



# Press Release

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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## **COLLABORATIVE EFFORT SAFELY DISENTANGLES HUMPBACK WHALE**

NOAA and the Hawaii Department of Land and Natural Resources (DLNR) with assistance from the community-based Whale Disentanglement Network successfully freed a humpback whale from a life threatening entanglement off the north side of Lanai on Sunday. The whale was entangled in lines coming from its mouth and trailing 25 feet. Line and two large red polyballs were part of the gear providing considerable drag and thereby a threat to the animal.

The whale was first seen on February 9, 2006 off the island of Hawaii by the Hawaiian Marine Mammal Consortium (HMMC), a whale research organization and a member of the disentanglement network. With assistance from DLNR, Division of Aquatic Resources on the Big Island, a special tracking buoy housing a VHF transmitter was attached to the gear entangling the whale. Unfortunately as teams got underway, VHF tracking indicated that the animal had moved into the rough waters of the Alenuihaha Channel where a rescue attempt was deemed too dangerous to undertake. Finally on February 12, the animal was sighted in waters between Maui and Lanai. The team attached large polyballs to the gear already entangled on the animal in an attempt to add drag and slow it down so rescuers could attempt to cut it free. The strategy proved successful and within a few hours the team made two cuts that removed all the gear from the animal.

This event represents the first successful disentanglement of the current humpback whale season, and the first ever disentanglement in Hawaii involving the use of a radio/VHF tracking buoy. The entanglement is the third confirmed report of an entangled humpback whale this season. The first entanglement was assessed as not life threatening, and no immediate action was taken. The second entanglement was assessed as life threatening but after an exhaustive effort was made to relocate the animal it has not been re-sighted.

The waters around the Hawaiian Islands constitute one of the world's most important North Pacific humpback whale habitats and the only place in the U.S. where humpbacks reproduce. Scientists estimate that two-thirds of the entire North Pacific humpback whale population migrates to Hawaiian waters to breed, calve, and nurse their young. Over the past few years, the number of confirmed reports of entangled whales in Hawaiian waters has increased. While these large animals are not typically at risk from drowning or immediate death, they are at increased risk of starvation, infection, physical trauma from the gear, and ship strikes as a result of the entanglement.

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“Entanglement in fishing gear and marine debris poses a serious threat to many marine animals and is a major issue,” said Naomi McIntosh, manager of the Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary. “While cutting an animal free of a life threatening entanglement may save the animal, it is not the long term answer to the problem. Preventing entanglements is the ultimate solution, and cutting whales free and documenting entanglements provides valuable information to help us prevent entanglements in the future,” McIntosh said. Maui-based sanctuary rescue staff, Ed Lyman and David Mattila, and Justin Viezbicke, the sanctuary’s West Hawaii coordinator, served as on-scene coordinators during this multi-island disentanglement effort.

If you believe you have seen an entangled whale, please call the NOAA Fisheries Hotline at **(888) 256-9840** as soon as possible. “Personnel who are part of Hawaii’s disentanglement team are federally permitted and expertly trained to undertake these activities”, said David Schofield, Marine Mammal Response Network Coordinator, NOAA Fisheries Service. “The process of disentangling a large free swimming whale is extremely dangerous and rescuers never enter the water. Never take it upon yourself to attempt to disentangle a whale.”

**High quality, dramatic photos of the rescue operation available by request.  
Contact [Keeley.Belva@noaa.gov](mailto:Keeley.Belva@noaa.gov).**

The Hawaiian Islands Whale Disentanglement Network is a community-based consortium of Federal, State and non-profit organizations working collaboratively to save whales from life threatening entanglements. The Network works in collaboration with NOAA’s Pacific Islands Regional Office and is authorized through NOAA’s Marine Mammal Health and Stranding Response Program.

NOAA’s National Marine Sanctuary Program (NMSP) seeks to increase the public awareness of America’s maritime heritage by conducting scientific research, monitoring, exploration and educational programs. Today, 13 national marine sanctuaries encompass more than 18,000 square miles of America’s ocean and Great Lakes natural and cultural resources. In addition, the NMSP is conducting a sanctuary designation process to incorporate the Northwest Hawaiian Islands Coral Reef Ecosystem Reserve into the national sanctuary system.

NOAA’s Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary was established in 1992 to protect humpback whales and their habitat in Hawaii. The sanctuary emphasizes research, education and community-based resource protection in a diverse set of conservation programs across the state. NOAA and DLNR work as partners in co-managing the sanctuary, which encompasses 1,370 square miles of coastal waters off portions of Kauai, Oahu, Molokai, Lanai, Maui and Hawaii.

NOAA Fisheries Service is dedicated to protecting and preserving our nation’s living marine resources and their habitat through scientific research, management and enforcement. NOAA Fisheries Service provides effective stewardship of these resources for the benefit of the nation, supporting coastal communities that depend upon them, and helping to provide safe and healthy seafood to consumers and recreational opportunities for the American public.

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The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, an agency of the U.S. Commerce Department, is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through the prediction and research of weather and climate-related events and providing environmental stewardship of our nation's coastal and marine resources. Through the emerging Global Earth Observation System of Systems (GEOSS), NOAA is working with its federal partners and nearly 60 countries to develop a global monitoring network that is as integrated as the planet it observes.

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On the web:

Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary:

<http://www.hihwnms.nos.noaa.gov/>

NOAA's Fisheries Service: <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov>

Hawaii Department of Land and Natural Resources: <http://www.hawaii.gov/dlnr/>

NOAA: <http://www.noaa.gov>