

# Sperm Whale Dies with 100kg 'Litter Ball' in Its Stomach

2 December 2019 (Scotland)



*Photo by: Scottish Marine Animal Stranding Scheme*

**A sperm whale which died after stranding on the Isle of Harris had a 100kg "litter ball" in its stomach.**

Fishing nets, rope, packing straps, bags and plastic cups were among the items discovered in a compacted mass. Whale experts said it was not immediately clear whether the debris had contributed to the whale's death. But locals who found the carcass on Seilebost beach on Thursday said it highlighted the wider problem of marine pollution.



among the items found inside the whale  
*Photo by: Scottish Marine Animal Stranding Scheme*

Dan Parry, who lives in nearby Luskentyre, said: "It was desperately sad, especially when you saw the fishing nets and debris that came out of its stomach.

"We walk on these beaches nearly every day and I always take a bag to pick up litter, most of which is fishing-related.

"This stuff could have easily been netting or the like lost in a storm, we just don't know, but it does show the scale of the problem we have with marine pollution."

Members of the Scottish Marine Animal Stranding Scheme (Smass), an organisation that investigates the deaths of whales and dolphins, dissected the whale to try and determine its cause of death.



*Photo by: Scottish Marine Animal Stranding Scheme*

A post on the group's Facebook page stated: "The animal wasn't in particularly poor condition, and whilst it is certainly plausible that this amount of debris was a factor in its live stranding, we actually couldn't find evidence that this had impacted or obstructed the intestines.

"This amount of plastic in the stomach is nonetheless horrific, must have compromised digestion, and serves to demonstrate yet again the hazards that marine litter and lost or discarded fishing gear can cause to marine life."

### **Buried on the beach**

The debris is believed to have originated from both the land and the fishing industry.

The Coastguard and workers from Western Isles Council helped with the examination of the whale on Saturday, as well as digging a giant hole on the beach to bury the sub-adult male.

According to Smass figures reports of whale and dolphin strandings in Scotland are on the increase. There were 204 reports in 2009, rising to more than 930 in 2018.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-scotland-highlands-islands-50621304>