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Rescue Plan Brief for the Juvenile Humpback Whale, Kirchsee, Insel Poel

Based on WHOI-2024-05 and NRE Tasmania 2022 Cetacean Incident Manual

Issued 11 April 2026. The whale is still alive at the date of this brief.

This brief sets out a technical rescue plan for the juvenile humpback whale currently stranded in the Kirchsee bay off the island of Poel. The plan is grounded entirely in two published operational sources: the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution Technical Report WHOI-2024-05 (Sharp, Moore, Harms, Wilkin, Sharp, Patchett and Rose, November 2024), and the NRE Tasmania Cetacean Incident Manual (2022). Every technical instruction in this document is traceable to one or both of these sources, with direct quotations at the points where the sources' own language carries more authority than paraphrase.

Stranded No More is honest about survival uncertainty. This animal has been stranded for twelve days. Several factors that the sources themselves identify as mitigating are working in his favor, and the fact that he is still alive after twelve days is itself evidence that those factors are operating. The brief acknowledges the uncertainty at the outset and then proceeds operationally. We do not claim the plan guarantees survival. We claim the plan is technically feasible under the published criteria of the two sources, that the animal still meets the criteria those sources describe as warranting rescue, and that abandonment is not the only defensible response under the operational doctrine the cartel itself is supposed to be following. The animal was not provided with consistent supportive care today, and his condition is deteriorating as a direct consequence of that neglect rather than as the natural trajectory of an irrecoverable clinical decline.

This brief describes the ideal rescue operation as the published sources describe it. We recognize that no real-world rescue proceeds exactly as written, that conditions on the day will force adjustments, that some steps may need to be abbreviated or executed in a different order, and that not every component of this plan will be implementable in the exact form presented

here. The plan is a reference framework, not a rigid prescription. The rescue team on site has the operational expertise and the situational awareness that a written document cannot have, and the final judgment on how to apply this plan to the actual conditions at the moment of execution belongs to them. Where a step in this plan cannot be implemented as described, the principle behind the step (minimize stress, maintain head-first direction, preserve quick-release capability, keep the animal breathing, keep personnel safe) is what matters, not the specific operational detail. We leave that judgment to the discretion of the rescue team.

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1. Current location and conditions

The baseline facts in this section are drawn from the DMM/ITAW Gutachten of 7 April 2026, so that the factual starting point of this plan is not in dispute with the ministry's own document. The animal is at position 53° 58.39' N, 011° 25.90' E, in the Kirchsee bay on the east side of the island of Poel. Water depth at the animal's position is approximately 1.50 meters. Substrate is sandy to muddy. The animal's back protrudes approximately 0.4 meters above the water at the highest point. Underwater imaging from 2 April 2026 by Baltic-Taucher shows the animal embedded in sediment up to the base of the left pectoral flipper. The depression in the soft substrate in which the body lies is estimated at approximately 0.4 meters deep, with the fluke hanging somewhat downward at the caudal end. The distance to shore is approximately 150 meters. The distance to the shipping channel on the east side of the Kirchsee is approximately 300 meters. These are the ministry's own measurements.

Supportive care has been inconsistent since 1 April 2026 and was not provided today. The animal's deterioration from 7 April to 11 April is documented on the public News5 livestream and in independent drone footage. He remains vocalizing, breathing, and responding to stimulus, according to the observations documented in the Stranded No More brief on the case. The water depth at his position is below the threshold required for self-refloating, and the BSH forecast cited in the Gutachten indicates that the tide will not rise sufficiently for self-refloat in the immediate term.

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2. Factors going for him

Four factors that both source manuals explicitly identify as mitigating are present in this case. Each is grounded below in a direct quotation from the relevant source. Taken together they

establish that the animal is not automatically a Category 3 write-off on the published criteria, and that rescue is defensible under the sources' own language.

2.1 Semi-buoyancy and the "water mattress" effect

The animal is not hard-aground. He is partially supported by water, with his back protruding only 0.4 meters above the surface and his body held in soft sediment in approximately 1.5 meters of water. The WHOI report specifically identifies this configuration as one that substantially mitigates rhabdomyolysis, which is the severe muscle damage that normally kills prolonged-stranded whales from the weight of their own bodies compressing internal tissue:

> *"For instance, animals that are hard aground may have more significant rhabdomyolysis than those that are resting on small cobble and have almost a 'water mattress' providing support" [WHOI 2024-05]*.

The Tasmania manual reinforces the same principle from the other direction, stating that rescue of large whales is a realistic option precisely when the animal is in this semi-buoyant configuration: *"Rescue of large whales is normally only possible if the animal is semi-buoyant" [NRE Tas 2022, Vol. 2, p. 25]*. The animal in the Kirchsee meets this criterion.

2.2 Cold weather mitigating physiological collapse

The dominant cause of rapid decompensation in stranded large whales is hyperthermia, not hypothermia. The WHOI report identifies heat stress as the primary accelerator of the downward physiological spiral:

> *"Conditions leading to more rapid decompensation include larger size, less buoyant support (i.e., more of body out of water), longer duration emergent, and hotter sunnier weather" [WHOI 2024-05]*.

And further: *"Cetaceans' ability to thermoregulate out of the water is limited... Hyperthermia (elevated body temperature) is more common than hypothermia (low body temperature) in stranded large whales" [same source]*. The Baltic conditions in early April 2026, with cold water, cold air, and overcast weather, have protected the animal from the hyperthermic collapse that kills prolonged-stranded whales in warmer climates. This is a substantial mitigating factor and it is present continuously.

