

Investigation into the health, group composition and relative abundance of long-finned pilot whales

Project outline

Supervisors Dr Kate Sprogis¹, Dr Holly Raudino², Dr Kelly Waples²,
Dr Barbara Cook³, Ass. Prof. Courtney Waugh⁴

¹The UWA Oceans Institute and School of Biological Sciences, Great Southern Marine Facility, The University of Western Australia, Albany, WA 6330, Australia

²Department of Biodiversity Conservation and Attractions, Perth, WA, Australia

³School of Agriculture and Environment, The University of Western Australia, Albany, WA 6330, Australia

⁴Faculty of Biosciences and Aquaculture, Nord University, 7713 Steinkjer, Norway

Summary

Long-finned pilot whales are a common species to mass strand in Australia. Investigating potential causes of mass strandings is difficult when scientists do not have baseline data of pilot whales. Therefore, this project aims to investigate the health, group composition and relative abundance of presumably healthy free-ranging pilot whales off Western Australia. Photo-identification and blow sample data will be collected in the field, and analysed in the lab. The project is a collaborative project with supervisors from UWA, the WA Government and Nord University (Norway). The results from this research will provide baseline data for understanding the group composition and relative abundance of pilot whales, and for comparison to biological samples collected during mass strandings.

UWA Albany student

Masters of Philosophy student (2 years), or a PhD student (3-3.5 years). Stipend required.

Aims

To investigate the group composition, relative abundance and health of long-finned pilot whales.

Importance

Baseline health and abundance/group composition data is required for a greater understanding behind mass stranding events.

Methods

Fieldwork (summer months) and lab analyses (health and microRNA) required.

Funding

Nord University, in-kind, other funding potentially required.

Further reading

Gales, R., R. Alderman, S. Thalmann, and K. Carlyon. 2012. Satellite tracking of long-finned pilot whales (*Globicephala melas*) following stranding and release in Tasmania, Australia. *Wildlife Research* **39**:520-531.

Hamilton, V., K. Evans, B. Raymond, E. Betty, and M. A. Hindell. 2019. Spatial variability in responses to environmental conditions in Southern Hemisphere long-finned pilot whales. *Marine Ecology Progress Series* **629**:207-218.

Meyer, C. E., J. R. Zaeschmar, and R. Constantine. 2024. Occurrence, site-fidelity and photo-identification of long-finned pilot whales in Aotearoa New Zealand. *New Zealand Journal of Marine and Freshwater Research*:1-20.