

Unusual stranding on KZN coast – September 2015

False Killer Whale (*Pseudorca crassidens*)

On 9 September 2015, the KZN Stranding Network received information of a live stranded dolphin in the tidal pool at Umtentweni. We were informed that the public were attempting to swim / refloat the animal. Sea World offered to assist and upon arriving on scene, found the animal in the surf zone and was fairly battered by the rocks. Upon closer inspection the animal was identified as a young False killer whale. Due to its age, injuries, time out of water and travel time to nearest rehabilitation facility, it was decided that the animal should be euthanized. The carcass was then transported to the KZN Sharks Board facility in Umhlanga where Bayworld/PE Museum are currently collecting a range of biological data.



Interesting facts about the False Killer Whales:

- Occur worldwide in tropical and temperate waters, with their latitudinal limits around 50°N and 50°S.
- Often confused with Pilot or Melon-headed whales.
- In the southern African subregion they have been recorded from Gabon, Angola, Namibia, South Africa, Mozambique, Tanzania, Madagascar, Comoros Islands and the Seychelles.
- In South African waters, they are known to be an oceanic species, usually in waters of 1000m or more.
- Diet consists of mostly cephalopods & fish but are known to pursue, capture and kill dolphins.
- Calves are born at about 1.5m.
- Gestation is ~15 months with intense suckling in the first week but slowly decreases over time, suckling recorded in captive animals for 2 years but are known to eat solid food from 6-8 months.
- Females reach maturity at 3.2m (9 - 10.5 years of age); Males at ~4.3m.
- Fecundity is low, with average calving interval every 7 years.
- Ages of up to 57 years for females and 62 years for males have been recorded.
- In Southern Africa, they are known to more likely strand *en masse*.
- Since 1928, eight mass stranding events of False killer whales have occurred in southern Africa.
- IUCN listed as Least Concern in South Africa and data deficient globally. Included on Appendix II of CITES.



Thank you to all those who assisted on & off the beach and especially to the team from Sea World and KZN Sharks Board.