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Wheelhouse card for Alaskan Fishermen

State of Alaska, NOAA, Fishermen



INTERNATIONAL
WHALING COMMISSION

Marine Mammal Entanglement Wheelhouse Guide for Commercial Fishermen

NOAA Fisheries
Protected Resources
24-hour hotline

(888)
774-7325

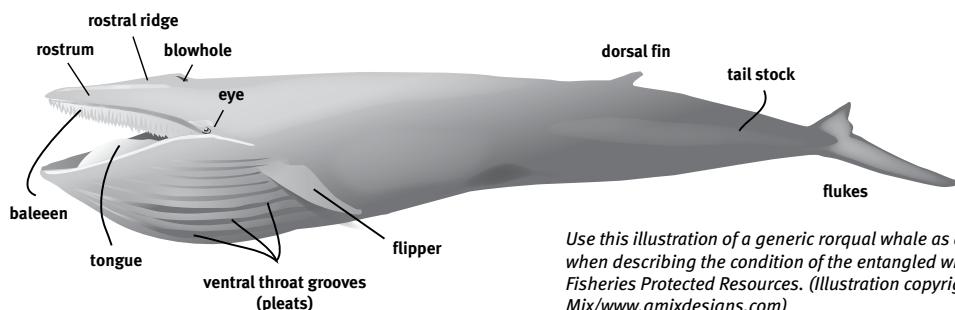
If you encounter a whale while fishing:

Avoid entanglement. See tips on reverse to prevent whales from becoming entangled in your fishing gear.

If a whale is entangled, assess the situation. First, determine if your situation is unsafe because the whale is too close. Maintain a safe distance (100 yards). If your vessel is attached to the animal (e.g., seine or drift net fishing), determine if it is possible to safely help the whale free itself (see tips on reverse).

Free your vessel. Remember that entangled animals can be dangerous and unpredictable. Stay at least 25-50 feet away (one whale-body length). If you must free your vessel from the animal, and it is safe to do so, cut your fishing gear to leave 25-50 feet attached to the whale. Put a large buoy bag on the gear attached to the whale. This will make it easier for NOAA Fisheries to track the animal and possibly disentangle it later.

Call NOAA Fisheries Protected Resources at (907) 586-7235 (office) or (888) 774-7325 (24-hour hotline) if you are unable to free the animal. Provide information on your exact location; sea conditions; species, size, and condition of the animal and its ability to surface to breathe; and type of gear and how the animal is entangled. This will help the agency determine whether or how to assist in disentanglement. Take pictures, if you have time and can do so safely, to help disentangle later.



Use this illustration of a generic rorqual whale as a guide when describing the condition of the entangled whale to NOAA Fisheries Protected Resources. (Illustration copyright Garth Mix/www.gmixdesigns.com)

Report the incident to the NOAA Fisheries Marine Mammal Authorization Program. You can get the appropriate form from local enforcement or from the NOAA Fisheries website at <http://alaskafisheries.noaa.gov/protectedresources/observers/mmapform.pdf>. Your Marine Mammal Authorization allows for the legal “incidental take” of marine mammals in the course of commercial fishing. You must, however, report any incidental injuries or mortalities to marine mammals within 48 hours of the end of your fishing trip.

! Do not get in the water with the whale or approach a free-swimming entangled animal.

How to prevent entanglements

Tips from fishermen

Make noise. Changing the speed or direction of your vessel (put vessel in and out of gear) can sometimes make whales aware of your presence and cause them to change course.

Put tension on the net or line by towing on the net. A whale is less likely to get entangled and more likely to get through a taut net than a loose one.

Towing the net may also help create bubbles or sound that could deter a whale.

Use sinking (rather than floating) line on pot gear whenever possible.

Stay aware of your gear so you can act quickly if you encounter a whale.

Use the radio. If you see a whale approaching, let others fishing in your area know so they can take steps to avoid it.

Report ghost gear. If you come across or know of lost gear, report it at www.mcafoundation.org/report.html/.

If you have your own tip you'd like to share, contact Sunny Rice, Alaska Sea Grant Marine Advisory Program in Petersburg, (907) 772-3381 or fnar@uaf.edu.



*Humpback whales (*Megaptera novaeangliae*) are less aware of their surroundings when they are feeding. (Photo by Barry Bracken, Petersburg Marine Mammal Center)*



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