



van den Berg

Rescue, Conservation & Education

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Guidelines for rescue & rehabilitation of stranded harbour porpoises (*Phocoena phocoena*)

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MONITOR

It is important to closely monitor the animals during the rehabilitation process and register:

- **breathing** rates (5min)
- colour and structure of **defecation**
 - observations of behaviour
- upward or downward **cramping**
 - timing and occurrence of **coughs**



GENERAL

Rehabilitation of stranded cetaceans is not to be taken lightly and is an **intensive**, costly, complex **trajectory**.

Full recovery often takes 3-6 months. Rehabilitation shall only be attempted when acting in the animal's best interest

Rehabilitation requires:

- quarantine facilities
- water management
- veterinarian care
- animal caretakers + volunteers, for both day and night shifts



REHYDRATION

In the first twelve hours after stranding **rehydration** of the animal is **crucial**.

The **composition** (ratios of % saline) is determined **based on the blood values**.

These fluids are administered utilizing a lubricated tube, directly into the stomach or in cases of severe dehydration even through an IV.

After this first critical period, the digestion system may slowly build up by starting to **feed small portions of fish** dispersed over **multiple sessions**, every 1- or 2 hours, throughout the day and night.

If an animal receives too much food in a short period, there is a chance the digestive system can not handle this yet resulting in an **undigested ball** of fish bones in the first stomach or vomiting.



BASIN

The basin should be of **sufficient size** and **oval-shaped**, as when the pool is round and/or too small, animals can swim themselves crooked or die from stress.

A **light colour** of paint is preferred as it increases visibility and allows for observing faecal excretion and behavioural cues, such as cramping.

The water needs to be **salt**, refreshed or filtered, and stable in temperature.



HEALTH ASSESSMENT

At the rehabilitation centre, a **medical check** will be performed by the vet. During this assessment the animal will be weighed, girth, size and body temperature will be measured, and the vet will attempt to take **microbiological swaps** and collect various samples, such as **blood**, breath, gastric juice or faecal samples for further specific diagnostics. Based on these results, an individual **treatment plan** will be designed and additional examinations such as echo- or endoscopy, X-ray or CT scan will be planned.



RELEASEMENT

Upon release, the animal should form **no threat to the wild** population and must have a **fair chance of survival**.

Therefore, the animal must:

- show no hearing deficiency,
 - be able to catch fish
- remain healthy after being off medications for 2 weeks, and
- not infectious to other animals

