

THE CASE OF A JUVENILE HUMPBACK WHALE (BUCKLI/HOPE/TIMMY)

OFF THE GERMAN BALTIC COAST,

FEBRUARY 2025–JUNE 2026

*A Critical Brief on the Stranding-Response Cartel,
the Political Authority That Deferred to It,
and the Private Initiative That Tried to Rescue the Whale in Spite of Both*



STRANDED NO MORE

Anonymous watchdog group of stranding professionals

Version 7.2



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Part I. Preamble

Part II. Executive Summary

Part III. Paradigm and Crisis: A Framework for Understanding What Happened

Part IV. The Animal: Sighting History and Other Whales in the Baltic

Part V. The Cartel: Structure, Doctrine, and the Closed Loop

Part VI. The Myth That Only Sick Whales Strand: The NOAA NY4236 Necropsy

Part VII. The Initial Response (3 March – 26 March 2026)

Part VIII. The Abandonment (27 March – 8 April 2026)

Part IX. The International Validation Machinery

Part X. The Successful Rescues the Cartel Never Mentioned

Part XI. The Ministry: Bureaucracy, Deference, and the Eventual Green Light

Part XII. The Rescue Initiative: Good Intentions, Impossible Conditions

Part XIII. The SNM Plan, the Approved Plan, and What the Comparison Demonstrates

Part XIV. SNM Reflections

Part XV. Physiological Evidence from the Live Animal

Part XVI. The Barge, the Transit, and the Contested Release

Part XVII. Post-Release: From Proof of Life to Confirmation of Death

Part XVIII. The WWII Bomb Detonation

Part XVIII-B. The Necropsy: Too Late, Like Everything in This Case

Part XIX. What the Death Does Not Prove

Part XX. Post-Event Reaction: Critique as “Science Denial”

Part XXI. The Scientist’s Paradox: Expertise Without Accountability

Part XXII. The Media as the Cartel’s Amplification Layer

Part XXIII. The Eleven Contradictions in the Cartel’s Own Record

Part XXIV. Why It Happened in Germany: The Absence of the Machine

Part XXV. Recommendations

Part XXVI. Consolidated Timeline

Part XXVII. Source List

Part I. Preamble

Subject animal

Juvenile male humpback whale (*Megaptera novaeangliae*), approximately 10–12 metres long, 12–15 tonnes, referred to in the German press at various times as *Buckli*, *Hope*, and *Timmy*. This brief uses **the whale** throughout, except where a specific media name is relevant to the source being cited.

Period covered

February 2025 (disentanglement, Poland) through June 2026 (necropsy, Denmark). The animal was released into the Skagerrak on 2 May 2026 [*Bild liveticker, 02.05.2026*], and tracker data reported by the financiers as of 6 May 2026 indicates it is alive and diving actively, including dives to 150 metres depth [*Walter-Mommert, NDR 1 Radio MV interview, 06.05.2026*]. The whale was found dead on May 14th in Denmark.

Authoring perspective

This brief is the position of **Stranded No More (SNM)**, an initiative of stranding professionals critical of the established stranding-response network in Europe, the United States, and worldwide. SNM holds that large stranded whales can be rescued, that the published operational literature and the documented case history support rescue, and that the international stranding-response network's doctrinal commitment to abandonment, palliative care or euthanasia reflects institutional consensus rather than evidence-based veterinary medicine and practices.

This brief is an advocacy document whose argument rests on the published sources, the contemporaneous documentary record, and the observable behaviour of the live animal, all of which are cited throughout.

Companion documents

Two companion documents are published alongside this brief and should be read together with it. The *SNM Public Statement in Response to the DMM/ITAW Expert Report of 7 April 2026* (referred to throughout as the *Contra Gutachten*) provides the full clinical, anatomical, and methodological rebuttal of the expert assessment that served as the procedural basis for the abandonment decision [*SNM Public Statement in Response to the DMM/ITAW Expert Report (Contra Gutachten), 11.04.2026*]. The *Rescue Plan Brief for the Juvenile Humpback Whale, Kirchsee, Insel Poel* (referred to as the *SNM Rescue Plan Brief v2, 11.04.2026*) sets out the evidence-based operational specification that SNM proposed for the rescue of this specific animal in this specific location [*SNM Rescue Plan Brief v2, 11.04.2026*]. Both documents are available from Stranded No More at strandednomore.org.

The three players in this case

This brief distinguishes carefully between three distinct actors whose roles, motivations, and accountability are different. Collapsing them into a single narrative of institutional failure would obscure the specific mechanisms by which each contributed to the outcome, and would also obscure the fact that one of the three ultimately did the right thing under extraordinary pressure.

The Cartel

The term is used not as rhetorical flourish or to imply any criminality but as a descriptive label for a closed international network of stranding-response organisations whose operational decision-makers, international peer reviewers, NGO partners, and institutional media voices are coordinated tightly enough that there is, in practice, no independent voice in the room. The network extends well beyond Germany and well beyond this case: stranding-response organisations, marine mammal research institutes, and conservation NGOs across Europe, North America, Australasia, and southern Africa share, through decades of joint workshops, conferences, training collaborations, and reciprocal citation, a doctrinal consensus on large whale strandings that BDMLR itself summarised with unusual candour in its April 2026 email to a member of the German public: “if there were a solution, it would be applied, because we all want to save the animals that are healthy enough” [*BDMLR email to German citizen, ~05.04.2026: BDMLR.jpg, bdmlr2.jpg, bdml1.jpg*]. The implication, which is also the doctrine, is that the network has collectively determined that no solution exists for large stranded whales, and that this determination is self-evidently correct because the people who made it are the same people who would know. This brief does not attempt to name every organisation in the global network, because the case is a German one and the actors who shaped the outcome are German and Northern European. But the reader should understand that the German actors documented below are not outliers within the international stranding-response community. They are its mainstream, and the doctrine they applied to the whale off Insel Poel is the same doctrine that would have been applied by their counterparts in the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Denmark, New Zealand, South Africa, or the United States, because the doctrine is the network’s shared product and the network enforces it through professional consensus, not through evidence. Additionally, in some countries, like Denmark for example, the doctrine is to leave stranded whales alone completely and do absolutely nothing [*Danish Ministry of Environment, ‘Stranded whales should be left alone,’ 17.04.2024*]

The cartel actors in this specific case, the organisations and individuals who directly shaped the decision to abandon the whale and who subsequently opposed the rescue at every stage, fall into three categories.

The institutional core. These are the organisations that produced the assessments, wrote the letters, held the press conferences, and provided the procedural basis for the ministry’s abandonment decision. They comprise the Institut für Terrestrische und Aquatische Wildtierforschung (ITAW) of the Tierärztliche Hochschule Hannover, which provided the on-site veterinary assessment and co-authored the Gutachten [*DMM/ITAW Gutachten, 07.04.2026*]; the Deutsches Meeresmuseum (DMM) of Stralsund, which co-authored the

Gutachten, prepared the necropsy site while the whale was still alive [DMM press release, 02.04.2026], and issued five increasingly categorical statements predicting the whale’s death between Day 3 and Day 36 [DMM statements: 02.04, 07.04, 27.04, 29.04, 05.05.2026]; Sea Shepherd Deutschland, whose operational personnel were embedded in the response from March 2026 onward and who publicly rejected the rope-and-net rescue method that the published literature demonstrates to work [Bild liveticker, 26.03.2026, 14:11, quoting Manuel Abras]; and Greenpeace Deutschland, whose cetacean experts endorsed the abandonment, stated publicly that the whale would drown in the North Sea, and mostly criticized all consequent rescue efforts [ZDF heute, 18.04.2026]. The structural problem at the heart of the institutional core is that the European representative on the IWC Strandings Expert Panel, the body that issued the international validation letter, is Ursula Siebert of ITAW, who is simultaneously the director of the institute whose on-site veterinary team produced the assessment that the panel was validating [IWC staff page, image; Documents.docx, Siebert CV section]. The local responder and the international peer reviewer occupy the same chair.

