

# Guide for Taking Photographs for Cetacean Strandings Investigation



Best Practice  
for Sri Lanka



INTERNATIONAL  
WHALING COMMISSION



UK International  
Development

Partnership | Progress | Prosperity

## Why Photos Are Important

Good photographs provide crucial information for scientists to:

- Identify the species
- Understand what happened to the animal
- Document injuries or unusual features
- Create permanent records for future study

Even if you cannot examine the animal closely, your photographs may provide the only scientific record of the stranding.

## Essential Photographs to Take

### Whole Body Shots

- Both sides of the animal - Take several photos showing the entire body from each side
- From above - Stand above the animal and photograph looking down along the back
- From the tail end - This "skyline" view shows the body shape and muscle profile

### Head and Mouth

- Side view of the head - Show the entire head clearly
- Open the mouth if possible - Photograph the teeth or baleen (the comb-like plates in some whales)
- Close-up of the eye

### Tail and Fins

- Top and bottom of the tail flukes - These often have unique patterns for identification
- Dorsal fin (the fin on the back) - Photograph both sides
- Flippers (pectoral fins) - Show both the top and bottom

### Underside

- Genital area - This helps determine if the animal is male or female
- Any openings or unusual features

### Any Injuries or Unusual Features

- Cuts, wounds, or scars
- Rope marks or net impressions

- Unusual lumps or swellings
- Any external parasites
- Anything that looks abnormal

## How to Take Good Photos

### **Include a Scale Reference**

- Place a ruler, measuring tape, or common object (like a water bottle or shoe) in the photo
- This shows the actual size of features
- For whole body shots, a person standing next to the animal works well

### **Make a Simple Label**

Write on paper or cardboard and include in photos:

- Date (day/month/year)
- Location
- Your contact information
- Any identification number given by authorities

### **Technical Tips**

- Avoid shadows - Try to photograph with the sun behind you
- Get close - Take both close-up and distant shots of each feature
- Keep it clear - Don't let your fingers, camera strap, or other objects block the view
- Multiple angles - Take several photos of the same thing from different positions
- Check your photos - Make sure images are clear and in focus before leaving

### **What Not to Do**

- Don't place labels or rulers over important features
- Don't use flash if it creates glare on wet skin
- Don't photograph only one side or one area

### **After Taking Photos**

- Don't delete anything - Even blurry photos might contain useful information
- Share immediately - Send photos to authorities as soon as possible
- Keep copies - Back up your photos in multiple locations
- Note the time - Record when photos were taken

## Remember

It is always better to take too many photographs than not enough. Even mobile phone photos taken quickly can provide valuable scientific information. Don't worry about perfect photography - just capture as much as you can safely and clearly. **ALWAYS WEAR APPROPRIATE PPE WHEN NEAR THE CARCASS.**

## Quick Photograph Checklist

|  <b>PHOTOGRAPHS (check when completed):</b> |   |                            |
|--|---|----------------------------|
| <i>ENSURE SCALE BAR/MEASURING TAPE IN FRAME &amp; CASE NUMBER VISIBLE</i>  |   |                            |
| <input type="checkbox"/>   | Position of animal on beach                           | NOTES / ADDITIONAL PHOTOS: |
| <input type="checkbox"/>   | Left lateral (entire body, head to tail)              |                            |
| <input type="checkbox"/>   | Right lateral (entire body, head to tail)             |                            |
| <input type="checkbox"/>   | Dorsal view (overhead, entire body)                   |                            |
| <input type="checkbox"/>   | Ventral view (belly up, entire body)                  |                            |
| <input type="checkbox"/>   | Dorsal fin (each side)                                |                            |
| <input type="checkbox"/>   | Genital area  |                            |
| <input type="checkbox"/>   | Cranio-caudal skyline view (to assess body condition) |                            |
| <input type="checkbox"/>   | Head - left lateral                                   |                            |
| <input type="checkbox"/>   | Head - right lateral                                  |                            |
| <input type="checkbox"/>   | Head - dorsal (top of head, blowhole visible)         |                            |
| <input type="checkbox"/>   | Head - ventral (underside, jaw/throat)                |                            |
| <input type="checkbox"/>   | Blowhole - close-up                                   |                            |
| <input type="checkbox"/>   | Mouth - open (teeth/baleen visible)                   |                            |
| <input type="checkbox"/>   | Eye - close-up (both eyes if possible)                |                            |
| <input type="checkbox"/>   | Any external lesions/injuries/scars etc               |                            |

## Good Photograph Examples

### Position of Animal on the Beach

Take a wide photograph of the animal in position on the beach showing the general scene.



### Skyline view

Crouch down at the head and take a photograph looking along the body



## Whole animal, side profile

Take a photograph of the animal showing the whole animal from head to tail both sides.

**Right Side**



**Left Side**



### Close up of head (both sides)

Take a close photograph of the head from both sides.



### Close up of mouth and teeth/baleen

Open the mouth to reveal the teeth or baleen and take a close up photograph. Be sure to include a scale.



## Genital Region

Take a close photograph of the genital region to show the sex of the animal.



## Other markings of Note

Be sure to include a scale when photographing any wounds, parasites, scars or unusual lumps or bumps