2.3 Juvenile age class

The animal is a juvenile, measured at approximately 11.8 meters. Smaller and younger cetaceans show substantially greater resilience during prolonged stranding and greater improvement during rescue operations than large adults. The Tasmania manual states this directly:

> *"The size and age class of the individual will be taken into consideration in this respect as smaller animals show greater improvement with this technique" [NRE Tas 2022, Vol. 2]*.

2.4 The twelve-day threshold is variable by design

The WHOI report's Category 3 threshold is often cited as a hard rule. The source itself is explicit that it is not. The threshold is stated with an explicit variability clause that refers directly to the factors present in this case:

> *"prolonged time beached (>12 – 60 h, variable depending on size, exposure, and stranding effects)" [WHOI 2024-05, Triage Category 3 description]*.

Size (juvenile), exposure (cold weather), and stranding effects (semi-buoyant water mattress) are the three variables the source itself names as modifiers of the threshold. All three operate in favor of this animal. The Tasmania manual further documents that semi-submerged survival for extended periods is possible under appropriate conditions: *"With appropriate care sperm whales have survived in a semi-submerged state for up to 5-6 days before successful rescue" [NRE Tas 2022, Vol. 2, p. 26]*. Sperm whales are considerably larger and more physiologically vulnerable to prolonged stranding than a juvenile humpback. If sperm whales can survive five to six days semi-submerged and then be successfully rescued, a juvenile humpback surviving twelve days in colder conditions with greater relative buoyant support is not outside the envelope the sources describe as rescuable.

The twelve days of survival are themselves evidence that the mitigating factors are real and are operating. An animal whose physiology was in terminal collapse would not still be vocalizing, breathing at regular intervals, and responding to stimulus on day twelve. The animal is telling the rescuers, through his own persistence, that he is not yet past the point where rescue is defensible. An on-site veterinary assessment by a clinician not affiliated with the cartel should confirm this before the rescue proceeds, and the plan below assumes that such an assessment has been performed and has confirmed viability.

2b. Individual characteristics of the animal

This section is based on contemporaneous observation from the public News5 livestream and from independent observer volunteers working from the same livestream over multiple days of the stranding. The observations are consistent enough across sources and across days to constitute a genuine behavioural profile of this specific animal, not a collection of isolated impressions. The profile matters for the operational sections that follow, because a rescue protocol that is optimized for a generic stranded humpback and is executed on an animal whose

documented individual characteristics deviate from the generic baseline is a rescue protocol that is working against its own subject. The sections after this one are modified throughout to account for what has been observed about this specific animal.

Breathing rate as a real-time stress indicator. The animal's inter-breathing intervals change measurably in response to human proximity. When boats approach, intervals shorten. When boats withdraw, intervals lengthen again. When the animal is alone, his baseline breathing rate is within normal range for a humpback at rest. The pattern is reproducible and directional enough to be used as a real-time physiological readout of stress during the rescue operation. The dedicated breathing observer described in Section 4.4 uses this pattern as the specific baseline against which stress elevation is measured, rather than relying on a generic threshold.

Nocturnal activity and the defensive posture toward humans. The animal is substantially more active at night than during the day. Documented forward movements under his own power have occurred overnight, during windows when vessels and personnel were not present or were minimally visible. The interpretation is not that the animal is biologically nocturnal. The interpretation is that he is defensive in the presence of humans and expresses normal mobility only when he feels unobserved. This is an observed behavioural adaptation to the conditions he has been subjected to for three weeks, not a preference of his species.

General temperament. The animal dislikes boats and dislikes human proximity. He becomes defensive under pressure. Previous attempts to guide him through the Baltic in the earlier phase of the stranding sequence (late March 2026) failed in part because he panicked when pressed and stressed when rushed. The documentary record shows that pressed guidance produced stress responses and escape attempts rather than cooperation. This animal cannot be rushed, cannot be pushed, and cannot be handled aggressively at any phase of the operation. Any approach that treats him as a passive object to be moved through the water by force will produce the same stress response that produced the earlier failures, and will put the entire operation at risk.

Operational implications for this rescue. Close proximity to the animal is unavoidable during the initial refloat phase because the straps, the water jets, and the pontoon attachment all require personnel within arm's length of his body at specific moments. This is the phase that will generate the largest stress response from the animal, and the entire rest of the operational plan is designed to minimize the duration of close proximity and to transition to distance as fast as possible once the lift is complete. Once the tow begins, vessels and personnel maintain the maximum practical distance from the animal while still executing the tow under control. Once the quick release is executed, the distance increases further and the herding formation operates at the greatest distance compatible with actually accompanying him. The principle is that close contact is a cost, not a default. The plan accepts the cost only where the sources' own techniques require it, and then removes the cost as quickly as the operation allows.

He cannot be rushed, and he cannot be left alone. These two constraints are both true and they are the reason this operation requires skilled judgment at every phase. The plan reconciles them through gentle firmness: never pushing, never pressing, never aggressive engine use, never artificial pressure on the animal, and simultaneously never abandoning him after release. Gentleness means the herding is slow, quiet, and at distance. Firmness means the herding is continuous through the night and does not stop just because he shows that he would like to be left alone. Being left alone is what has produced the restrandings. The documented record of his stranding sequence shows that unescorted he restrands within hours. The herding phase after quick release must continue through darkness, with personnel rotation to prevent fatigue, with minimal artificial lighting, and with the greatest possible distance between the vessels and the animal while still maintaining the herding formation.