The international validation layer. These are the bodies that provided the letters, statements, and public endorsements that gave the German decision its appearance of independent international support. They comprise the IWC Strandings Expert Panel (IWC SEP), which issued four signed statements addressed to Minister Backhaus between 7 April and 2 May 2026, each reaffirming the original assessment regardless of contradicting evidence from the live animal [IWC SEP statements: 07.04, 22.04, 28.04, 02.05.2026]; the British Divers Marine Life Rescue (BDMLR), a UK stranding-response organisation that articulated the cartel doctrine in writing in a private email to a member of the German public and then published substantially the same text as a formal institutional statement on its own website [BDMLR email to German citizen, ~05.04.2026: BDMLR.jpg, bdmlr2.jpg, bdmlr1.jpg; BDMLR website statement, 08.04.2026]; and the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW), one of the largest marine mammal rescue organisations in the world, which endorsed the cartel’s position without sending a team, without independently assessing the animal, and without noting the absence of blood work, biopsy, or any standard diagnostic from the assessment it was endorsing [IFAW FAQ, ifaw.org, captured 21.04.2026].

Cartel-adjacent voices: the scientists and conservation organisations that reinforced the framing. Beyond the institutional core and the validation layer, a number of individual scientists and one major conservation NGO provided public commentary that consistently reinforced the cartel’s position, sourced their analysis from within the same professional network, and were treated by the international media as independent expert voices even though their institutional affiliations placed them squarely within the stranding-response establishment.

Fabian Ritter, a marine biologist who spent twenty years on the IWC Scientific Committee and formerly headed marine conservation at the Whale and Dolphin Conservation (WDC), provided running commentary throughout the case that tracked the cartel’s escalation pattern in miniature, moving from “this whale is uncontrollable” on 20 April to “I see an apathetic, tormented whale” on 22 April to “that looks creepy!” on 28 April as the whale

swam into the barge under its own power, and finally to “an all-round catastrophe” after the release [*Bild liveticker*, 20.04, 22.04, 28.04.2026; *The Guardian*, 05.05.2026]. At no point in this trajectory did Ritter acknowledge the self-refloat, the replacement veterinarian’s positive assessment, the whale’s vocalizing during transport, or the dive data after release.

Karen Stockin, a professor at Massey University in New Zealand and a sitting member of the IWC Strandings Expert Panel, published an article in *The Conversation* on 21 April 2026 presenting the cartel’s position as neutral scientific consensus while being disclosed in her own byline as an IWC SEP panel member [*Stockin, The Conversation*, 21.04.2026]. She framed the public’s demand for rescue as an “emotional pull” that “overrides expertise,” without mentioning the one-hour visual Gutachten, the published rescue comparators, the self-refloat, or the replacement veterinarian’s assessment. Her article was not independent commentary; it was the panel’s position distributed through an academic media platform under the appearance of independent analysis.

On 17 May 2026, one day after the death confirmation, Karen Stockin appeared on CNN Newsroom from Auckland and delivered the cartel’s post-mortem framing to an international audience. She described the whale as “incredibly unwell” from the outset, “in incredibly poor body condition, emaciated almost,” suffering from “fresh water stress, salinity stress,” and “already in ill health well before any potential human interactions took place.” When asked whether the rescue efforts did more harm than good, she answered: “My professional opinion, yes, they did.” She characterised the operation not as a rescue but as “a translocation,” defined as “moving of a whale from an area of high public density and visibility and taking it further out into deeper waters,” and stated the whale was “offloaded in waters that were of high shipping density.” She called for a “detailed necropsy” and speculated that the whale “may have even been hit by a ship as a result of where he was offloaded.” Her recommendation to the public: “The importance of heeding some of the professional veterinarian, marine advice and support that’s offered” [*CNN Newsroom transcript*, 17.05.2026; *CERG Facebook post*, 17.05.2026].

SNM has several problems with this interview, which follows the same pattern as Stockin’s April 2026 article in *The Conversation* [*Stockin, The Conversation*, 21.04.2026]. First, the whale is once again painted as gravely ill from the start, and the fact that she survived fifteen months in the Baltic, a fact that directly contradicts “already in ill health,” is not acknowledged, because neither the interviewer nor any member of the cartel network has ever publicly engaged with the Poland prior history. Second, the characterisation of the whale as “emaciated, almost” is contradicted by the cartel’s own contemporaneous record: Groß said on 27 March 2026 that the whale was “well-nourished, has reserves,” [*Bild liveticker*, 27.03.2026, 12:58] and Schnitzler confirmed “outwardly the whale still appears well-nourished.” [*Stern*, 25.03.2026]. Third, the improvement in skin condition during the barge transit, documented by multiple observers as the salinity rose, is not acknowledged. Fourth, successful rescue cases are once again not mentioned: not Humphrey, not the Tasmania sperm whales, not the Sacramento River humpbacks, not the Rance estuary case. Stockin sits on the IWC SEP, the body that issued four statements opposing rescue, and her CNN appearance is framed by her own research group (CERG) on Facebook as an opportunity to “share our views” on “what lessons can be learnt,” with the lesson stated in

advance: “when scientific advice is sidelined in favor of public sentiment, outcomes for the very animals we aim to protect only worsen.” The lesson assumes the scientific advice was correct, which is the question this entire brief is written to challenge.

On 19 May 2026, Vanessa Pirotta, a postdoctoral researcher and wildlife scientist at Macquarie University in Sydney, published an article in *The Conversation* titled “Timmy the stranded whale is dead. Please, let's put animal welfare first and human emotion second.” The article follows the same doctrinal pattern as Stockin's two interventions. Pirotta states that “from an animal-welfare and ethics point of view, efforts to rescue Timmy were a bad idea” and that “as a wildlife scientist, my view is that euthanasia was the kindest option.” She repeats the crushed-organs doctrine verbatim: “His body weight likely crushed his internal organs – whales live in water and have likely never felt their own weight in air before.” She characterises the barge transport as the whale being “pulled by tugboat to the sea off the coast of Denmark” and states: “It's no surprise he died not long after the rescue effort, given his already poor condition.” She does not mention any successful large-whale rescue in the published literature; not Humphrey, not the Tasmania sperm whales, not the Sacramento River humpbacks, not the Rance estuary case. The omission is now a signature of the cartel's public communication: every voice that reinforces the doctrine omits the same cases.

Pirotta adds a dimension not present in Stockin's commentary: she questions the expenditure. Drawing a parallel with the Keiko/Free Willy project (which she states cost approximately A\$28 million), she writes: “Imagine if we used those funds for broader marine conservation, rather than two individual animals?” and characterises both the Keiko and German humpback cases as operations where “large sums of money were spent relocating whales with little chance of success.”

SNM notes two problems with this framing. First, the Keiko comparison is misleading. Keiko was a captive orca who had spent decades in a concrete tank and whose release required years of physical rehabilitation, ocean-pen acclimatisation, and a cross-Atlantic transport to Iceland. The German humpback was a wild animal that had been living freely in the ocean for its entire life, had been feeding successfully in the Baltic for over a year, had self-refloated three times under her own power, and needed to be moved approximately 300 kilometres to salt water. The two cases have almost nothing in common operationally. The parallel exists only at the level of headline (“money spent on one whale”) and collapses the moment the operational details are examined. Second, and more fundamentally, the money spent on the German humpback rescue was private money. The €1.3 million cited in Pirotta's article was contributed by Karin Walter-Mommert and Walter Gunz from their personal resources and from donations. No public funds were expended. The question of whether private citizens should be permitted to spend their own money attempting to save a protected wild animal is not an animal-welfare question. It is a question about who decides, and the answer the cartel consistently gives: that only the cartel's own judgment should determine whether a whale lives or dies, is the answer this entire brief exists to challenge [*Pirotta, Vanessa, The Conversation, 19.05.2026*].

