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Update on Stranded Juvenile Humpback Whale East Hampton, New York

Since Tuesday, April 6, NOAA experts and our partners in the Northeast marine mammal stranding network have worked to humanely euthanize a juvenile humpback whale that was stranded and trapped in the surf in a relatively remote stretch of beach in East Hampton, New York. The animal could not be safely moved into deeper water or rehabilitated due to its location and environmental conditions, and therefore had to be humanely euthanized. Our priority was to end this animal's suffering as quickly as possible. It was successfully euthanized late this morning.

Whales have unique physiological and anatomical features, so traditional veterinary procedures are often not applicable or feasible. Veterinarians and biologists onsite worked diligently to assist the animal. The team worked from the least invasive euthanasia methods such as administering large quantities of sedatives, to more direct methods such as utilizing ballistics. These techniques are widely used by wildlife professionals, although the use of ballistics with marine mammals in the U.S. has been minimal.

Putting the animal to sleep was the preferred method. NOAA staff, in consultation with local veterinarians, administered sedatives and pain relievers to the whale using dart syringe devices. The whale appeared dead from the advanced stage of sedation early this morning at around 2 a.m. However the whale was still alive at daylight. A combination of methods, including sedatives and ballistics, was then employed to humanely euthanize the whale and end its suffering. A thorough exam has been initiated to investigate what may have caused the whale to strand.

During administration of the sedatives, one of the dart syringe devices ricocheted off the whale into the surf. Since the device may still contain approximately 50ccs of medications, a public safety alert will be issued to request that the dart be handled carefully like any other medical waste and reported to the local police department immediately for proper handling.