

Scottish Executive Environment Group

**ROYAL FISH: GUIDANCE FOR DEALING WITH  
STRANDED ROYAL FISH (e.g. WHALES OVER  
25 FEET) IN SCOTLAND**

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## Introduction

### Purpose

1 This guidance is being issued to clarify the arrangements which currently apply when dealing with Royal Fish found stranded on the shoreline of Scotland. It provides guidance to the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) on how to respond to notification of a 'Royal Fish' in Scotland. It also clarifies the role of the local authorities when determining the most favourable disposal option for 'Royal Fish' and the information they will be asked to provide to the Scottish Executive Environment and Rural Affairs Department (SEERAD) when finalising the arrangements.

### Definitions

2 In Scotland 'Royal Fish' are considered to be those stranded whales measuring more than 25 feet from the snout to the middle of the tail<sup>1</sup>.

### Geographical Extent

3 This Guidance applies **only** to Scotland. In England and Wales, responsibility for 'Royal Fish' rests with the post of Receiver of Wreck (ROW) in the Maritime and Coastguard Agency, an appointment made under the Merchant Shipping Act 1995.

### Guidance

4 **This document is intended for guidance only.** Local practicalities will always be a very important consideration.

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<sup>1</sup> The right to claim Royal Fish in Scotland allows SEERAD (on behalf of the Crown) to claim stranded whales which are too large to be drawn to land by a 'wain pulled by six oxen.' SEERAD understand that no stranded whale measuring more than 25 feet from the snout to the middle of the tail could be so drawn to land, and so only intend to review the right to claim stranded whales which measure more than 25 feet from the snout to the middle of the tail.'

## Background

5 In July 1999, the responsibility for dealing with all 'Royal Fish' in Scotland devolved to the Scottish Executive. On behalf of the Crown, the Scottish Executive Environment & Rural Affairs Department (SEERAD), Wildlife and Habitats Division, has first claim on all "Royal Fish" found stranded dead on Scottish shores. Contact details are provided in Annex A.

6 Further information regarding 'Royal Fish' can be found on the Scottish Executive's website: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Environment/Wildlife-Habitats/19887/82239>

7 The responsibility for 'Royal Fish' in England and Wales rests with the post of Receiver of Wreck (ROW) in the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA), an appointment made under the Merchant Shipping Act 1995. Further information on the process in England and Wales can be found at the MCA website (<http://www.mcga.gov.uk>).

## Responsibility for 'Royal Fish'

8 On behalf of the Crown, the Scottish Executive Environment & Rural Affairs Department (SEERAD) has first claim on all 'Royal Fish' found dead and stranded on the shoreline of Scotland. Where SEERAD do not wish to claim a Royal Fish, they will liaise with the local authority Environment Health Department who may wish to arrange for their disposal.

9 In the case of rarer species, the National Museums of Scotland or other organisations may request the whale skeleton for their collection. This option will be considered by SEERAD in collaboration with the relevant local authority and the interested party.

10 The responsibility for whales less than 25 feet in length, and all porpoises, dolphins and sturgeons rests with the local authority, who may wish to arrange for their disposal. In such cases, the stranded cetacean should be reported directly to the Scottish Strandings Co-ordinator at the Scottish Agricultural College (SAC) in Inverness, who record **all** strandings around Scotland and, who may wish to undertake a post-mortem examination (necropsy). Contact details can be found at Annex B.

11 If a 'Royal Fish' is dead, but has not yet stranded ashore, a watching brief will be required and the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) will consider the need to broadcast details of its location for shipping and navigational purposes.

12 If a 'Royal Fish' is stranded but not yet dead, animal welfare organisations normally take responsibility for any proposed rescue for these animals. The 'Scottish Society for the Protection of Cruelty to Animals' (Scottish SPCA) should be contacted in the first instance. The 'Cetacean Research & Rescue Centre' (CRRU) may also be able to offer assistance. Contact details can be found in Annex B.