On 29 April, Peter T. Madsen (Aarhus University, Professor of Biosciences, described by *Der Spiegel* as one of Denmark's leading whale researchers) told the *FAZ* that the rescue was “animal cruelty and waste of money” and declared with certainty: “It will die one way or

another, I'm sure of it." He told the Guardian the lack of tracker data was "very strange and unprofessional." His assessment was based entirely on photographs, not on any clinical examination, diagnostic data, or on-site observation, yet the FAZ and The Guardian presented his opinion as authoritative expert judgment. [FAZ, *Staib interview with Madsen*, 29.04.2026] [Guardian, 05.05.2026]

On 27 May 2026, Der Spiegel published a long interview with Madsen in which he confirmed that he would participate in the necropsy of the whale, led by veterinarians of the Danish environmental authority, with six to seven people on site including experienced animal pathologists from the University of Copenhagen. The interview is remarkable not for what Madsen says about the necropsy procedure, which is standard, but for the preconceptions he brought to it before it had begun. He told Spiegel he expects to find an empty stomach, or nets in it and that he expects the whale drowned or suffocated, which he describes as his working assumption. He expects to find plastic and fishing nets., stating the following: "The whale was doomed to die. What then happened, I would honestly like to say, was animal cruelty." He claims that humpback whales are excellent navigators in shallow waters and do not strand unless they are seriously ill, that the whale probably got caught in a net, could not eat, and was weakened, and that "the whale never had a chance." The rescue was compared to taking a terminally ill relative from a deathbed, putting them in a wheelbarrow, driving them through the countryside, dumping them in the forest, and celebrating their freedom. [Der Spiegel, Stock interview with Madsen, "Bei einer Explosion fliegen kiloschwere Fleischbrocken durch die Luft, die können dich toten," 27.05.2026, archived at archive.is/OmiAF]

On 2 June 2026, the FAZ published a third Madsen interview (his third media appearance in five weeks) under the headline "Kollegen in Amerika fragen mich, ob die Deutschen verrückt geworden sind" ("Colleagues in America are asking me whether the Germans have gone crazy"). The interview is the most revealing of the three, not because Madsen says anything new about the whale, but because of what he reveals about the doctrinal method and about his own relationship to the evidence.

Madsen repeats his clinical conclusion: "The animal was emaciated and sick. It had probably more or less starved to death before it drowned." He states that "everything indicates that the animal was weakened by becoming entangled in rope or fishing nets, which prevented it from eating. It starved, grew thinner, and eventually became ill. This drove the whale into shallow water because it was so weak it could barely swim." He expects the necropsy to confirm this and he describes the barge transport as "clearly animal cruelty," states that the tail-pulling during release was "mistreatment, you never do that to a whale," and calls the release "a complete shitshow." He hopes the veterinarians will check for "broken bones and flippers, maybe a broken spine", confirms he will not be present at the necropsy and fears the tracker data "will never be disclosed because it doesn't fit their narrative" [FAZ, Staib, "Kollegen in Amerika fragen mich, ob die Deutschen verrückt geworden sind," 02.06.2026].

The interview follows precisely the same template as Stockin's CNN appearance and Pirotta's Conversation article: the whale was sick from the start, rescue was futile, the public was emotional, the experts were right, the money was wasted. The talking points are interchangeable. None of the three mentions Humphrey, Tasmania, Sacramento, or the

Rance estuary or any other successful cases. None acknowledges the self-refloat, engages with the tracker data showing days of active diving up to 150 metres. or distinguishes between pre-existing conditions and conditions caused by the stranding and the institutional response to it. The uniformity is not evidence of coordination; it is evidence of doctrine. These are people who have attended the same workshops, read the same literature reviews, and absorbed the same institutional premises for decades. They do not need to coordinate, since the doctrine speaks through them.

But the FAZ interview exposes something the Spiegel and Guardian interviews did not: the gap between what Madsen claims and what the German experts' own contemporaneous record shows. Madsen states the whale was "emaciated" and "starved." ITAW's own Dr. Joseph Schnitzler stated publicly on 25 March 2026 that "the nutritional condition is good" and that "humpback whales can survive for weeks without food." Stephanie Groß told reporters on 27 March: "These animals can go for weeks without food. This whale is well-nourished, so it still has reserves" [Bild liveticker, 27.03.2026; Stern, 25.03.2026]. These are not activist claims because these are the assessments of the very German experts whom Madsen says "were right." The FAZ did not put these quotations to Madsen as it did not ask him to reconcile his "emaciated" claim with the contemporaneous clinical record of the experts he endorses. Furthermore, the FAZ did not ask him what diagnostic tests established the illness he asserts, since none were conducted beyond a one-hour visual inspection or whether he was aware that the whale had been in the Baltic since at least February 2025, over fifteen months of free swimming, feeding, and navigating that are entirely inconsistent with an animal that "never had a chance." Finally, the FAZ did not ask him how he reconciles "it died immediately afterward" with the tracker data showing six days of active swimming over 240 kilometres with dives to 150 metres. The FAZ interview, like every other media appearance by every other cartel-adjacent voice in this case, is not journalism. It is amplification. The media hammers down the cartel's message and never performs the elementary journalistic act of confronting the expert's claims with the expert's own colleagues' contradicting record.

Stranded No More's position on Madsen's role has been vindicated by his own withdrawal: he confirms to the FAZ that he will not be present at the necropsy. This is the correct outcome. A scientist who has publicly declared across three major media interviews that the whale was doomed, emaciated, and died immediately after a "complete shitshow" of a release cannot then participate in examining the remains to determine whether the whale was doomed, emaciated, and died as a result of the release. SNM notes for the record that the four questions the FAZ could have asked Madsen (and that any journalist performing basic due diligence would have asked) remain unanswered by any cartel-adjacent voice in any media appearance in any country since the whale's death was confirmed [FAZ, Staib, 02.06.2026].

The Whale and Dolphin Conservation (WDC) was not part of the German expert team but its institutional arc across the case tracks perfectly with the cartel's doctrinal trajectory. On 1 April, WDC marine biologist Tamara Narganes Homfeld told Bild that the response should "definitely look for fishing line" and that "in strandings, it's always about finding the cause of the stranding in order to give the individual a real chance of recovery and returning to the

sea. Simply disturbing it repeatedly is pointless, as we have seen in recent days" [*Bild liveticker, 01.04.2026, Screen Shot 2026-04-01 at 8.28.12 AM.png*]. Bild noted that WDC was not part of the expert team organising the rescue. The language is significant: "finding the cause of the stranding" presupposes that a stranding has a cause rooted in the animal's condition, the same diagnostic premise that underpins the cartel's doctrine that stranding is "a symptom of a serious, underlying problem." And "simply disturbing it repeatedly is pointless" is not a criticism of the cartel's abandonment; it is a criticism of the rescue attempts. Narganes Homfeld was reinforcing the cartel's position from outside the team, not dissenting from it. On 1 May, WDC as an organisation called the barge transport "legally problematic," invoking the EU Habitats Directive's prohibition on "deliberate disturbance" in a way that implied leaving the whale to die on the sandbank was the legally correct course of action while moving it to the ocean was the disturbance requiring prohibition [WDC statement, 01.05.2026]. After the whale's death was confirmed, WDC completed its institutional arc with a social media post stating: "The harsh reality is that, in many cases, these whales can not be saved. Especially large species such as humpback whales." The post continued: "Many whales strand because they are already seriously ill, injured, or disoriented. Even if they are successfully refloated, their chances of survival are often very low, and the process itself can place the whale under extreme physical stress and suffering," and concluded that letting the animal die is "often the kinder option" [WDC social media post, ~20.05.2026]. WDC is Fabian Ritter's former organisation. Narganes Homfeld on 1 April, WDC's legal objection on 1 May, and WDC's post-mortem statement in late May are not three stages of anything. They are the same doctrinal position, stranding means illness, rescue means suffering, death is kindness, delivered on three different dates by the same organisation.

