



NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service
Alaska Region

NEWS RELEASE

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Humpback cow and calf swim free after life-threatening entanglement

Juneau, AK – On Tuesday morning NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service received a report from fishermen that a mother and calf humpback whale had just gotten entangled in fishing gear off Point Baker in Sumner Strait, Southeast Alaska.

The fishers sighted the mother humpback whale and her calf only moments before the whales hit the gillnet and became entangled. It appeared that the animals punched

through (made contact with) the belly of the net and were entangled in only webbing as opposed to any lines. Unfortunately, both animals were wrapped up in a significant amount of netting such that they were tethered together lying side-by-side and almost touching—a life threatening situation for both mammals. The entanglement was too complex for the fishermen to attempt to free the whales without endangering themselves.

The fishers assisted operations by monitoring the animals until an experienced whale disentanglement response team from NOAA's Protected Resources Division in Juneau arrived on scene to lend a hand. NOAA scientists worked with the local fishermen to further assess the situation in order to determine the best plan of action.

While assessing and monitoring the animals, the whales worked free of each other and began to shed the fishing gear. After a few more hours, the adult female had shed all gear, and the calf had very small remnants of netting still caught on barnacles on its head and on the left side of its tail.



“The remaining gear on the calf would likely be shed within a day,” said NOAA Marine Mammal Response Manager Ed Lyman. “The entanglement was no longer life threatening for either animal. They’ll both be fine.”

While the whales did not have to be cut free, NOAA credits the fishers in reporting, monitoring and assisting in the effort.

Disentangling a 40-ton whale is dangerous and should only be performed by experienced and authorized responders. Mariners are requested to report any sightings of whales in distress to the NOAA Fisheries Marine Mammal Hotline at (877) 925-7773.

NOAA understands and predicts changes in the Earth's environment, from the depths of the ocean to the surface of the sun, and conserves and manages our coastal and marine resources. Visit www.noaa.gov. To learn more about NOAA Fisheries in Alaska, visit alaskafisheries.noaa.gov or www.afsc.noaa.gov.