



NEWS FROM NOAA

NATIONAL OCEANIC & ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION • US DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

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NEWS RELEASE
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Right Whale Calf Confirmed Dead off Jacksonville, Florida ***NOAA Fisheries Service Coordinates Response Team***

Jacksonville, FL. – A North Atlantic right whale calf was confirmed dead on January 10 by members of the Marine Mammal Stranding Network. NOAA Fisheries Service coordinated a response team to examine the whale in an effort to determine the cause of death. There are large propeller marks and associated areas that appear to be bruised, strongly suggesting the animal died from a vessel collision. Pathology reports, which can definitively confirm this finding, are pending. Experts continue to collect samples and data from the whale today and have confirmed the whale to be a male, approximately one month old.

NOAA Fisheries Service and the Marine Mammal Stranding Network immediately responded to the dead right whale calf that was reported by a fishing boat crew off Florida's east coast Tuesday morning. The New England Aquarium aerial survey team, United States Coast Guard (USCG) and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) deployed to confirm the whale's species and location. The whale was close enough to shore to tow, giving biologists the opportunity to further investigate the event. Information gathered will not only answer questions about this particular whale, but will also aid in future analysis for understanding right whale mortalities.

"It's always frustrating to hear about a right whale mortality," said NOAA Fisheries biologist Barb Zoodsma. "However, it is important for natural resource managers to understand the causes of these mortalities and we could not do that without the partnership of the Marine Mammal Stranding Network." The members of the Marine Mammal Stranding Network (MMSN) responding to this event include: NOAA Fisheries Service, United States Coast Guard, United States Geological Survey's Sirenia Project, National Institute of Standards and Technology, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, Georgia Department of Natural Resources, University of North Carolina at Wilmington, and the Virginia Aquarium.

Ship strikes are one of the leading causes of known right whale mortalities along the U.S. east coast. NOAA Fisheries plans to release a proposed rule for a ship strike strategy in the near future and will request public comment on the need for this strategy. The purpose of this strategy is to reduce future risks of right whale mortalities from ship collisions. All maritime vessels are urged to use caution while cruising along the southeast coast during the right whale winter calving season (November 15 – April 15). Routine aerial surveys are conducted during each calving season to spot right whales and alert vessels of whales that are in their vicinity.

The North Atlantic right whale is the most endangered whale off American coasts. After a period of intense whaling in the 19th and early 20th centuries, it was on the brink of extinction. Although whaling practices have ceased, right whales face serious risks from ship collisions and entanglements in fishing gear and marine debris. The North Atlantic right whale population is now estimated to be approximately 300 animals and is listed as “Endangered” under the Endangered Species Act of 1973. Right whales and all other species of marine mammals are protected under the Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972. Federal regulations prohibit anyone from approaching a right whale within 500-yards.

NOAA Fisheries Service is dedicated to protecting and preserving our nation’s living marine resources and their habitat through scientific research, management and enforcement. NOAA Fisheries Service provides effective stewardship of these resources for the benefit of the nation, supporting coastal communities that depend upon them, and helping to provide safe and healthy seafood to consumers and recreational opportunities for the American public. To learn more about NOAA Fisheries Service, please visit: www.nmfs.noaa.gov.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, an agency of the U.S. Commerce Department, is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through the prediction and research of weather and climate-related events and providing environmental stewardship of our nation’s coastal and marine resources. Through the emerging Global Earth Observation System of Systems (GEOSS), NOAA is working with its federal partners and nearly 60 countries to develop a global monitoring network that is as integrated as the planet it observes.

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Media Note:

Photos available upon request.

For more information on the Marine Mammal Stranding Network, log onto:
[www.nmfs.noaa.gov/prot_res/PR2/Health and Stranding Response ProgramT](http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/prot_res/PR2/Health_and_Stranding_Response_ProgramT)