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3. Initial refloat

The operational objective of the initial refloat phase is to break the substrate suction, tunnel broad load-bearing straps under the animal without forcing them through embedded mud, attach the straps to industrial pontoons on both sides of the animal, inflate the pontoons to lift the animal's weight off the substrate, and begin a controlled slow tow only once the animal is fully supported by the pontoon sling. Every phase is designed so that no person is ever positioned underneath the animal or within the reach radius of a sudden fluke or body movement.

3.1 Why dredging and excavation are rejected

The most intuitive approach to an embedded whale is to dig. Both sources reject this approach explicitly. The WHOI report warns of two specific failure modes. The first is "tabling," where excavation around the animal leaves the whale balanced on a hard peak of substrate directly under the thorax, which compresses the internal organs and expedites cardiopulmonary collapse. The second is sinking, where fluidizing the sand directly underneath the belly causes the animal to settle deeper into the mud and risk drowning as the tide changes. Both failure modes have killed whales in documented rescue attempts. The alternative, which the sources endorse, is to leave the substrate around the animal intact and to break the suction and insert the straps without excavating.

3.2 Breaking the suction with water jets

The WHOI report describes a specific technique for tunneling straps under an embedded belly without disturbing the surrounding substrate. A curved tube emitting a high-pressure water jet is used to fluidize a narrow channel through the sand underneath the animal at the level of the axilla, just caudal to the pectoral flipper. The water jet blasts the sand and mud aside, creating a

tunnel just wide enough for the strap to be fed through. The rest of the substrate remains undisturbed. The Tasmania manual describes the parallel technique using vessel propeller wash directed at the substrate adjacent to the animal from the opposite side of the towing vessels, which also breaks the suction without mechanical contact with the animal's body.

Both techniques can be used together. Propeller wash from a jet boat positioned on one side of the animal breaks the large-area substrate suction. Water jets from handheld tubes create the specific tunnels the straps need to pass through. Divers are used only for positioning and guiding the straps once the tunnel has been created.

Diver safety is absolute. Divers operate only from the side of the animal, at the level of the pectoral flipper or slightly caudal, never underneath the body, never within the reach radius of the fluke, and never in a position where a sudden movement of the animal could trap them against the substrate or against the pontoons. Each diver has a tether and a dedicated safety observer on the surface whose only job is to watch the diver and the animal simultaneously. If the animal shows any sign of imminent movement, the divers are withdrawn immediately and the operation pauses until the animal settles. Dart-delivered medications (Section 6) do not include sedatives, which means the operation must treat the animal as potentially capable of sudden movement at all times.

3.3 Broad strap specifications and two placement configurations

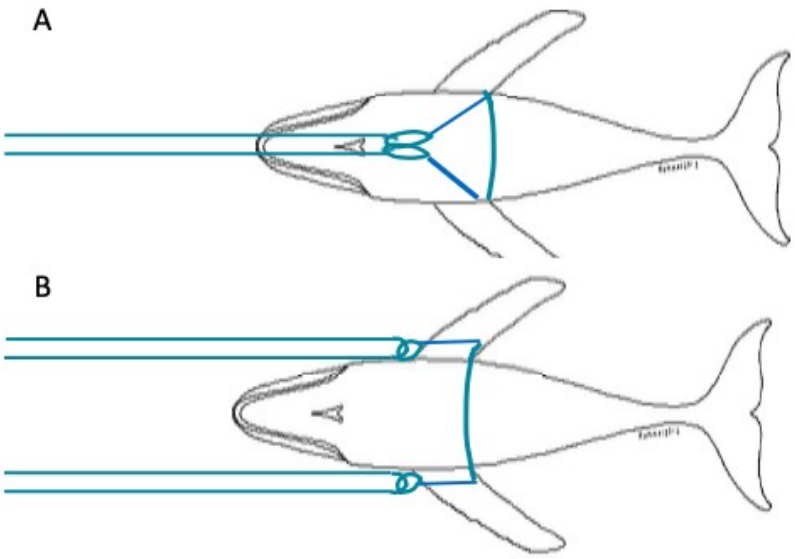
A rope harness is not appropriate for an animal of this size. The WHOI report specifies broad load-bearing straps rather than ropes, because the weight of the animal combined with the friction of the lift and tow can cause ropes to cut into the skin and underlying tissue. The WHOI report describes two alternative strap-placement configurations, illustrated in its Figure reproduced here. Both configurations use broad straps, both are designed so that nothing encircles the animal or its appendages, and both allow for quick release by deflating the pontoons. The choice between the two is made by the on-site rescue team based on the animal's specific physical condition at the moment of execution.

Configuration A — under-belly strap. A single broad strap is tunneled under the belly just caudal to the pectoral flippers (at the level of the axillae), passes under the body, and comes up on both sides. The two ends of the strap attach to two separate tow lines that extend forward past the animal's head to the towing vessel. In this configuration the animal's back is not in contact with the strap. The strap length for this configuration is **6 to 12 meters (20 to 40 feet)** per the WHOI specification. Water jets are used to fluidize the sand and mud underneath the belly at the axillary level, creating the tunnel through which the strap is fed. This is the configuration labeled A in the WHOI diagram.

Configuration B — over-back strap with under-flipper loops. Two broad straps are passed over the back of the animal and looped under each pectoral flipper separately, one strap per flipper. The ends of each strap extend forward on the corresponding side to the towing vessel, producing a four-line tow configuration rather than the two-line configuration of option A. In this configuration the strap does contact the back of the animal. The strap length for each of the two straps in this configuration is **4.6 to 7.6 meters (15 to 25 feet)** per the WHOI specification. This is the configuration labeled B in the WHOI diagram.

