

MBH0107130o, Case update, February 2013

A neonatal male killer whale was recovered January 7, 2013 from Dungeness Spit, near Sequim, WA. The animal was transported to the NOAA facility at Sand Point, Seattle and a post mortem examination was conducted January 8, 2013. The animal was 236 cm long and weighed 158 kg and presented with prominent fetal folds and vibrissae with apparent rake marks along the flank and leading edges of the flukes. Scavenging was noted in and along the margins of the mouth and tongue. There was no apparent indication of human interaction.

Gross examination revealed bleeding and fluid accumulation in the blubber and skeletal muscle around the head and throat region, as well as within the melon, tongue, right ear and brain. There was free fluid accumulation within the chest and abdominal cavities and the lungs were partially inflated. The stomach contained a few stones and red mucous and there was no ingesta within the small intestine. Approximately 0.5 ml of feces was in the colon.

Microscopic review of the sampled tissues is still underway and initial microbiology of harvested organs did not recover any significant pathogens. Studies on post mortem heart blood suggest that this animal may not have nursed after birth.

Preliminary genetic results from NOAA's Northwest Fisheries Science Center indicate that the killer whale calf was a member of J-pod. Preliminary genetic parentage analysis indicates that J28 is the likely mother of the stranded calf. Parentage analysis also identified L41 as the likely father.

At present, no specific cause of death has been assigned for the loss of this neonate. As the lungs were partially inflated, this animal had been born alive and the bleeding and fluid accumulation around the head and throat regions suggest a possible dystochia or injury related to live stranding, prior to death. Results from additional diagnostic studies are pending and will be provided as they are available. A report should be finalized within 6-8 weeks.



Photo: NOAA Fisheries