**NATIONAL PARKS AND WILDLIFE SERVICE**  
Disposal of whale carcasses

# Checklist for land managers

The National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) developed this checklist to assist land managers to dispose of whale carcasses.

**The responsibility for the disposal of whale carcasses rests with the land manager.** On NSW beaches, this is generally local council.

1. Collect key information

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Check** | **Action** | **Purpose** |
|  | Check for signs of life   * respiration * eye movement * reflexes of the eye and blowhole when touched | * If alive, NPWS assumes control.  Phone: 13000 PARKS * If dead, the Land Manager takes responsibility * Contact NPWS for reporting, advice and data collection at 13000 PARKS |
|  | Identify exact location | * To consider logistical requirements and proximity to urban and peri-urban areas |
|  | Identify species and state of decomposition | * Contact NPWS for further species information including recording, necropsy procedures, scientifically valuable species and to determine appropriate disposal |
|  | Photograph the carcass | * Send images to the assigned NPWS officer. Include photographs of identifying features, wounds and carcass length |

1. Notifications (where applicable)

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Action | Purpose |
| NPWS | For carcasses on NPWS estate and reporting, advice and data collection |
| Local Aboriginal Land Council | To ensure established protocols are followed for species with cultural significance |
| Local Council | For carcasses on local beaches |
| Department Primary Industries | NPWS can notify Department of Primary Industries, for the shark smart app |
| Crown Lands | For carcasses on Crown land not managed by council |
| Ports Authority (VTS) | For a floating carcass to broadcast hazard over marine radio in NSW Ports |
| Proposed waste facility for disposal | To ensure the waste facility has space for general putrescible waste and can prepare for carcass arrival |
| Environment Protection Authority | To seek approval for burial outside of a licensed waste facility. Call Duty Incident Advice Coordinator on 0418 445 035 |
| Agency media unit | To commence formulating key media messages |

1. Immediate actions for safety

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Check** | **Action** | **Purpose** |
|  | Assess threats to personnel, public, or property | * To identify and then address hazards to reduce risk |
|  | Cordon off the site from people and pets | * Consider all accesses (the same approach distances apply if the animal is alive or dead) * Consider installing appropriate signage |
|  | Coordinate crowd management | * Seek assistance if necessary, e.g. NSW Police. * Inform people at the scene about the purpose of the operation. * Consider appropriate media statements to alert the local community to appropriate approach distances and restrictions |

1. Details required for disposal decision

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Check** | **Action** | **Considerations** |
|  | Assess site access | * Safety of personnel, logistics of moving equipment and features of machinery required |
|  | Assess current and forecast weather conditions | * Sea state, temperature, daylight hours remaining, and tides |
|  | Identify appropriate machinery and equipment | * Size of carcass, beach access and stability of substrate |
|  | Ensure adequate resources | * Number of personnel, type of equipment and machinery needed |
|  | Complete all necessary documentation | * Photograph completed documentation in case records are affected by prevailing conditions |
|  | Collate information needed to inform disposal options | * Extraction method, transport and location of the facilities available for disposal |

1. Disposal options for a marine wildlife carcass

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Options** | **Determining factors** |
| 1. No burial. Leave in situ\* to decompose naturally.   Preferred option if location is remote and the site is unlikely to be accessed by the public. | Consider if:   * There is a low risk to public health and safety due to proximity to residences, businesses, water sources and recreational areas |
| 1. Dispose in licensed waste facility.   Preferred option in urban and peri urban areas or there are health and safety risks to public at or adjacent to the site. | Consider if:   * The carcass is not scientifically valuable * The land manager has approved landfill disposal costs * A licensed waste facility has agreed to accept the carcass |
| 1. Bury offsite. | Consider if:   * The carcass is scientifically valuable and will be exhumed in the future * Permission is required from the NSW Environment Protection Authority for burial outside of a licensed waste facility * Landholder has nominated a discreet burial site |
| 1. Bury on beach.\*   Least preferred option. Only to be considered where it is not possible to leave in situ or machinery access is not possible and removal would pose a high safety risk. | Consider if:   * The site has infrequent public access and is not adjacent to residences, businesses, or recreation areas * Potential impacts have been communicated to residents and businesses * Risk of the carcass being uncovered by shifting sands has been considered * Remains are not planned to be exhumed for research because beach burials are difficult to relocate |

Towing or detonating a carcass is not recommended due to potential liability and safety risks.

\* Issues to consider for in situ decomposition and beach burial as the carcass decomposes:

* smell of decomposition
* attraction of scavenging animals on land
* potential zoonotic and parasitic risks to the public
* leachates seeping into adjacent water with unknown implications for public health and safety
* potential souveniring by the public (illegal under the *Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016*)
* community concern regarding risks associated with leachates attracting sharks (note: current research indicates there is no evidence that a carcass buried on a beach increases the risk of shark attack on that beach).

1. Manage disposal of the carcass

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Check** |  | **Considerations** |
|  | Health and Safety Protection | * Post a lookout to watch for incoming tides and waves * Ensure all personnel assisting wear personal protective equipment to protect the health and safety of everyone involved * Adopt strict hygiene protocols to stop the spread of disease * Advise all personnel assisting to manage risks associated with operating and working around machinery and how to undertake heavy lifting * Consider site risks to assisting personnel and onlookers and monitor equipment use and bio-waste handling at the site * Clean all equipment and transport vehicles thoroughly after use to ensure equipment is maintained and there is negligible risk of bio-waste contamination |
|  | Communication to the Public and Media | * Develop key messages with agency media * Inform any people at the scene with the status and purpose of the operation |
|  | Culturally and Scientifically Significant Species | * Consider natural and cultural heritage values * Liaise with Aboriginal land councils to ensure protocols for culturally significant species are followed * NPWS will advise if the specimen is considered scientifically valuable in liaison with the Australian Museum and will discuss necessary arrangements |
|  | Transport | * Carcasses being transported on a Heavy Vehicle must comply with legal dimensions and mass limits in the Heavy Vehicle National Law (HVNL) * NSW Road rules also apply * Apply for a permit from Roads and Maritime Services on 1300 656 371 if the intended load exceeds the legal dimensions and mass requirements |

1. Guidelines for site selection and burial

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Aspect of the burial** | | **Considerations** |
|  | Site selection: | * Locate the burial site behind the fore dune and above extreme tides for beach burials * Choose generally dry substrate. Sand is good, clay is poor * Check the soil at depth is non-permeable and will retain leachate over time * Ensure the burial site is away from stream mouths, erosion and is above the water table * Check the bottom and sides of the pit do not show signs of fissures that might result in loss of containment |
|  | Burial: | * Open the animal’s body cavity in the pit to promote decomposition and gas release * Bury the carcass at 2 to 3 metres depth to prevent access by vandals or scavengers * Heap surplus soil over the pit to stop the carcass rising from gas entrapment and to filter odours and fluids * Construct diversion banks to prevent surface run-off from entering the pit * Fence off the graves of large animals in case of subsidence during decomposition * Erect risk signage to warn of subsidence |