# Sperm whale death raises alarm over fishing gear entanglements



The death of a sperm whale on the shores of Raasay has raised concerns about marine entanglements, particularly related to fishing gear, after the creature was discovered stranded on the island's coastline on Monday, following a rescue attempt that occurred over the preceding weekend.

The 15-metre (49-foot) sperm whale was first sighted struggling off the coast of Skye on Thursday, having become entangled in ropes, some trailing as much as 20 metres (66 feet) behind it. Volunteers from British Divers Marine Life Rescue (BDMLR) intervened on Saturday, managing to free five ropes from the whale, though several others remained wrapped around its head. BDMLR later reported that a rope had been tightly fastened around the whale's jaw, which likely hindered its ability to feed. This malnutrition was a factor in the whale’s subsequent demise once it washed ashore near Oskaig on Monday.

Rescuers documented that the whale appeared to take its last breath shortly after the disentanglement efforts. BDMLR expressed concerns regarding the frequency of whale entanglements in Scottish waters, citing this incident as part of a concerning trend involving multiple similar occurrences in recent months.

Reporting on the situation, BBC Scotland noted that entanglements typically involve fishing gear such as creel lines or 'ghost gear', which refers to lost or abandoned fishing equipment. In previous instances, such as a sperm whale found on the Isle of Harris in November 2019, marine biologists have discovered substantial amounts of fishing paraphernalia within the animals' stomachs, suggesting long-standing issues with marine debris and its impact on marine life.

Ellie MacLennan, co-ordinator of the Scottish Entanglement Alliance (SEA), remarked on the unusual frequency of entangled whales this year, elaborating that since Christmas, there have been five recorded cases of humpback whales, in addition to the sperm whale incident. Only one of these other encounters resulted in the death of the whale. Ms MacLennan noted that increasing whale populations, following the end of commercial whaling in the 1980s, might lead to more encounters with fishing gear as whale distributions shift, potentially influenced by changes in prey availability and climate conditions.

Moreover, the current seasonal presence of humpback whales in regions where they are typically less observed is seen as an anomaly, further indicating possible shifts in marine behaviour. Incidents such as one involving a humpback tangled in a Skye fish farm's equipment earlier this year have also been described as rare.

To address these ongoing issues, initiatives have been undertaken involving collaboration with the inshore fishing community to heighten awareness and response regarding entanglements. These efforts include workshops aimed at preparing fishermen for potential disentanglement scenarios. Innovative methods, such as "ropeless creels," are also being explored as a means of reducing the chance of whale entanglements in fishing waters. This technology, initially developed for fisheries in North America to support endangered whale species, is being trialled in Scotland.

Amidst these discussions, the fate of the sperm whale found on Raasay highlights the ongoing challenges surrounding marine wildlife conservation and the complex interactions between aquatic life and fishing practices.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://news.stv.tv/highlands-islands/sperm-whale-dies-after-becoming-entangled-in-fishing-ropes> - This article corroborates the death of a sperm whale due to entanglement in fishing ropes off the coast of Skye and its subsequent stranding on Raasay Island. It details the rescue efforts by British Divers Marine Life Rescue (BDMLR) and the challenges faced during the disentanglement process.
* <https://divernet.com/scuba-news/marine-biology/tangled-sperm-whale-in-trouble-off-skye/> - This article supports the details of the sperm whale's entanglement and the efforts by BDMLR to disentangle it. It also mentions the whale's weakened state and its eventual death on Raasay Island.
* <https://www.westcoasttoday.co.uk/news/another-whale-gets-stuck-and-dies-on-the-west-coast---why> - This news piece provides additional context on the recent spate of whale entanglements and deaths on the West Coast, highlighting the incident involving the sperm whale on Raasay.
* <https://www.noahwire.com> - This source is mentioned as the original article's source but does not provide specific details on the entanglement incidents. It is included as a reference to the original article.
* <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/scotland> - Although not directly linked to a specific article, BBC Scotland is mentioned as a source discussing entanglements involving fishing gear like creel lines or 'ghost gear'. This aligns with broader discussions on marine debris and its impact on whales.
* <https://www.scottishentanglementalliance.org> - This URL is not directly available in the search results, but it would be relevant for information on the Scottish Entanglement Alliance (SEA) and their efforts to address whale entanglements in Scottish waters.