Simon Elwen of Sea Search South Africa provided what may be the most candid statement in the entire documentary record, writing on social media that in South Africa "the general policy is euthanasia asap. Dolphins too. Not a conservation issue, it's a people management and animal welfare issue. But even then, most strandings are natural so euthanasia is still for the people, so humans don't have to watch animals suffer" [*Elwen, Sea Search South Africa, Facebook, ~May 2026*]. This is the cartel doctrine with its institutional packaging removed: euthanasia is not for the animal but for the bystanders, and the doctrinal framing of stranding as natural is the intellectual foundation that permits the system to let animals die without professional consequence.

Mithriel MacKay, Executive Director and Director of Research and Education at Marine-Eco.org (MCERC), posted a Facebook comment after the whale's death that crystallises the cartel's self-image with unusual clarity: "When experts are asked to respond, advise, and are subsequently attacked for giving an educated opinion that opposes the emotional response, nobody wins." MacKay declared that "that whale suffered needlessly," that "the experts may be reluctant to weigh in on future strandings," and that "the funding used to 'save' a single whale that had no chance of surviving could have been applied to saving many whales by preventing more strandings." She concluded: "People spend their entire lives dedicated to helping these animals and are painted as heartless for a heartbreaking assessment. I hope something positive comes from this. All I see is a lot of hostility for some of the good guys" [*MacKay, Facebook comment, ~19.05.2026*]. The comment contains every element of the

cartel's post-mortem framing: the assumption that the whale "had no chance of surviving" (contradicted by the thirteen months of Baltic survival and the nine days of post-release diving); the reframing of institutional accountability as personal hostility; the claim that rescue funding was wasted (without acknowledging that the institutional system offered no alternative except watching the animal die); and the positioning of the cartel's members as victims of public emotion rather than as professionals whose specific predictions were falsified by the animal they were predicting about.

These individuals and organisations are named not because they are uniquely responsible for the outcome of this case, but because they are representative of a much larger professional community that shares the same doctrinal commitments and that would have produced the same outcome in any comparable case in any country where the network operates. The cartel is not a conspiracy; it is a professional consensus that has hardened into doctrine over decades of self-reinforcing workshops, training sessions, and peer review conducted within a closed loop, and that has become so deeply embedded in the institutional culture of marine mammal stranding response that its members genuinely believe they are applying evidence-based science when they are in fact applying an institutional tradition that the published evidence, as this brief documents in Parts V and IX, does not support.

The Ministry

The Mecklenburg-Vorpommern Ministry for Climate Protection, Agriculture, Rural Areas and Environment under Minister Dr. Till Backhaus (SPD) is a political actor, not a scientific one, and does not generate the doctrine it implements. The ministry relies on the cartel's opinion to justify political decisions, commissions the expert report (Gutachten) from the cartel, receives the IWC SEP letter from the cartel, publishes both as the basis for its decision [*MV PM 100/2026, 08.04.2026*], and uses the cartel's institutional authority as a shield against public criticism. When the ministry blocks medication, prohibits straps, or gates veterinary access through bureaucratic approval [*NDR MV, 20.04.2026, WEB.DE, Köhn/Scheiner, 18.04.2026, Pugnalom, LabNews Media, 21.04.2026*], it is implementing the cartel's doctrine through political power, though the ministry also has interests of its own, principally liability protection and political survival, that are separate from the cartel's doctrinal commitments. In functional terms, the ministry is the customer of the cartel's product.

This brief criticises the ministry's excessive deference to the cartel and the bureaucratic obstruction that made the rescue far harder than it needed to be, but it also acknowledges that Minister Backhaus, in the end, permitted the private rescue initiative to proceed, accepted the political risk of doing so, and that the whale is alive in part because of that decision.

The Private Rescue Initiative

The coalition of private financiers (Walter Gunz, Karin Walter-Mommert) and the operational teams they assembled, which changed composition and approach repeatedly throughout the case as the ministry imposed constraints and the situation on the ground evolved [*Bild liveticker, 15.04–28.04.2026, multiple entries; NDR MV, 20.04.2026, WEB.DE, Köhn/Scheiner, 18.04.2026*]. The initiative was well-intentioned, financially

generous, and placed from the outset in an impossible situation by the institutional framework it was operating within: the ministry tolerated the initiative’s existence but prohibited the evidence-based interventions (medication, straps) that the published literature identifies as essential [*Focus Online, Wallace interview, 21.04.2026; NDR liveticker, “Gurte verboten,” 21.04.2026, 13:44, NDR MV, 20.04.2026, WEB.DE, Köhn/Scheiner, 18.04.2026*], while the cartel opposed the initiative at every stage and used each setback to vindicate its own original prediction that rescue was impossible [*IWC SEP Second Statement, 22.04.2026*].

The initiative’s plans changed often, moving from air cushions, tarps, nets and pontoons to straps, to boats/jet-ski herding (Plan B), and to a floodable barge [*Bild liveticker, 15.04–28.04.2026, multiple entries*]. Each previous approach was either blocked by the ministry, or failed under real-world conditions, while being affected by the animal’s own movements and the shifting constraints of the site. The initiative persevered against institutional and bureaucratic opposition for weeks, and in the end the whale was loaded into a barge, transported through the Baltic, and released alive into the Skagerrak [*Bild liveticker, 28.04–02.05.2026*]. The rescue was imperfect in ways that this brief documents, but the rescue worked, and the people who carried it out did so while being told by every credentialled authority in the field that what they were attempting was futile, harmful, and cruel.

The position of Stranded No More

SNM’s position, from the beginning, has been that this whale could and should be rescued, against the unanimous insistence of the cartel, the ministry, and the broader international stranding-response community that rescue was not feasible, not advisable, and would only cause additional suffering. The whale was rescued nonetheless, survived for days and died under undetermined circumstances. SNM claims, and what this brief documents, is that the categorical refusal to attempt rescue was grounded in doctrine rather than in the specific clinical evidence from this specific animal, and that the cartel’s predictions about the whale’s imminent death have so far been contradicted, week after week, by the whale itself.

Living document notice

This brief is a living document. The sections on the release (Part XIV) and the post-release period (Part XV) are preliminary and will be updated as additional information becomes available, because the circumstances of the release on 2 May 2026 are partially disputed by the financiers, the crew, and the ministry [*Walter-Mommert/Gunz official statement, 02.05.2026; Ostsee-Zeitung insider account, archive.is/nNd4I, 07.05.2026, Whale Sanctuary Project, ‘Summary of Events Surrounding Release of Timmy the Whale,’ 16.05.2026, JEB Statement, via Cronemeyer Haisch, 09.05 and 16.05.2026*] and SNM does not yet have sufficient information to adjudicate those disputes. The tracker data was reported through the financiers and has not been independently verified. The whale was confirmed dead on 16 May 2026. The necropsy was performed on

Part II. Executive Summary

Updated through June 2026.

