**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

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| **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
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1. Notifications (where applicable)

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| 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

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| --- | --- | --- |
| **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

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| --- | --- | --- |
| **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

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| **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

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| **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
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1. Guidelines for site selection and burial

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| **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
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