Marine MegaFauna Stranding Guidelines

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In news : The Ministry of Environment Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC) has released 'Marine MegaFauna Stranding Guidelines and National Marine Turtle Action Plan

Key updates

- Despite the immense economic, ecological and cultural values of marine habitats in India, marine mega fauna species and marine turtles face a wide variety of challenges including stranding and entanglement.
- Managing such challenging situations requires coordination, action and people's participation which would help in the long-term conservation of marine species and their habitats.
- The documents launched today contains ways and means to not only promote inter-sectoral action for conservation but also guide improved coordination amongst the government, civil society and all relevant stakeholders on the response to cases of stranding, entanglement, injury or mortality of marine mammals and also conservation of marine turtles.

Highlights of the two documents

These two documents highlight the following

- Actions to be taken for handling stranded animals on shore, stranded or entangled animals in the sea or on a boat
- Management actions for improved coordination
- Reducing threats to marine species and their habitats
- Rehabilitation of degraded habitats
- Enhancing people's participation

- Advance scientific research and exchange of information on marine mammals and marine turtles and their habitats.

What is Mega Fauna?

Usage of the term in terrestrial zoology

- In terrestrial zoology, the megafauna comprises the large or giant animals of an area, habitat, or geological period.
- The most common thresholds used are weight over 40 kilograms (90 lb) or 44 kilograms (100 lb) (i.e., having a mass comparable to or larger than a human) or over a tonne, 1,000 kilograms (2,205 lb) (i.e., having a mass comparable to or larger than an ox).
- In practice, the most common usage encountered in academic and popular writing describes land mammals roughly larger than a human that are not (solely) domesticated.
- The term is especially associated with the Pleistocene megafauna – the land animals often larger than modern counterparts considered archetypical of the last ice age, such as mammoths, the majority of which in northern Eurasia, the Americas and Australia became extinct within the last forty thousand years
- Among living animals, the term megafauna is most commonly used for the largest extant terrestrial mammals, which are elephants, giraffes, hippopotamuses, rhinoceroses, and large bovines.

Usage of the term for marine mammals

Marine megafauna comprise all large-bodied organisms (body mass, ≥45 kg) inhabiting the coastal and open oceans, including bony fishes, elasmobranchs (sharks and rays), mammals (whales, seals, sea cows, and the polar bear), reptiles (sea turtles), a species of sea bird (i.e., the emperor penguin), and a few species of mollusks (clams,

squids, and octopuses)

What is Marine wildlife stranding?

A stranding is the beaching of a live or dead marine mammal.

Stranded marine life can take the following forms:

- Whales, dolphins, and porpoises (cetaceans) are considered stranded when they are found dead, either on the beach or floating in the water, or alive on the beach and unable to return to the water.
- Seals and sea lions (pinnipeds) are considered stranded when they are found dead on land or in the water, or are in need of medical attention.
- Stranded sea turtles are defined as any ocean turtle found on land or in the water that is dead, injured, or exhibits any indication of ill health or abnormal behavior.

Why do animals strand?

Marine animals strand for numerous reasons, and the predominant known causes vary by species. Some of the common general causes include:

- Injuries caused by ship/vessel collisions.
- Entrapment or entanglement in fishing gear.
- Viral and bacterial infections.
- Parasitism.
- Disease resulting from exposure to harmful algal blooms.
- Other diseases, including cancer.
- Starvation.
- Unusual weather or oceanographic events.