

Whale Stranding

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About 380 whales have died in what is suspected to be Australia's largest stranding on record. It is not fully understood why the whales become stranded. Highly social mammals, pilot whales in particular are known for stranding in groups because they travel in large, close-knit communities which rely on constant communication. The whales largely washed up on sand spits in the waters around an area called **Macquarie Heads**.

More About Whale Stranding

- Cetacean stranding, commonly known as **beaching**, is a phenomenon in which whales and dolphins strand themselves on land, usually on a beach. Beached whales often **die due to dehydration, collapsing under their own weight, or drowning** when high tide covers the blowhole.
- Whales are known to strand themselves on beaches across the world and they **do so singularly or in groups**.
- While individual strandings are mostly attributed to injury or sickness, it is not clear why exactly whales beach themselves in groups.
- Even so, there are a few theories that might explain this behaviour. One reason could be that some whales **follow schooling fish or other prey into shallow waters**, which causes the **whales to become disoriented**, as a result of which they get stranded.
- Another reason could be **panic from being trapped by a predator** such as killer whales or sharks.
- Another possibility is that whales **might be drawn to land** by prey-rich currents.
- Further, the shape of the beach and the coastline could also have a role to play. For instance, if the beach has gently-sloping shorelines, **whales that are dependent on echolocation for navigation can be deceived**.

- According to Australia's Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment, the species that most often get stranded on Australian beaches are those that use echolocation or sonar for navigation, such as pilot and sperm whales.
- Whale stranding is **neither an uncommon nor a recent phenomenon**. While dead individuals would naturally wash up ashore, mass beaching has baffled humans since at least 300 BC.