## Notification of 'Royal Fish'

13 When 'Royal Fish' (whales measuring over 25 feet in length from the snout to the middle of the tail) are discovered stranded dead on the shoreline around Scotland, the local Coastguard will notify both SEERAD **and** the appropriate Local Authority Environmental Health Department, providing wherever possible, the following information:

- Species of whale (where known)
- Size (from the snout to the middle of the tail fluke)
- Condition of carcass
- Precise location of stranding, giving a six figure grid reference (e.g. west end of XXX Bay) and a brief description of the location and immediate area
- Digital photographs of the whale and surrounding area, where possible
- Number of carcasses stranded
- The owner of the shoreline, if known (local authority or private landlord)
- Whether the local authority Environmental Health Officer has been informed. If so, the contact name, address and telephone number;
- Whether the Strandings Co-ordinator at the Scottish Agricultural College, Inverness intends to conduct a post-mortem? If yes, provide any details known.
- Is the location accessible to the public? If yes, has a guard been placed?
- Is there any media interest?

***[Note. If the whale is less than 25 feet in length, the coastguard should directly contact the local environmental health department who have responsibility for the removal and disposal of the carcass.]***

14 The local Coastguard should also inform the Scottish Strandings Co-ordinator at the Scottish Agricultural College (SAC) in Inverness, who record **all** strandings around Scotland and, who may wish to undertake a post-mortem examination if the animal is in good condition and at an accessible location (contact details in Annex B). To assist with this SAC may require more detailed information including<sup>2</sup>:

- Date the stranded animal was first seen
- The shape of the head and whole animal and, the colour of the carcass (to assist with a more accurate identification of the species)

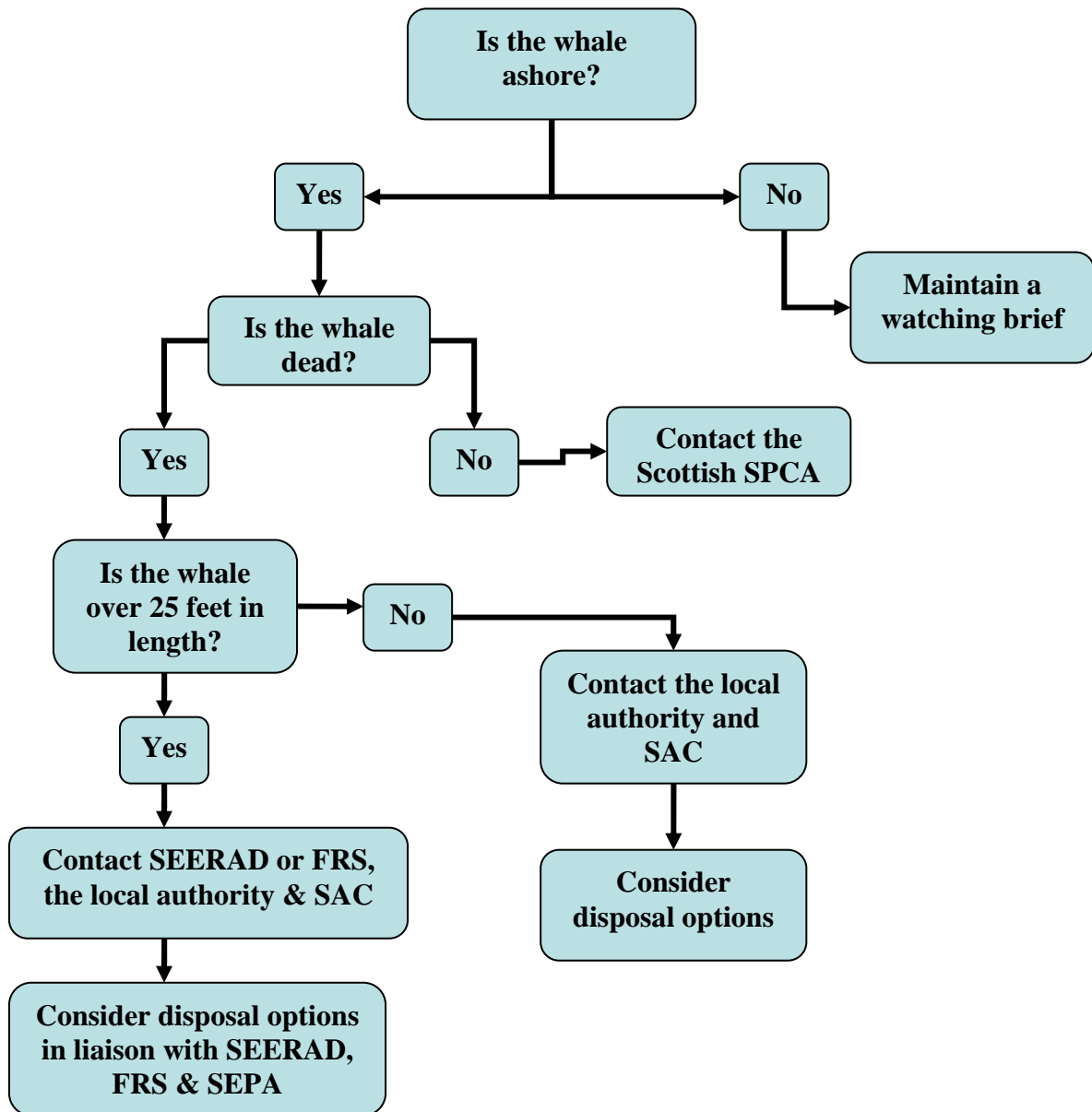
15 The Scottish Strandings Co-ordinator will always seek to obtain samples from whale carcasses, but these samples must be collected within 36 hours of death to allow a meaningful post mortem examination, therefore rapid notification is essential.

