thought through and planned, with full briefing to all **participants and team members**. All **participants** need to be clear on aims, objectives, operational procedure and roles.
- (v) Do not secure a line from the whale to the vessel.
- (vi) In addition to focusing on the disentangling itself, pay careful attention to the overall environment.
- (vii) Actions must not be pressured by weather, time of day, onlookers, media, or the perceived need to act.
- (viii) When in doubt about safety or the success of the operation, stand down. If possible attach a satellite