Remark on skin condition for this specific animal. The animal's back exhibits documented sloughing and blistering skin lesions that have been observed on multiple occasions since 4 March 2026 and have continued to deteriorate through the stranding sequence. Contact pressure from a strap running across the compromised dorsal surface may exacerbate the skin damage during the lift and tow. For this specific animal, Configuration A (under-belly strap) is likely the preferable option because it avoids direct mechanical contact with the damaged dorsal skin. The under-belly strap passes under the axillary region and over the flanks, which are less affected by the sloughing than the dorsal surface. The final choice belongs to the on-site rescue team and the attending veterinarian, and if access or substrate conditions make under-belly tunneling impractical, Configuration B remains a valid alternative, with the understanding that the straps should be as broad as possible to distribute pressure across the back rather than concentrating it on a narrow band, and that the back should be kept continuously wet during the lift to reduce friction against the strap surface.

For both configurations, the minimum strap specifications are: commercial lifting straps with a working load limit of at least 15 tonnes per strap with a safety factor of 2, so straps rated for 30 tonnes minimum; minimum width of 30 centimeters to distribute pressure across the contact area without creating a cutting edge. Two forward and aft straps are used for the lift regardless of which configuration is chosen, one forward at the axilla (or over-back and under-flipper in Configuration B) and one aft at the caudal peduncle forward of the flukes to stabilize the caudal end.



3.4 Pontoon placement geometry

Pontoons are positioned **on both sides of the animal, along the flanks**, not under the chin and under the tail. The sources are clear on this. The WHOI salvage technique uses large tubular lift bags positioned on either side of the animal, connected to the straps that pass under the belly. The straps form a supportive sling; the pontoons float alongside the animal and bear the weight through the straps. Critically, the straps do not encircle the animal. They pass under the belly and up to the pontoons, meaning the entire apparatus can be released by deflating the pontoons, at which point the straps lose tension and fall away from the animal without any portion remaining wrapped around the body.

Pontoon specifications: industrial-grade tubular lift bags with rapid inflation and rapid purge capability, rated for the lift weight required. For a 12-tonne animal with partial pre-existing buoyancy from being in 1.5 meters of water, the net lift required is substantially less than 12 tonnes. WHOI does not specify the exact lift capacity but the text makes clear that the pontoons are sized to overcome the remaining negative buoyancy and the substrate suction, not the animal's full weight. Two pontoons minimum, one per side, with a combined lift capacity of at least 8 tonnes and ideally 10 to 12 tonnes to provide margin.

Pontoons are pre-positioned at the animal's sides while the straps are being tunneled. They are inflated only once the straps are confirmed to be correctly placed and once the veterinarian on site has cleared the animal for the lift attempt. Inflation is gradual, not instantaneous, so that the lift is controlled and the animal has time to adjust to the new loading on his body.

4. Towing

Once the animal is supported by the pontoon sling and is clear of the substrate, the tow begins. The objective is to move the animal 300 meters to the shipping channel on the east side of the Kirchsee, and from the channel to sustain gentle forward movement for as long as the animal tolerates the tow without fighting it. The tow does not have a predetermined endpoint beyond "as far as he will allow." If he tolerates 300 meters, the tow ends at the channel and the quick release is executed. If he tolerates more, the tow continues into Wismar Bay in the direction of deeper water. The animal's tolerance, not a map coordinate, determines when the tow ends.

Maximum practical distance once the tow begins. The behavioural profile in Section 2b means that once the animal is clear of the substrate and the pontoon sling is supporting his weight, every vessel and every person on the water operates at the maximum practical distance from him consistent with maintaining control of the tow. The towing vessel extends the tow line to the longest working length that still allows controlled slow forward movement. The support vessel that executed the water jet work and the diver deployment withdraws to a standoff distance once its immediate task is complete. The observation vessel carrying the breathing observer, the veterinarian, and the safety officers holds position at the greatest distance from which the blowhole can still be observed clearly. Close proximity during the tow is a failure mode, not a default. If the tow can be executed with the vessels further away, they are further away.

4.1 Head-first only, and the absolute prohibition on tail towing

The animal is towed head-first and only head-first, at every phase, without exception. Both sources are categorical. The WHOI report states that hauling a stranded whale by the tail causes severe subluxation and damage to the lower spinal joints. The Tasmania manual states:

> *"Under NO circumstances should any cetacean be towed by the tail stock" [NRE Tas 2022, Vol. 2, p. 30]*.

The straps and pontoons are configured so that the tow line extends forward from the sling apparatus to the towing vessel, and the animal is pulled gently forward with the water flowing over his body from front to back in the natural direction. The pectoral flippers are not restrained and are free to move. The flukes are not attached to anything. Head-first direction is not a preference or a default. It is the only permissible direction, at every phase of the operation, from the moment the lift begins to the moment the quick release is executed. If for any reason the apparatus begins to drift into a configuration that would pull the animal tail-first or sideways, the tow is halted immediately and the configuration corrected before resumption.

4.2 Very slow speed

Speed is determined by the animal, not by the schedule. The Tasmania manual and the WHOI report both describe successful tows at speeds that are barely faster than drift. The vessel moves forward at the minimum speed required to maintain directional control and the straps taut. If the vessel engine has to work to produce enough thrust for controlled movement, it is moving too fast. The rescuers are not trying to cover distance; they are trying to keep the animal moving in the right direction with the least possible physical and acoustic stress.

