

Cetacean Strandings in San Diego County, California: 1904-2007

Kerri Danil¹, Susan J. Chivers¹, Mike D. Henshaw¹, Judy A. St. Leger², and Janet L. Thieleking¹

¹ Southwest Fisheries Science Center, 8604 La Jolla Shores Dr., La Jolla, CA 92037

² Sea World San Diego, 500 SeaWorld Drive, San Diego, CA 92109, USA

Abstract

A total of 630 cetacean strandings in San Diego County, comprising 14 odontocete species and 5 mysticete species, were summarized for the years 1904 through 2007. *Delphinus* spp. (48.4%) were the most commonly stranded cetacean, followed by *Tursiops truncatus* (19.8%), *Eschrichtius robustus* (12.2%), and *Lagenorhynchus obliquidens* (5.6%). Coastal protrusions likely contributed to the greater number of strandings in the La Jolla and Coronado/Imperial Beach areas. Overall, *Delphinus* spp. strandings peaked in the early to mid 1970s and in the late 1990s to 2007, coincident with cool oceanographic regimes. More specifically, *D. delphis* stranding peaks occurred in 1989, 1995, and 2003-2005, while *D. capensis* strandings peaked in 2003 and 2006-2007. Peaks in *T. truncatus* strandings occurred in 1976 and 1980. *T. truncatus* neonate strandings indicate a calving season from May to September. A peak in *E. robustus* strandings occurred during the documented 1999/2000 die-off. Temporal changes in stranding rates of *Delphinus* spp., *P. dalli* and *G. macrorhynchus*, were likely associated with changes in oceanographic conditions. Extralimital strandings of *Phocoena phocoena* occurred in 2005 and 2006.