16 The attached 'decision tree' should help all organisations understand the notification process.

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<sup>2</sup> Please note that the information requested should be applied to **all** stranded cetaceans found on Scottish shores, irrespective of size.

**'Decision Tree' on the notification process**



## **Disposal options**

17 On receiving notification of the stranded whale, the local authority Environmental Health Department will initially need to assess the situation to consider whether there is a need to make arrangements for the disposal of the carcass and if so, what the best course of action would be.

18 In choosing a suitable method for disposal of the carcass, the local authority must take into consideration the following factors:

- Public and environmental health issues – i.e., is the carcass posing a potential risk or health hazard<sup>3</sup>
- Health and safety issues for personnel dealing with the carcass
- Presence of any special constraints – i.e. local heritage/ nature conservation issues
- Cost effectiveness of disposal
- The location, including accessibility for removal equipment
- Availability of disposal sites in the area - i.e., landfill, beach disposal
- State of decomposition of the carcass
- Post-mortem result ( If conducted within 36 hours of death)

19 A proposal for disposal of the carcass should be drawn up by the local authority following consideration of all these factors and, SEERAD should be informed in writing of this before the disposal of the carcass proceeds, especially in cases where financial assistance is being sought.

20 Local circumstances will ultimately dictate the form of action local authorities take when disposing of whale carcasses. It is desirable that, in consultation with both SEERAD and the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA), such action is taken as appears practical and necessary to dispose of whale carcasses in a safe and efficient manner, to protect public health, safety or amenity.

## **Recovery of Costs**

21 SEERAD has no legal obligation to assist with the costs of disposal of 'Royal Fish' but funding may be provided at its discretion, to assist local authorities with difficult disposal cases.

22 If a local authority wishes to seek access to this funding, it should provide SEERAD with details of its proposals for disposal, which should be based on the most appropriate and cost-effective option. SEERAD will consider these proposals and advise in writing (e-mail is acceptable) whether financial assistance towards the cost of disposal will be available and, if so, to what extent. This written agreement will provide the basis for the level of financial assistance subsequently granted.

23 A summary of the costs (as previously agreed) incurred during the disposal of the 'Royal Fish,' including a breakdown of the services used (i.e., contractors, staff time, transport), should be passed to SEERAD for payment. These costs should be presented on a single numbered local authority invoice with VAT indicated as appropriate.

24 In support of the invoice, the following information should be provided by the local authority:

- Written confirmation of the size and species of the stranded whale;

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<sup>3</sup> Local authorities may wish to contact the State Veterinary Service and / or the local SEPA office to seek advice on animal by-product and waste matters respectively.