4.3 Five-minute active tow with rest intervals

The Tasmania manual specifies the tow cycle:

> *"Periods of towing should be interspersed with rest periods at 5-minute intervals to allow the whale to surface and breathe properly" [NRE Tas 2022, Vol. 2, p. 25]*.

The cycle is: five minutes of gentle forward motion, stop, allow the animal to rest and breathe undisturbed, resume. The rest periods are not optional and are not shortened if the operation is running behind schedule. The schedule is the animal's. If the animal needs longer than the default rest, the rest is longer.

4.4 Dedicated breathing observer with authority to halt

A single person is assigned to the role of **dedicated breathing observer** for the duration of the operation. This person has no other job. They sit on a support vessel positioned close enough to the animal to observe the blowhole clearly, equipped with a stopwatch and a written log. Their only task is to time the intervals between breaths, note the depth and strength of each breath, and compare the observed rate against the animal's baseline respiratory rate documented in the pre-rescue observation days on the News5 livestream.

The breathing observer has the **unconditional authority to halt the operation at any moment** if the respiratory rate rises significantly above baseline. Baseline for this specific animal is established in Section 2b on the basis of the livestream observation record: inter-breathing intervals are within normal range when the animal is alone, shorten measurably when boats approach, and lengthen again when boats withdraw. Any increase of more than roughly 50 percent from the observed alone-state interval, or any pattern of rapid shallow breathing, or any cessation of breathing beyond the animal's normal maximum observed dive interval, triggers a halt. The authority to halt is not advisory. When the breathing observer calls a halt, every person on every vessel stops what they are doing. Towing ceases. Divers surface and withdraw. The animal is given whatever time he needs to recover before the operation resumes. If the breathing observer judges that the animal is not recovering, the operation transitions to the

quick release described in Section 5 and the rescue attempt is ended as a refloat-and-release rather than a sustained tow.

The principle is that the animal's physiology, not the operational plan, sets the pace. The breathing observer is the animal's voice in the operation. If the observer is overruled by anyone, for any reason, the operation has already failed as a welfare operation regardless of whether it succeeds as a logistics operation.

4.5 Noise discipline throughout

Everything is done as slowly and as quietly as possible. Engine revs are minimized. Vessel crews communicate by radio at low volume rather than by shouting. Hulls are not banged or impacted. Equipment is lowered into the water rather than dropped. The animal has been in acoustic stress for weeks and the rescue operation must not add to that. The Tasmania manual's observations on vessel noise as a stimulus for stranded cetaceans are clear that sound carries through water and through the animal's body, and that calm acoustic conditions reduce stress and improve tolerance of handling.

4.6 Tow for as long as he tolerates it

The critical instruction on tow duration is that the tow continues for as long as the animal accepts it without fighting, and ideally for as long as possible given his observed tolerance. The behavioural profile in Section 2b means that the alternative to a long tow, which is early release followed by extended herding over distance, is actually the more stressful option for this animal, because herding requires boats near him and the tow sling does not. Counterintuitively, a longer tow under tolerance is gentler on this specific animal than an earlier release followed by prolonged herding. If he is calm, pulling forward with the tow, showing no escape behavior, no sudden body movements, and no rising breathing rate, the towing continues past the shipping channel and into deeper water for as far as his tolerance allows. The decision to end the tow is made when he begins to show signs of stress or fighting, not at a predetermined distance. If he begins to fight the sling, thrash, attempt to break free, or show acute breathing rate elevation, the rescue transitions immediately to the quick release described in Section 5. The decision point is behavioral and is called by the breathing observer in consultation with the veterinarian on site.

4b. Vessels: what the sources actually recommend

The ministry has publicly framed the rescue as requiring specialized equipment, specifically an expensive catamaran for shallow-water operations. This framing is not supported by either source manual. Both WHOI and the Tasmania manual describe successful rescues using vessels that are commercially available in any working harbor, and the Tasmania manual in particular identifies specific vessel types that have worked repeatedly in comparable operations.

The Tasmania manual explicitly cites jet boats from aquaculture operators as the vessel type that has been most useful in past rescues, and explains why. The 2020 Macquarie Harbour mass rescue of 114 pilot whales, the largest single rescue operation in Australian cetacean rescue history, was executed with aquaculture jet boats. The relevant passage from the manual:

> *"Large jet boats provided by aquaculture companies have been particularly useful in these situations, providing sufficient power, shallow draft and lack of a spinning propeller that is a risk to whales and response personnel" [NRE Tas 2022, Vol. 2, p. 25]*.

The three critical characteristics are named directly: **sufficient power, shallow draft, and absence of spinning propellers**. Jet drive is preferred over propeller drive for two reasons: jet drives can operate in shallower water, and jet drives do not expose personnel or the animal to spinning propeller blades in the event of an accidental contact. These are the characteristics of aquaculture support vessels, which exist in working harbors throughout the Baltic, the North Sea, and the North Atlantic. They are not specialized rescue vessels. They are the commercial vessels that aquaculture farms already own and operate daily.

The WHOI report describes its successful Morehead City lift-bag rescue as having been executed in collaboration with TowBoat US, a commercial boat-towing company, using standard boat salvage protocol equipment rather than specialized whale-rescue vessels. The Brazilian rescues cited in the same WHOI section used offshore tugboats and Navy vessels pulling harness systems through jet-ski-deployed rope configurations. None of these operations used a custom-built catamaran.