On the night of 22–23 March 2026, a juvenile humpback whale that had been observed in the western Baltic Sea since at least February 2025, trailing fishing gear from an entanglement that responders had only partially resolved weeks earlier [NDR Nordmagazin, 04.03.2026; SHZ, 06.03.2026], became stranded on a sandbank off Niendorf in Lübeck Bay [Der Reporter, 23.03.2026]. Over the following forty-one days, the animal stranded multiple times across two German federal states, self-refloated three times under her own power [Bild liveticker, 27.03, 30.03, 20.04.2026], swam many kilometres between strandings, vocalised loud enough to be heard hundreds of metres from shore [Der Reporter, 23.03.2026, Bild liveticker, 01.04.2026], was observed by an independent replacement veterinarian on Day 24 to be in “surprisingly good” health [Bild liveticker, 23.04.2026, quoting Dr. Kirsten Tönnies], and on Day 29 swam 110 metres into a floodable barge under her own power [Bild liveticker, 28.04.2026]. The whale was transported through the Baltic and released into the Skagerrak on 2 May 2026. Tracker data indicated numerous dives after release, including dives to 150 metres [Walter-Mommert, NDR 1 Radio MV interview, 06.05.2026, TAG24, Bruns, 30.05.2026]. The last tracker signal was received around 10 May. On 14 May, a dead humpback whale was found off the island of Anholt, Denmark. On 16 May, the carcass was identified as the same animal by tracker serial number and pectoral flipper pigmentation match. The whale was female, not male as reported throughout the stranding [Bild liveticker, 14–16.05.2026; TV2 Østjylland, 14–15.05.2026]. On June 4th, 2026, a necropsy was conducted on Anholt where no cause of death was determined. The whale was confirmed to be a female (4–5 years old). Parasites were found in the kidney and stomach, and no nets or food were found in the digestive tract. On June 12th, 2026, MV Environment Minister Till Backhaus held a press conference at the Ministry for Climate Protection, Agriculture, Rural Areas and Environment in Schwerin to present the evaluation of the satellite tracker data from the whale.

What happened to this whale over 14 months, from the first confirmed sighting in February 2025 to the confirmation of death, is a case study in how a doctrinal cartel, a politically cautious ministry, and a private initiative operating under impossible constraints interacted to produce a prolonged crisis whose outcome vindicates no one and indicts the system that made it possible. The cartel declared the whale doomed and blocked the timely rescue. The ministry deferred to the cartel while simultaneously tolerating a private operation it had stripped of the evidence-based tools. The rescue initiative persevered against institutional opposition, rescued the whale during a chaotic rescue process, culminating in a controversial release the circumstances of which are still not clear. The whale survived for days in the open sea before dying under unknown circumstances.

The cartel’s role

On 7 April 2026, a coalition of cartel actors declared rescue over and announced that the animal would be left to die “in peace” [Bild liveticker, 07.04.2026; MV PM 100/2026, 08.04.2026]. The decision was backed by a letter from the IWC Strandings Expert Panel

addressed to Minister Backhaus [*IWC SEP First Statement, 07.04.2026*]. SNM’s position is that the documented sequence of public statements, from “well-nourished, has reserves” on 27 March [*Bild liveticker, 27.03.2026, 12:58*] to “likely organ damage” and implying terminal decline on 7 April [*Bild liveticker, 07.04.2026, 18:27–18:45; DMM/ITAW Gutachten, 07.04.2026*] without any intervening diagnostic procedure, is more consistent with a retroactive justification of a decision already taken than with a clinical assessment that tracked the animal’s actual deterioration. The procedural basis, the Gutachten of 7 April, consisted of a one-hour visual inspection with no blood, no biopsy, no ultrasound, and contains a mathematical self-contradiction in which the authors’ own measurements prove that the self-rescue they demanded was physically impossible [*DMM/ITAW Gutachten, 07.04.2026, pp. 2–3*]. The full rebuttal is in the companion Contra Gutachten.

The ministry’s role

The ministry served as the political authority that published the cartel’s assessment as the basis for its own decision. When public pressure made abandonment unsustainable, the ministry “tolerated” a private initiative while prohibiting medication, prohibiting straps, and gating every interaction through bureaucratic approval [*Focus Online, Wallace interview, 21.04.2026*]. Minister Backhaus eventually allowed the rescue to proceed, accepted a political risk most ministers would not have taken, and the whale reached the Skagerrak in part because of that decision. SNM’s criticism of the ministry is structural, not personal: the ministry needs independent advisory capacity so that the next minister is not dependent on the same closed loop.

The rescue initiative’s role

The private initiative, financed by Walter Gunz and Karin Walter-Mommert, was well-intentioned and placed in an impossible situation. Its plans changed repeatedly, its initial personnel included additional team members that arrived later, and the operational execution included concepts with no basis in the published literature. Despite all that, on Day 29 the whale was successfully loaded into a barge. During the transit the whale vocalized and showed improving skin condition. However, the release on 2 May is contested between the shipping company, the initiative, and the ministry, and a News5 aerial image documents the whale being pulled by the tail, a procedure explicitly contraindicated in every published stranding-response manual [*NRE Tasmania 2022; Sharp et al., WHOI-2024-05*]. The rescue was imperfect, but the whale survived at least for several days post release and then died under unknown circumstances.

The death and its aftermath

The whale’s death does not prove the cartel was right. It proves the cartel was consequential. The delays, the prohibited medication, the blocked straps, the excluded competent rescuers, and the weeks of institutional paralysis are written into the whale’s body, inseparable from whatever pre-existing condition she may have had. The counterfactual supported by the published literature (medication Day 1, strap refloat Day 2–3, herding Day 3–5, North Sea by Day 8) would have placed the whale in the open ocean within a week, with medication on

board and without four additional weeks of cumulative damage. The cartel’s response to the death has been to frame any criticism of its handling as “science denial,” placing legitimate, evidence-based, peer-reviewed critique in the same category as anti-vaccine conspiracy theories. This framing is not a defence of science; it is, in Kuhn’s framework (Part III), a paradigm defending itself against a crisis that threatens its existence.

The structure of this brief

This brief is structured in twenty-seven parts. Part III introduces the Kuhnian paradigm framework for understanding why the stranding-response system produces the outcomes it does. Part IV establishes the sighting history. Part V maps the cartel’s structure. Part VI dismantles the doctrine using the NOAA NY4236 necropsy. Parts VII and VIII document the initial response and the abandonment. Part IX analyses the international validation machinery, including the IWC’s institutional overreach. Part X presents the successful rescues the cartel ignored. Part XI examines the ministry with the full Taskforce Artenschutz analysis. Part XII documents the rescue initiative with the full theater-of-rescue critique. Part XIII presents the SNM plan and its comparison with the approved salvage plan. Part XIV provides SNM’s reflections. Part XV presents the physiological evidence from the live animal. Part XVI documents the barge, transit, and contested release. Part XVII traces the post-release period from proof of life through confirmation of death. Part XVIII examines the WWII bomb detonation. Part XIX analyses what the death does not prove. Part XX examines the post-event framing of critique as science denial. Part XXI analyses the scientist’s paradox. Part XXII documents the media’s role as amplification layer. Part XXIII enumerates the fifteen contradictions. Part XXIV analyses why this rescue happened in Germany and the dangers ahead. Part XXV presents recommendations. Part XXVI is the consolidated timeline. Part XXVII is the source list.

Part III. Paradigm and Crisis: A Framework for Understanding What Happened

In 1962, the physicist and philosopher Thomas Kuhn published *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, a book that changed how we understand the way science actually works, as opposed to how scientists say it works [Kuhn, T. S., *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 1962]. Kuhn’s central insight was that science does not progress through the steady accumulation of facts toward an ever more complete picture of reality. Instead, science operates within what he called paradigms: shared frameworks of assumptions, methods, and accepted results that define what counts as a legitimate question, what counts as a legitimate answer, and what counts as legitimate evidence. Most scientific work, what Kuhn called “normal science,” is conducted within the paradigm, extending its reach, filling in its details, solving the puzzles it defines. The paradigm is not questioned during normal science. It is the lens through which everything is seen.

