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## Beached pygmy sperm whale to be euthanized

Whale beached self at Spessard Holland Park, officials say

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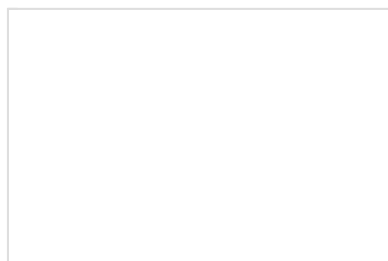
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**MELBOURNE, Fla.** - Biologists plan to euthanize a 10-foot-long pygmy sperm whale that beached itself Monday morning at Spessard Holland Park, Local 6 news partner Florida Today reports.

"It's really, really sick," said Megan Stolen, a research scientist with the Hubbs-SeaWorld Research Institute. "It's very, very skinny."

Stolen suspects the whale may be suffering from heart failure.



But biologists plan to examine the whale's remains to test for the so-called morbillivirus. They'll test whether that measles-like virus, which killed more than 1,600 dolphins since July 2013, also killed the pygmy sperm whale.

The virus has been killing bottlenose dolphins along the Atlantic Coast for more than two years in the worst outbreak of the virus in almost three decades.

The virus claimed 740 dolphins from New Jersey to Florida in 1987.

Monday's was one of several recent whale strandings in the region.

On May 7, Hubbs researchers received a report from Canaveral National Seashore staff that the whale had stranded alive on the beach within the national park.

Pilot whale strands at KSC



The whale washed out for a while but then washed back onto the beach at Kennedy Space Center.

Hubbs staff euthanized that whale, too. Whales rarely survive beaching. But NOAA Fisheries also mandates all whales and dolphins that beach during a morbillivirus outbreak must be euthanized to prevent spread of the virus.

The dolphins infected with the virus wash up with lesions on their skin, mouth, joints, or lungs.

Since July 2013, the virus has killed more than 1,660 bottlenose dolphins, from New Jersey to Brevard, more than 300 of them in the Florida, according to NOAA Fisheries.

Stolen said about 30 dead bottlenose dolphins in the Indian River Lagoon region have tested positive for the virus. But as many as 100 in the region may have died from the virus, the Hubbs researchers suspect.

If tests continue to show no morbillivirus infections, NOAA Fisheries may soon consider declaring a formal end to the unusual die-off, Hubbs officials said earlier this month. That would also end the mandatory euthanizing of the stranded dolphins and whales.

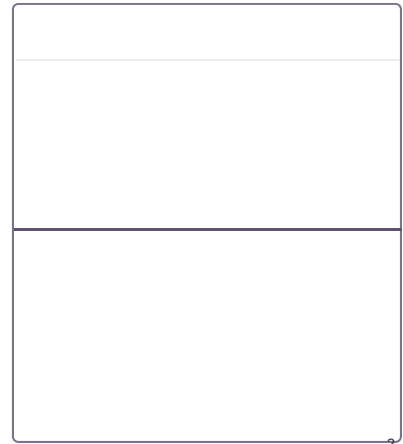


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