The operational requirement in the Kirchsee is modest by comparison. The tow distance to the shipping channel is 300 meters. The water depth is 1.4 to 2 meters. The minimum vessel fleet for the operation is three vessels: one primary towing vessel with shallow draft and adequate forward thrust, one secondary support vessel with jet drive for propeller-wash suction breaking and for divers and equipment staging, and one observation vessel for the breathing observer, the veterinarian, and the safety officers. None of these three vessels needs to be specialized or custom-built. The Wismar harbor area has working vessels of each type. The Baltic coastline has aquaculture operations. The German Navy has shallow-draft work vessels. The commercial salvage industry has equipment that meets the WHOI specification.

The framing that rescue requires unavailable equipment is a framing choice, not a technical fact. If the ministry commits to the operation, the vessels can be assembled within 24 to 48 hours from resources already present in the Baltic. Stranded No More is not claiming this is logistically trivial. We are claiming that the Sharp et al. 2024 WHOI report and the NRE Tasmania 2022 manual describe rescues that have been executed under comparable or more difficult conditions using vessels that are commercially available, and that the framing of this operation

as equipment-blocked is not consistent with the published operational literature the ministry's own experts should be familiar with.

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5. Quick release and post-release monitoring

Quick release is the mechanism by which the entire strap-and-pontoon apparatus is removed from the animal at the moment the rescue transitions from towed support to independent free movement. It is also the emergency release mechanism if the animal begins to fight the sling at any earlier point in the operation. The WHOI report is specific that the release must be designed so that nothing remains on the animal:

> *"Lines should not encircle the whale or its appendages, and the pontoons should be able to rapidly purge their air (deflate) so the entire system falls away seamlessly once the whale is free" [WHOI 2024-05, as summarized in the research dialogue from the source]*.

The release sequence is: the pontoons are rapidly purged of air through dump valves, losing buoyancy within seconds; the straps lose tension as the pontoons collapse; the straps, no longer held in place by the lift force, fall away from the animal's body into the water; the tow line connecting the pontoon apparatus to the towing vessel is released at the vessel end, so that the entire apparatus becomes free from both the animal and the vessel simultaneously; the apparatus is then recovered from the water by the support vessel for inspection and potential reuse if the rescue is aborted rather than completed. The entire quick-release sequence should execute within 30 seconds from the decision to release. If it takes longer than 30 seconds, the design of the apparatus has failed and the operation is in danger.

Post-release, the rescue team does not disengage from the animal. The role of the vessels transitions from active towing to accompaniment and herding. The Tasmania manual describes the herding pattern:

> *"Splashing and hitting the water; revving vessel engines; using propeller or jet wash by experienced personnel (where safe for response personnel and animals); beating the vessel hull or other metallic object in the water; and, using acoustic crackers (only to be used by experienced and qualified personnel following consultation with MCP and IES staff and the Incident Controller)" [NRE Tas 2022, Vol. 2, p. 29]*.

The herding pattern places the vessels **on the shore side and the lateral sides of the animal, leaving the seaward path completely open**, **and at the maximum practical distance consistent with maintaining the herding formation**. Acoustic and visual stimuli are applied

from the blocked directions to encourage the animal to move away from shore and toward deeper water. The seaward direction has no vessel, no noise, and no obstruction. The animal is offered a clear path out. The Tasmania manual is specific that acoustic stimuli on the open side of the animal are counterproductive and must be avoided. The behavioural profile in Section 2b modifies how this herding is executed: close-range herding is counterproductive with this specific animal, because proximity itself is a stressor for him. The herding formation operates at the greatest distance compatible with being able to block the shore-side and lateral directions. If the distance can be greater, it is greater. Herding is gentle presence at distance, not pursuit and not close-range pressure.

The herding continues through the night and does not stop. The animal cannot be left to his own devices after release. The documentary record of the stranding sequence shows that unescorted he restrands. The herding phase after quick release is continuous, through darkness, with personnel rotation to prevent fatigue and with minimal artificial lighting so as not to re-stress the animal whose documented preference is to move when unobserved. The operational challenge here is that the herding must accomplish two things that are in tension: it must be gentle enough to avoid pressing the animal (which Section 2b establishes is counterproductive with him) and firm enough to prevent him from settling into shallow water again (which the documentary record shows he does when alone). The resolution is the distance principle: the herding vessels are present and are in the correct formation, but they are as far from him as the formation allows. Gentleness comes from distance. Firmness comes from continuity. He is accompanied, not pursued. He is never left, not even at the moments when he would prefer to be left.

The breathing observer continues in role through the herding phase, with rotation of personnel as a dedicated night shift begins. The same authority to halt applies: if the animal's breathing rate rises, the herding vessels withdraw further and allow the animal to rest. Herding is not pursuit. The goal is not to move the animal as far as possible as fast as possible. The goal is to help the animal accept the open seaward path and to accompany him gently as he uses it, for as long as accompaniment is needed, through the night and into the following day if necessary.

A satellite tag is attached to the animal **before the rescue begins**, not at the release point. The WHOI report is clear on this. Attaching the tag while the animal is still in the pontoon sling, before the tow begins, means there is no separate handling event and no need to approach the animal again at the release point when he is exhausted and most vulnerable. The tag enables post-release tracking regardless of how far the active herding phase proceeds, and it provides the objective data on outcome that the operation needs in order to be evaluable.