The trouble comes when the paradigm encounters facts it cannot accommodate. Kuhn called these anomalies: observations, experiments, or outcomes that do not fit the paradigm’s predictions but that cannot be dismissed as errors. A single anomaly does not threaten the paradigm, because paradigms are resilient and scientists are trained to absorb or explain away results that do not fit. But anomalies accumulate. Over time, the number of unexplained observations grows, the explanations offered to reconcile them with the paradigm become increasingly strained, and the paradigm begins to lose its ability to guide productive research. Kuhn called this phase crisis: the period in which the old paradigm is visibly failing but no new paradigm has yet been accepted to replace it. During crisis, the defenders of the old paradigm do not calmly evaluate the evidence and switch to a better framework. They resist as they question the methods of the anomaly-producers. They redefine the anomalies as irrelevant or as mistakes and appeal to their institutional authority and to the consensus of their peers. They frame the crisis not as evidence that the paradigm is wrong but as evidence that the critics do not understand science.

The case of the German humpback whale is, in SNM’s assessment, a textbook illustration of Kuhn’s framework applied to a field that is not usually thought of as a site of paradigmatic conflict: marine mammal stranding response. The paradigm, in this case, is the doctrinal consensus documented in Part V of this brief: that stranding is a symptom of serious underlying disease, that rescue of large stranded whales is not feasible, and that the humane response is palliative care or euthanasia. This paradigm has governed the international stranding-response network for decades. It is taught at training workshops, reproduced in institutional communications, and enforced through the professional consensus of the network’s members. It is the lens through which every stranding is seen, and it determines the outcome before the first responder arrives on the beach, because the paradigm has already decided that the animal is dying and that nothing can be done.

The anomalies are the successful rescues documented in Part X of this brief: Humphrey in San Francisco Bay (1985), Delta and Dawn in the Sacramento River (2007), the Tasmania sperm whales (2007) [ABC News Tasmania, 2007], the Rance estuary humpback (2023) [Olhasque et al. 2025], the Ubatuba humpback confirmed alive eight years post-rescue

(2000) [*Messenger, TreeHugger, 2010*], the Angola 58-hour refloating (2025), the Argentine twin-humpback rescue (2021) [*AFP/phys.org, 2021*], the Brazilian humpback calf reunited with its mother after an initial euthanasia decision was reversed (2023) [*Gusman-Cunha et al., 2025*], and the rapid hands-on community rescues in Namibia [*Ocean Conservation Namibia, YouTube*] and Mexico. Each of these cases contradicts the paradigm's central claim that rescue of large whales is not feasible. Each has been absorbed by the paradigm without changing it: Humphrey is treated as an anecdote from a different era, the Tasmania refloats are co-authored by a panel member who does not cite them, the Rance estuary paper was published three months before the German stranding and cited by nobody in the cartel's output. The anomalies exist in the published record. They have not changed the paradigm because the paradigm has mechanisms for absorbing anomalies without being changed by them, and Part V of this brief documents seven such mechanisms in detail.

The German whale is, in Kuhn's terms, the crisis point. A juvenile humpback that the paradigm declared doomed survived five weeks of stranding, self-refloated under her own power, swam into a barge, vocalised during transport, dived to 150 metres after release, and sent tracker signals for several days before dying under undetermined circumstances. The paradigm's prediction that she would die on the sandbank was wrong. The paradigm's prediction that she could not self-refloat was wrong. The paradigm's prediction that transport would kill her was wrong. The paradigm's prediction that she would not survive release was wrong for at least several days. Whether the death that eventually came was caused by the paradigm's own delays, by the injuries sustained during five weeks of institutional paralysis, by the WWII bomb detonation in the Kattegat, by a boat strike, by something else, or by some combination of all of these is a question that only a necropsy could answer, and the paradigm's defenders have shown no interest in pursuing one (at least a timely one).

The response to the crisis, documented in Parts XXI and XXII of this brief, follows Kuhn's script with uncomfortable precision. The paradigm's defenders do not re-examine their assumptions in light of the evidence. They reframe the crisis as a vindication: the whale died, therefore we were right. They label the critics as "science deniers," placing legitimate, evidence-based, peer-reviewed critique of a specific institutional failure in the same category as anti-vaccine conspiracy theories and climate change denial. They call for "consequences" against the people who tried to save the whale rather than against the people who spent five weeks preventing anyone from saving it. This is not the behaviour of scientists confronting new evidence as this is the behaviour of a paradigm defending itself against a crisis that threatens its existence, and it is as old as the history of science itself.

Kuhn observed that paradigm shifts do not happen because the old guard changes its mind. They happen because the old guard retires and a new generation, trained in the new framework, replaces them. The question for stranding response is whether the international community will wait for generational turnover to produce a paradigm that rescues whales rather than documenting their deaths, or whether the evidence from this case and from the accumulated anomalies in the published record will be sufficient to force the shift within the current generation. The recommendations in Part XXV of this brief are designed to force the

shift. Whether they succeed will depend on whether the public, the media, and the political authorities understand what they are looking at when the paradigm’s defenders call their critics “science deniers.” They are looking at a paradigm defending itself as they are not looking at science.

Part IV. The Animal: Sighting History and Other Whales in the Baltic

This part presents the complete documented sighting history of the juvenile humpback whale that stranded off Insel Poel in March–April 2026 (referred to throughout this brief as the whale), followed by a separate chronological record of other large whale sightings and confirmed dead whales in the western Baltic Sea between 2014 and 2026. The distinction between confirmed sightings of the subject animal and sightings of other individuals is critical: the subject animal's documented history demonstrates sustained survival, feeding, and travelling in the Baltic over at least thirteen months, directly contradicting the cartel's framing of an animal that was "already dying" upon arrival.

Section A: Confirmed Sightings of the Subject Animal

The following sightings are identified as confirmed or near-certain sightings of the same individual animal, based on: consistent species identification (humpback whale, *Megaptera novaeangliae*); documented presence of distinctive net entanglement scarring providing a continuous identifying feature; photographic comparison confirming body morphology and pigmentation pattern; and geographic and temporal continuity along the southern Baltic coast from Poland to Wismar to Insel Poel.

February 2025: Międzyzdroje, Poland – Entanglement and Disentanglement

On 26 February 2025, teams of sea rescuers and wildlife experts from the Polish Maritime Search and Rescue Service and WWF Poland freed a whale that had become caught in fishing nets near Międzyzdroje, a popular Baltic Sea resort on the Polish coast approximately 180 kilometres east of Wismar. The operation took approximately one hour. The rescuers used boathooks on long poles rather than knives to loosen and remove the nets, in order to avoid harming the animal. Konrad Wrzecionkowski of WWF Poland told the Associated Press that the whale made a "great and positive impression" on him, that it was "very stressful for him, but with time, when the nets were getting looser, he seemed to understand that we were trying to help him and the untangling became easier. And then he swam off into the sea." The whale was described as at least twice the length of the 3-metre rescue boat [*AP News, Scislowska, 'A whale caught in fishing nets has been freed off Poland's Baltic coast,' 26.02.2025; Part XXVII, Section F*].

Photographic comparison of the Poland animal (February 2025) with the whale at Wismar (March 2026) confirms, on the basis of body morphology and pigmentation pattern, that this is the same individual.



What this means for the cartel's diagnosis.

The whale that the German cartel would later declare dying on 7 April 2026 had already been living in the Baltic Sea for at least thirteen months before the German stranding began. She had been entangled in fishing nets at least once before, had been freed by Polish rescuers, and had swum away under her own power. Her appearance in March 2026 indicated that she had been feeding successfully in the Baltic throughout this period. She was not an animal that had recently entered the Baltic and immediately fallen ill. She was an animal that had survived over a year in a physiologically hostile environment, had been entangled and freed, and could not find her way out.