- Details of the disposal options considered (and reasons for the chosen option, including why other options have not been chosen);
- Breakdown of the costs incurred: including, equipment hire and associated costs, labour,
- Date of commencement and completion of removal [if applicable]

25 Only when this information is provided, will SEERAD release funds to cover the costs of removal.

### **Health Issues**

26 Stranded whales may harbour infections / diseases and, the local authority should, wherever necessary, take appropriate precautions to advise the general public of the potential dangers.

### **Media Interest**

27 A dead or dying whale can generate media attention, therefore all press enquiries should be directed to the Scottish Executive Press Office.

## Contact Arrangements

### ***During normal working hours***

28 In the event of a 'Royal Fish' stranding dead on a Scottish shore during normal working hours, the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) or local authority Environmental Health Department should contact the Wildlife & Habitats Division, within the Scottish Executive's Environment and Rural Affairs Department. The contact details are as follows:

Marine Nature Conservation & Protected Areas Team  
Wildlife and Habitats Division  
Scottish Executive Environment & Rural Affairs Department  
Victoria Quay  
Edinburgh  
EH6 6QQ  
Tel: 0131 244 6627  
Fax: 0131 244 7163

### ***Out of office hours***

29 In the event of a Royal Fish stranding on Scottish shores **outside normal working hours** (Monday to Friday, 8.30am to 5pm and all public holidays), the Environment Protection Group of the Fisheries Research Services, Marine Laboratory, Aberdeen (FRS) will act as the first point of contact within the Scottish Executive. The FRS ML Duty Emergency Officer contact details are below:

|                  |   |
|------------------|---|
| Mobile Telephone | 07770 733423                                |
| Pager:           | 07699 705993                                |
| Fax              | 01224 295524 (Environment Protection Group) |

It should be noted that on occasion, particularly during the response to an incident, that the mobile phone may be otherwise engaged. In the event that a call fails to connect with the duty officer, a message, including a contact name and return phone number, should be left on the pager.

Should both these routes fail to receive a response then a call should be made to the FRS Marine Laboratory Switchboard: (01224) 876544.

## Useful Contacts

### Scottish Executive

Wildlife and Habitats Division  
Environment Group  
Area 1-H93  
Victoria Quay  
Edinburgh  
EH6 6QQ

Tel: 0131 244 6627  
Fax: 0131 244 7163  
[marinemammals@scotland.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:marinemammals@scotland.gsi.gov.uk)

### Scottish Agricultural College (SAC)

Drummondhill  
Stratherrick Road  
Inverness  
Inverness-shire  
IV2 4JZ

Tel: 01463 243 030 (Bob Reid)  
Fax: 01463 711 103  
Mob: 0797 9245 893

### Fisheries Research Services - Marine Laboratory

P.O. Box 101  
375 Victoria Road,  
Aberdeen  
AB11 9DB

Tel: 01224 876544  
Fax: 01224 295524  
Mob: 07770 733423

### Scottish Environment Protection Agency

Corporate Office  
Erskine Court  
Castle Business Park  
Stirling  
FK9 4TR

Tel: 01786 457 700

### Natural History Museum

Department of Zoology  
Cromwell Road  
London  
SW7 5BD

Tel: 01710 938 9123

### Scottish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Scottish SPCA)

Braehead Mains  
603 Queensferry Road  
Edinburgh  
EH4 6EA

Tel: 0131 339 0222  
Fax: 0131 339 4777  
[enquiries@scottishspca.org](mailto:enquiries@scottishspca.org)

### Cetacean Research and Rescue Unit (CRRU)

P.O. Box 11307  
Banff  
Aberdeenshire  
AB45 3WB

Tel: 01261 851 696  
**National Hotline Number: 0845 1081 422**

### Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA)

Scotland & Northern Ireland Regional Office  
Marine House  
Blaikies Quay  
Aberdeen  
AB11 5EZ

Tel: 01224 597 900  
Fax: 01224 571 920

### Historic Scotland

Longmore House  
Salisbury Place  
Edinburgh  
EH9 1SH

Tel: 0131 668 8764

### Scottish Executive Information Directorate

St Andrews House  
Edinburgh  
EH1 3DG

Tel: 0131 244 2056