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6. Medical support: intramuscular only, delivered by dart, no sedatives

This section covers supportive medications for the animal during and after the rescue. The medications are limited to **intramuscular delivery by dart**. Intravenous delivery is not used because establishing IV access in a stranded large whale requires close-range handling that puts the veterinarian within reach of the animal, and the 200-liter bolus volumes required for effective IV fluid therapy are logistically impractical in the field in any case. Sedatives and analgesics are **not included** in this plan, for two reasons. First, sedatives require close-range confirmation that the dose has taken effect and close-range monitoring for respiratory depression, which places the veterinarian within reach of the animal at precisely the phase of the operation where human safety is most critical. Second, the animal has been observed as calm and minimally reactive throughout the pre-rescue observation period, so the primary clinical indication for sedation (reducing the flight response of a thrashing animal during handling) is weaker in this specific case than in the typical stranded-whale scenario the WHOI protocol addresses.

Every medication, every dose, and every decision in this section is subject to the authority of the licensed veterinarian on site. The dosages cited below are the WHOI-published ranges. They are starting points for clinical judgment, not prescriptions. The veterinarian on site adjusts based on the animal's observed condition, body weight estimate, and response to previous medications. If the veterinarian judges that any medication should not be given, it is not given. The plan defers to the vet on every individual decision.

The ordering below is from most urgent to most optional, based on the WHOI report's clinical priorities for prolonged stranding with muscle damage.

6.1 Urgent: Vitamin E and selenium (intramuscular, by dart)

Administered intramuscularly as antioxidants to treat reperfusion injury. Reperfusion injury is the tissue damage that occurs when blood flow returns to tissue that has been under pressure and deprived of adequate circulation. In this animal, the lift phase of the rescue will restore circulation to compressed tissue on the underside of the body that has been weight-bearing against the substrate for twelve days. Without antioxidant pretreatment, reperfusion injury is one of the primary mechanisms by which rescued whales die in the hours following a successful lift. Vitamin E and selenium are the standard WHOI-identified antioxidant protocol for this scenario. The injection should be administered, if at all possible, **before the lift begins**, so that the antioxidants are already circulating when reperfusion occurs. This is the single most time-critical medication in the plan.

6.2 Urgent: Calcium gluconate (intramuscular, by dart)

Administered intramuscularly as a cardioprotective agent for hyperkalemia. Hyperkalemia (elevated blood potassium) is a near-universal consequence of prolonged stranding with muscle damage, because damaged muscle releases potassium into circulation, and elevated potassium causes cardiac arrhythmia and sudden death. Calcium gluconate does not lower potassium directly; it protects the cardiac membrane against the effects of elevated potassium until the potassium can be excreted. This is the second-highest priority medication because it addresses the failure mode that most commonly kills rescued whales at the moment of lift and early tow, when muscle tissue that was under pressure releases its accumulated potassium into circulation as circulation is restored.

6.3 High priority: Dexamethasone (intramuscular, by dart)

A short- or medium-acting corticosteroid administered intramuscularly in low dose to reduce inflammation, restore organ dysfunction, and stabilize cell membranes. The WHOI report identifies dexamethasone specifically as an appropriate choice for this indication. The clinical target is the generalized inflammatory response to prolonged stranding and to the mechanical stress of the lift and tow. Dosing is at the lower end of the WHOI range to minimize immunosuppressive effects, which is clinically relevant because the animal has skin lesions and may be at risk for opportunistic infection.

6.4 High priority: Long-acting antibiotic (intramuscular, by dart)

Administered intramuscularly as a long-acting formulation to cover the risk of bacterial infection of the skin lesions and any residual entanglement wounds. The 2007 Sacramento River case that the WHOI report cites established that antibiotic injection via dart is a feasible delivery mechanism for free-swimming humpbacks, and the same technique applies to an animal being rescued from a stranding. The choice of specific antibiotic is the veterinarian's judgment and depends on what is available at short notice. Ceftiofur CPA is named in the sources as a formulation that has been evaluated for intramuscular use in cetaceans. Long-acting formulations are preferred because they provide coverage for several days post-release without requiring a second dose.

6.5 Optional: Vitamin B complex (intramuscular, by dart)

Administered intramuscularly as supportive therapy for suspected deficiencies. Supports nervous system regulation, energy metabolism, and red blood cell formation. The WHOI report identifies Vitamin B complex as appropriate for prolonged stranding cases where the animal has been unable to feed for an extended period. For this animal, twelve days without feeding justifies the inclusion of B complex as supportive therapy. It is listed as optional because its benefit is modest compared to the urgent items above, and because every additional dart

increases the operational time and the stress on the animal. The veterinarian may choose to include it if time and conditions permit.

6.6 Explicit exclusions

No xylazine as a sole sedative. The WHOI report specifically warns that xylazine causes dangerous excitatory responses in cetaceans when used alone. No IV fluids. The required bolus volume for effective fluid resuscitation in a 12-tonne animal is hundreds of liters, which cannot be delivered by dart and cannot be delivered safely by close-range IV access. No NSAIDs such as meloxicam, unless the on-site veterinarian identifies a specific localized inflammation that warrants them; the potential for gastrointestinal and renal effects in a dehydrated animal makes routine NSAID administration inappropriate. No sedatives or analgesics of any kind, for the vet-safety reasons discussed at the opening of this section.

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7. Optional: acoustic playback during the free-moving phase only

This section is optional and is included because acoustic directional encouragement has been used in some documented rescues to gentle herding. It is not a required component of the plan. The constraints on its use are specific and must be followed completely if the technique is used at all. If the operation team cannot implement all of the constraints, the playback component should be omitted entirely.

When. Playback is used only after the animal is free-moving under his own power, following the quick release described in Section 5. Never during active towing. Never while the animal is still in the pontoon sling. Never before the lift has occurred. The purpose is gentle directional encouragement of an animal who is already swimming on his own, not stimulus or acoustic manipulation of an animal who is constrained.