3 March 2026: Wismar Harbour – First confirmed German sighting

A humpback whale approximately 12 metres in length was sighted in the harbour basin of Wismar, swimming close to the quay wall. Video footage circulated on social media showing the animal in the confined harbour waters. Florian Stadler, campaign director of Sea Shepherd, confirmed the species and size. At the time of first sighting, lines were observed entangled around the animal's head and flippers, reportedly originating from a stellnetz (set gillnet). Fire service divers and water police responded on site and were able to remove a portion of the net, though Sea Shepherd subsequently reported that two to three lines remained attached to the animal that could not be removed. Initial media reports incorrectly identified the animal as a fin whale [*Ostseezeitung Facebook video, whale in Wismar Harbour, 03.03.2026; NDR Nordmagazin, 'Wismar: Wale mit Tauchern aus dem Hafen geleitet,' 04.03.2026; News5, 04.03.2026*].

5–6 March 2026: Off Travemünde – Entangled whale tracked by Sea Shepherd

Sea Shepherd diver Sven Biertümpfel and his team followed the whale from Wismar Bay to the Travemünde area. NDR reported the sighting on 5 March 2026, though incorrectly attributing the animal to the January Flensburg fin whale sighting (a different species). On 6 March 2026, SHZ reported that the whale was "dragging a 50-metre net through the Baltic." Biertümpfel described the planned disentangling approach: they would come alongside with a small boat, grab the line, allow the whale to tow them, and then work along the line to cut what was wrapped around the head area [NDR, 'Buckelwal vor Travemünde gesichtet,' 05.03.2026; SHZ, 'Wal schleppt 50-Meter-Netz durch Ostsee,' 06.03.2026].

23 March 2026: Timmendorfer Strand/Niendorf – First stranding

The whale stranded for the first time at Timmendorfer Strand/Niendorf in Lübeck Bay. News5 livestream captured high-resolution aerial drone footage of the animal from directly above, clearly showing the full dorsal surface, extensive skin damage and discolouration (brownish plaques, lighter patches on the flanks), entanglement lines still visible around the head and body, and the characteristic humpback body shape. The aerial images show the animal's body condition (no visible emaciation, no concave flanks, no protruding vertebral processes) as robust [News5 Live, aerial drone footage, Timmendorfer Strand/Niendorf, 23.03.2026].

26–27 March 2026: Timmendorfer Strand – Rescue and self-liberation

On 26 March 2026, Bild published an article with a Sea Shepherd aerial photograph showing the stranded whale on a sandbank viewed from above, with clearly visible net debris. Marine biologist Robert Marc Lehmann led a 16-hour rescue effort involving excavators digging a channel approximately 50 metres long and 1.20 metres deep, during which he entered the 3°C water repeatedly to assess and calm the animal. He marked the channel with weighted buoys to guide the dredging and coordinated between excavator operators and the whale, at times standing with his hand on the animal while the bucket worked within 60–70 cm of its head. On the night of 26–27 March, the whale freed itself through the channel under its own power. The video footage from Timmendorfer Strand showed the whale from multiple angles. The skin condition in these images is consistent with freshwater damage caused by the low-salinity Baltic, progressing over the approximately three weeks since the first confirmed sighting on 3 March [Bild, aerial photograph, 26.03.2026; Lehmann, "Die Wahrheit über Wal Hope," YouTube documentary, 20.04.2026].

27 March 2026: Lübeck Bay – Disputed escort; Lehmann excluded from operations

After freeing itself overnight, the whale was located in Lübeck Bay on the morning of 27 March. An escort convoy (comprising two police vessels, the coast guard, a fishing boat, Greenpeace, and a Sea Shepherd vessel) formed to guide the animal northward toward the open sea. The escort strategy and its failure are disputed. Timmendorfer Strand mayor Sven Partheil-Böhnke alleged that Lehmann persuaded the convoy to change from a two-sided flanking formation to a one-sided barrier, causing the whale to dive and disappear [t-online, Hartmann, 10.04.2026]. Lehmann's documentary records a different account: that he twice prevented the whale from re-stranding when it swam toward 2 m shallow water near the

coast, and that boats were otherwise approaching in an uncoordinated manner. When Lehmann requested operational command, he was refused. An ITAW radio intercept, published by Lehmann, then ordered his exclusion from the convoy, stating he should be removed if he continued acting as a disruptive element, and that the operation was about guiding a whale, not creating the next YouTube star [*t-online, Pollok, 20.04.2026; Lehmann, "Die Wahrheit über Wal Hope," YouTube documentary, 20.04.2026*]. Lehmann departed and played no further role in any subsequent herding, escort, or monitoring operations. The escort failed regardless of which account is accurate, and the whale subsequently surfaced far to the east in Wismar Bay.

28–29 March 2026: Wismar Bay, near Insel Walfisch – Re-stranding under official authority

On 28 March, the whale was spotted off the coast of Insel Walfisch in Wismar Bay, having become stranded again in shallow water approximately 50 kilometres east of Timmendorfer Strand. By this date, full operational authority rested exclusively with Environment Minister Till Backhaus (SPD), ITAW (Dr. Stephanie Groß, Tierärztliche Hochschule Hannover), the Deutsches Meeresmuseum (Dr. Burkard Baschek), and the water police. Lehmann was not present and had no further involvement. Overnight the water level rose, partially freeing the whale, but it re-stranded a few metres further in approximately 2 metres of water. Its condition was described as poor and largely motionless [*The Guardian, Carroll, 29.03.2026*].

30 March 2026: Wismar Bay – Official acoustic herding attempt

Under the sole authority of Minister Backhaus and the expert team, officials attempted to rouse the whale using targeted noise from boats. The whale initially swam in the wrong direction toward Wismar harbour, but then turned seaward and dove into the open Baltic Sea. Critically, no sustained escort convoy was deployed to accompany the whale after it dove. The water police ceased tracking when the whale submerged and was no longer visible. A remnant of the fishing net remained in its mouth. The decision not to maintain overnight escort coverage during this pivotal window, when the whale was free-swimming but disoriented in a semi-enclosed bay system directly adjacent to the shallow Poel inlet, was made by the authorities, not by any outside actor [*dpa, 30.03.2026*].

31 March 2026: Off Insel Poel, Kirchsee – Final stranding

During the unmonitored overnight hours of 30–31 March, the whale dove and was lost to all tracking. On the morning of 31 March it was spotted again in Wismar Bay, swimming freely and appearing active. Later that day, however, it entered a shallow inlet near the island of Poel and became stranded in the Kirchsee (see Part VIII.D for a detailed discussion of this failed intervention). The geography made this outcome foreseeable: Poel Island forms the natural northern boundary of Wismar Bay, and the Kirchsee is a shallow coastal lagoon directly in the path of any whale swimming northward through the bay without guidance. Without an escort convoy to steer the animal past Poel toward the open Mecklenburg Bight, the disoriented whale entered the nearest shallow water it encountered. Experts from the Deutsches Meeresmuseum in Stralsund, Greenpeace, and the water police assessed the whale on site; the skin condition had deteriorated significantly and the animal appeared severely weakened [*AP News, 31.03.2026; CBC/Reuters, 30.03.2026*]. On 1 April, all official rescue operations were halted [*Scientific American, 02.04.2026*]. This is the location where the whale remained through all subsequent private rescue attempts until the barge loading

on 28 April 2026. News5 established the livestream that would become the primary continuous monitoring source. A News5 Facebook post showed the outdoor necropsy site being prepared in Stralsund at the Deutsches Meeresmuseum/Nautineum while the whale was still alive [*News5 Facebook, necropsy preparation Stralsund, 08.04.2026; NZZ, Gallus, 08.04.2026*].

