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Criteria for response roles and training levels

NMFS



INTERNATIONAL
WHALING COMMISSION

DRAFT

NOAA FISHERIES
CRITERIA FOR WHALE ENTANGLEMENT RESPONSE
ROLES AND TRAINING LEVELS
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Levels of Participation in the Entanglement Response Network - Definitions

Roles	Levels
First Responder	1-5
Primary First Responders	3-5
Primary Entanglement Responder	4-5

First Responder is a general term that is used to describe anyone in the Entanglement Response Network with any level of training who may respond to an entanglement report under NOAA Fisheries operational protocols and authorization. At a minimum they will voluntarily attempt to standby with an entangled whale and, depending on training, experience, authorization and equipment available, may also assess and perhaps tag the whale. Individuals with higher NOAA Fisheries Authorization (Levels 3-5) may act as **Primary First Responders** in local areas.

Primary First Responders direct efforts locally and, under certain conditions and authorization, may attempt disentanglements during first response. These individuals have rapid access to vessels and specialized equipment. Additionally, Primary First Responders are on call full-time or at least during those times when there is a high likelihood of an entanglement report in their response area.

A First Responder's anticipated range of tasks is generally dependent on their classification in the Network. Classifications to various levels are determined on an individual basis and are based on a number of factors including, but not limited to the following:

- Pre-existing marine mammal and small vessel operations experience and skills
- Willingness and commitment to build experience and improve skills
- Entanglement response training
- Opportunity and available resources
- Location
- Commitment to being “on-call”
- Commitment to reporting entanglement cases as they encounter them
- Commitment to respond as needed

Primary Entanglement Responders are individuals who can perform all of the responsibilities of a first responder, but who also meet the criteria used by NOAA Fisheries for selecting individuals who may undertake the very dangerous activity of disentangling (i.e. attaching to, slowing down, and cutting a whale free). Primary Entanglement Responders must have the

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experience, training, support and proper equipment at the time of the event to conduct a full disentanglement with a high likelihood of success. Primary Entanglement Responders are those authorized by NOAA Fisheries at Levels 4-5 in the Entanglement Response Network. A summary of the various levels of certification follows.

ENTANGLEMENT RESPONSE NETWORK CERTIFICATION

LEVEL 1

Targeted Individuals: Professional mariners (i.e. fishermen, naturalists, Marine Patrol Officers) Boating experience and/or experience around whales is highly suggested (i.e. professional fishing, field biology, marine law enforcement, whale watching, etc.)

Responsibilities

Level 1 activities - primarily include: report, standby, and assess (within experience). Other activities may include:

- Rapidly alert Entanglement Response Network of first-hand and/or second-hand knowledge of local entanglements
- Depending on experience, stand by an entangled whale until backup arrives, and/or
- Communicate with crew on the vessel that is directly standing by the entangled whale and offer to replace the stand by vessel until additional backup or the response team arrives (if needed and within experience)

Criteria for certification

- Completed Level 1 classroom training, or
- Viewed NOAA Fisheries Training Presentation and demonstrated equivalent knowledge and experience

LEVEL 2

Targeted Individuals: Professional mariners (i.e. fishermen, naturalists, Marine Patrol Officers) There is a higher expectation of experience, commitment and participation from Level 2 responders.

Responsibilities

Level 2 activities - primarily include: report, stand by, and assess at a higher level (within experience). Other activities may include:

- Provide a thorough assessment of the nature of the entanglement and the whale, including: species, condition and behavior of the whale
- Provide local knowledge, transportation, and assistance to Primary First and Entanglement Responders, as needed, on a voluntary basis
- Be on-call, as available, to assist in planned disentanglement operations on telemetry-tagged whales

Criteria for certification

Level 1 certification in addition to the following:

- Completed Level 2 advanced training, including species identification, or
- Viewed NOAA Fisheries Training Presentation and demonstrated equivalent knowledge and experience, especially with whale species identification (submit experience resume)

LEVEL 3

Targeted Individuals: Whale researchers and naturalists, fishermen, State natural resource agency personnel, Marine Patrol Officers

Responsibilities

Level 3 activities - primarily include: report, stand by, assess, document and initiate and attach a telemetry buoy. Other activities may include:

- Be on-call 24 hours and should respond if conditions allow
- Initiate and maintain preparedness with appropriate resources
- Prepare local entanglement response action plan
- Provide entanglement assessment, documentation and recommendations to Primary Entanglement Responders during events
- Properly initialize and attach telemetry equipment to entangling gear if warranted and authorized
- May be authorized (depending on experience) to disentangle a minor entanglement with potential to adversely affect any whale other than right whales under the supervision/authorization of Level 4 or 5 network members. Authorization and supervision may be given over the phone or radio depending on the circumstances, complexity of entanglement, knowledge of entanglement configuration, and level of experience.