Where the playback source is positioned. The playback source is positioned **ahead of the animal in the direction he needs to go** (toward the shipping channel and then toward the open sea beyond Wismar Bay). Never behind him. Never from the sides. The purpose is to offer the animal an auditory cue that the direction of interest lies ahead, so that the animal has a reason to continue forward motion in the intended direction. Placing the source behind the animal or lateral to him creates conflicting acoustic cues that are at best useless and at worst confusing.

What is played. Feeding calls and social calls of humpback whales. If available, recordings from the same North Atlantic population are preferred, because they are acoustically familiar to this animal and likely represent the population he was born into and would return to if he

reaches open water. If population-specific recordings are not available, generic humpback social and feeding calls are acceptable as a second choice.

What is not played. Never the animal's own recorded vocalizations, from any time during the stranding or before it. An animal may or may not recognize his own calls as his own, and there is no upside to either outcome: if he does recognize them, the experience is acoustically disorienting, and if they are distress vocalizations (which many of his recent recordings likely are), playing them back creates a conspecific-distress exposure with no escape for the subject. Never humpback song. Humpback song is a male reproductive display and is ecologically inappropriate to the rescue context, may be disorienting to a juvenile, and carries no directional encouragement value. Never any other cetacean species. Never artificial sounds, alarms, or mechanical noise.

Volume. Moderate. Well below the threshold at which playback becomes an acoustic exposure event in the sense that cetacean bioacoustic research treats as a welfare matter. The target is the minimum volume at which the animal can hear the playback clearly as an ambient directional cue. Amplified playback that dominates the local soundscape is inappropriate and counterproductive.

If the animal responds by moving toward the source, the playback continues. If the animal does not respond, or responds by moving away, the playback is discontinued immediately. The technique is a gentle invitation, not a compulsion. If it does not work on this animal, it is not used further and the herding proceeds with visual and surface-acoustic cues only.

Closing

This brief does not guarantee that the rescue succeeds. It describes a technically feasible operation grounded in the published operational doctrine of two internationally recognized sources. The animal has already demonstrated, through twelve days of survival in conditions the sources themselves describe as mitigating, that he is not in the terminal decline the cartel's framing has attributed to him. He is vocalizing, breathing, responding to stimulus, and still alive today. The factors working in his favor are real and are documented in the sources' own language. The equipment required for the rescue is commercially available in the Baltic. The techniques required are described in the published literature. The personnel required are findable. The only thing currently missing is the operational decision to attempt the rescue.

Stranded No More does not have the authority to order the rescue. We have the authority to describe, in technical detail grounded in the published sources and informed by the documented

individual behavioural characteristics of this specific animal, what the rescue would actually look like if it were attempted. This brief is that description. It is on the public record. It exists so that nobody can later claim that no specific, source-grounded, operationally detailed rescue plan was available at the time the decision to abandon was made. The plan was available. It is this document. The decision whether to act on it belongs to those with the authority to act, and the consequences of that decision belong to the record this document is part of.

References

This brief is grounded in two published operational sources. Every technical instruction in the plan is traceable to one or both of them. Direct quotations are marked with their source throughout the document in accordance with the Stranded No More six-category citation scheme.

Sharp, S.M., Moore, M.J., Harms, C.A., Wilkin, S.M., Sharp, W.B., Patchett, K.M., and Rose, K.S. (2024). *Report of the Live Large Whale Stranding Response Workshop*. Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution Technical Report WHOI-2024-05, November 2024. 46 pages. Published proceedings of the Live Large Whale Stranding Response Workshop convened at the Society for Marine Mammalogy Biennial Conference, Halifax, Nova Scotia, 29 October 2017. Authors from the International Fund for Animal Welfare, the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution, North Carolina State University College of Veterinary Medicine, and the NOAA Marine Mammal Health and Stranding Response Program. US government reproduction clearance. Cited throughout this brief for: acceptable rescue techniques, lift bag and towing protocols, strap dimensions, Category 3 triage criteria and their variability clause, reperfusion injury and antioxidant protocol, satellite tagging timing, and the specific warnings against tabling and dredging-induced sinking.

Natural Resources and Environment Tasmania (2022). *Cetacean Incident Manual*, Volumes 1 through 5 (Governance; Stranding Response; Entanglement Response; Guidelines for Humane Euthanasia of Cetaceans; Guidelines for Necropsy). 166 pages. Government of Tasmania operational doctrine for stranding response personnel. Represents the published operational experience of the jurisdiction with the most documented refloat track record on large whales, including the 2020 Macquarie Harbour mass rescue of 114 pilot whales and the multi-year net-and-two-boat sperm whale refloat program pioneered in 2003. Cited throughout this brief for: the net-and-two-boat refloat technique, the prohibition on tail-stock towing, the five-minute active-tow-and-rest cycle, the release-readiness criteria including vocalisation as a positive indicator, the herding pattern with shore-side and lateral blocking, the aquaculture jet

boat vessel recommendation, and the published euthanasia-criteria list used in Section 2 of this brief to establish that the animal does not meet the criteria for euthanasia consideration.

The brief is also informed by contemporaneous observational data from the public News5 livestream of the Kirchsee site, which provided the behavioural record used in Section 2b. The livestream record is on the public record and is reproducible by any observer with access to the same video archive.

STRANDED NO MORE

Anonymous watchdog group of stranding professionals

The whale is still alive at the date of this brief.