Criteria for certification

Level 2 certification and experience in the following elements:

- Large whale species identification and behavior, and the ability to safely follow a free-swimming, entangled whale
- Boat handling and safety including basic seamanship, small vessel operations, and close approaches to whales, for example, biopsy sampling and photo-ID approaches are good proxies for close approaches to whales.
- Line handling and safety including knowledge of knots, handling lines under pressure, and an understanding of how working lines behave
- Follows instructions and entanglement response plans

Note: Each candidate will be evaluated for each element and any deficiencies must be supplemented with adequate training and/or experience.

Additionally, all Level 3 responders must have:

- Current First Aid and CPR certification
- Proof of Liability Insurance coverage either through their organization, Agency, or self policy

- Basic Level 3 training, or preferably:
- Advanced Level 3 training – a NOAA Fisheries approved entanglement response apprenticeship program

LEVEL 4

Targeted Individuals: Current Entanglement Response Network Level 3 responders

Responsibilities

Level 4 activities:

- Report, stand by, assess, document, attach a telemetry buoy, consult on an action plan and lead an entanglement response on all large whales, except right whales.
 - Report, stand by, assess, document, participate with a Level 5 responder and attach a telemetry buoy to right whales
 - On a case-by-case basis and after consultation, certain cuts on known entangled right whales may be permitted at level 4 ***if the proposed action is first approved by level 5 entanglement responders and NOAA Fisheries.***
- Train, evaluate and promote candidates for Level 1-3 under approved, standardized, training methods.

Please Note: Entangled whale behavior varies considerably by species. However, Level 4 Entanglement Responders should routinely be able to lead a disentangle of all large whales other than right whales.

Criteria for certification

Basic or Advanced Level 3 Certification and:

- Direct experience in a supervised (by Advanced Entanglement Response Network Responder/Network coordinators or NOAA Fisheries) large whale entanglement response, documentation of that experience, and a positive evaluation from NOAA Fisheries using information provided by Advanced Entanglement Response Network Responder /Network Coordinators and any hard documentation (i.e. images and video)
- When possible, commitment to consultation as detailed in Level 5 requirements.

LEVEL 5

Targeted Individuals: Current Entanglement Response Network Level 4 responders

Responsibilities

Level 5 activities:

- Report, stand by, assess, document, attach a telemetry buoy, consult on, or assist in developing an action plan and lead a disentangle of all large whales including right whales

Please Note: Right whales have exhibited aggressive behavior and therefore generally

considered the most difficult whales to disentangle. North Atlantic right whales are among the most critically endangered large whales in the world. Certification at this level is highly selective and specialized.

Criteria for certification

Advanced Level 4 Certification and:

- Experience w/ right whale behavior and/or includes a person on the team directly involved in the whale disentanglement (in the boat working directly with the whale) that is experienced in right whale behavior
- Documented participation in a right whale entanglement response
- NOAA Fisheries review of documentation of participation in a right whale entanglement response ensuring that NOAA Fisheries operational and safety protocols were adhered to

Commitment to Consultation to Include:

- Immediate Consultation: When possible, use satellite/cell phone to bring in additional ideas/experience from other Level 5's (and veterinarians and behaviorists if appropriate) while on scene with an entangled right whale
- Action Plan Development: For a tagged right whale, consultation is required with NOAA Fisheries, Level 5's (and 4's if appropriate), veterinarians, behaviorists, etc.

Rationale for consultation: First assessments and strategies almost invariably change with more discussion or information. Consultations will likely help to increase human safety and critical choices regarding risks to whale health must be made with the best available information.

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Criteria for certification

Level 4 certification and:

- Experience w/ right whale behavior and/or includes a person on the team directly involved in the whale disentanglement (in the boat with the whale) that is experienced in right whale behavior
- Documented participation in a right whale disentanglement and/or NMFS/PCCS review of video of participation in a right whale disentanglement that followed NMFS protocol
- Commitment to Consultation to include:
 - Immediate Consultation: when possible, use satellite/cell phones to bring in additional ideas/experience from other level 5s and level 4s (and vets and behaviorists if appropriate) while on scene with an entangled right whale
 - Action Plan Development: For a tagged right whale, consultation required with NMFS, level 5s and 4s, vets, behaviorists, etc.

Rationale for consultation: First assessments and strategies almost invariably change with more discussion or information. Consultation will likely help to increase human safety and critical choices regarding risks to whale health must be made with the best available information.