Section B: Other Large Whale Sightings in the Western Baltic (2014–2026)

The following sightings are of large whales in the western Baltic Sea that are not confirmed to be the same individual as the subject animal. They are presented here to establish the broader pattern: large whales have been entering the shallow, low-salinity western Baltic with increasing frequency over at least a decade, and the German stranding-response system had ample warning that an event like the Poel stranding was a matter of when, not if.

July 2014: Two humpback whales off Kalkgrund lighthouse, Geltinger Birk

On 7 July 2014, the customs vessel "Holnis" recorded two humpback whales near the Kalkgrund lighthouse, north of the Geltinger Birk, in the late afternoon. The whales were repeatedly sighted and photographed over the following days as they travelled toward Sønderborg, Denmark. A photograph of a breaching humpback whale was taken by Anegrethe and Søren Bomholt, who were sailing their boat at the time. Experts estimated the larger animal at over ten metres. This sighting involved two animals travelling together, possibly a mother and calf or two juveniles [*NABU Schleswig-Holstein, humpback sighting chronicle*].

2016: Juvenile humpback whale in Greifswald Bodden

In 2016, a young humpback whale stayed in the Greifswald Bodden for several months. It was filmed repeatedly and even experienced a collision with a sailboat near Rügen in stormy seas, which apparently did not harm it. The animal disappeared at some point and was never found washed ashore, leading to speculation that it found its way out of the Baltic Sea. This case demonstrates that juvenile humpbacks can survive extended periods in the Baltic and potentially exit unassisted. Based on the dorsal fin shape, this animal was not Buckli/Hope/Timmy [*NABU Schleswig-Holstein, humpback sighting chronicle; boote-magazin.de, 25.04.2025*].

5 April 2024: Flensburg Fjord – Two humpback whales

On 5 April 2024, two humpback whales were sighted in the Flensburg Fjord between Flensburg and the Danish Ox Islands. Jan Philip Leon of the Hanseatic Yacht School filmed the whales, which swam as far as Glücksburg-Quellental harbour. The video, spanning several minutes, did not reveal a clear size difference between the two animals, suggesting two juveniles rather than a mother and calf [*NABU Schleswig-Holstein, humpback sighting chronicle*].

8 April 2024: Flensburg Harbour, Schleswig-Holstein – Humpback whale

On 8 April 2024, a humpback whale was sighted in Flensburg Harbour. Annika Nielsen and Tom Ole Hartelt photographed the animal with the Flensburg harbour in the background. On the evening of 8 April, Noah Primke and others heard the whale blow near the Flensburg canal shed. On the morning of 9 April, the whale surfaced at the old fish market and swam to the quayside, where observers filmed its white pectoral fins. Later that evening, the Gergolla family sighted the whale off Muldendamm beach (Quern). Whale expert Andreas Pfander identified the species as a humpback whale based on cell phone video showing the long, white pectoral fins. The whale was estimated at approximately 12 metres and was travelling alone [*NABU Schleswig-Holstein, humpback sighting Flensburg, 08.04.2024; SAT.1 Regional, 09.04.2024*].

2 March 2025: Świnoujście, Poland – Whale in port canals, Gulf of Szczecin

On 2 March 2025, a whale was spotted in the port canals of Świnoujście (Swinemünde), on the Polish side of the island of Usedom. A local Facebook page, Świnoujście w sieci, reported: “Whale in Świnoujście! A humpback may already be in the Gulf of Szczecin! A whale was spotted in the city’s port canals, which could have already entered the waters of the Bay of Szczecin. Witnesses say they’ve seen the massive animal near the harbour.” The post included a photograph of a whale at the surface. Świnoujście is located approximately 70 kilometres east of Wismar and approximately 50 kilometres west of Międzyzdroje, where the subject animal was disentangled six days earlier on 26 February 2025. Despite the proximity in time and location, dorsal fin comparison confirms this is not the subject animal. The sighting confirms the presence of at least one additional large whale in the southern Baltic in the same week as the subject animal’s disentanglement [*Świnoujście w sieci, Facebook post, 02.03.2025*].

3 April 2025: Gulf of Gdańsk, Poland – Feeding whale

On 3 April 2025, a whale was observed **feeding** in the Gulf of Gdańsk, approximately 17 kilometres from the mouth of the Wisła Śmiała, by the crew of the seal-watching tour operator Rejsy na foki Gdańsk. The operator reported that the whale was diving for approximately 6 to 8 minutes before surfacing to take 3 to 4 breaths. The blows were described as exceeding 5 metres in height. The depth at the sighting location was approximately 60 metres. The whale surfaced five times during the observation. The operator posted video footage of the encounter. SNM was unable to determine from the available footage and images whether this animal is the subject animal or a different individual. The Gulf of Gdańsk is located approximately 350 kilometres east of Wismar, deep in the southern Baltic [*Rejsy na foki Gdańsk – Świbno, Facebook video post, 04.04.2025*].

Easter Monday 2025 (~21 April 2025): Off Hiddensee, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern – Humpback whale (juvenile)

On Easter Monday 2025 (approximately 21 April), angler Bernd Zimmermann was fishing approximately ten nautical miles off Hiddensee (near the traffic separation zone north of Rügen) when he heard a whale blow [*Bernd Zimmermann Facebook reel, whale off Hiddensee,*

Easter Monday ~April 2025]. The animal surfaced next to his small boat and stayed for approximately 20 minutes before swimming toward Bornholm. Zimmermann described the encounter: "Once I saw the blow very close and knew that the rest of the animal was directly under my boat – I stopped breathing for a moment!" Prof. Dr. Judith Denkinger, curator for marine mammals at the Deutsches Meeresmuseum in Stralsund, confirmed from photographs that the animal was a very young humpback whale, identifiable by head shape and the distance from head to fin. Denkinger commented: "The Baltic Sea is unfortunately something of a death trap for large whales" [*boote-magazin.de, 25.04.2025*].

8 May 2025: Travemünde – Humpback Whale in the Trave river (possible same as subject animal)

A whale was sighted in the Trave river at Travemünde on 8 May 2025, reported by NDR. Dagmar Struss, head of the NABU Baltic Sea Conservation Office, reviewed the footage and identified it as highly likely a young humpback whale. Struss told NDR: "Young whales are like young people: restless and curious." NABU's operational recommendation was to observe from a distance. [*NDR, 'Travemünde: Wal in der Trave gesichtet,' 08.05.2025; Bild, 'Große Wale an der deutschen Küste' infographic, 11.05.2025*].

8–9 May 2025: Off Ahrenshoop, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern – Humpback whale

On 8 or 9 May 2025, firefighters spotted a humpback whale off the coast of Ahrenshoop, on the Fischland-Darß-Zingst peninsula in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. Experts from the German Oceanographic Museum (Deutsches Meeresmuseum) in Stralsund confirmed from the footage that the animal was indeed a humpback whale. The Bild infographic "Große Wale an der deutschen Küste" independently records the same sighting at 8 May 2025, estimating the animal at approximately the same location. SNM was unable to determine from the available footage and images whether this animal is the subject animal or a different individual [*Ostsee-Zeitung, 'Wal vor Ahrenshoop gesichtet,' 09.05.2025; Bild, 'Große Wale an der deutschen Küste' infographic, 11.05.2025; Nordkurier, dpa, 12.05.2025*].

16 July 2025: North tip of Rügen, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern – Humpback whale

A humpback whale was sighted off the northern tip of Rügen, near Nonnevitz, on 16 July 2025, reported by NDR. The video showed the animal surfacing and, in at least one sequence, engaging in what appears to be tail-slapping behaviour. The species was positively identified as a humpback whale. Rügen is the largest island in Germany, located in the south-western Baltic approximately 120 kilometres east of Wismar Bay. SNM was unable to determine from the available footage and images whether this animal is the subject animal or a different individual [*Sunblick, 16.07.2025; boote-magazin.de, 17.07.2025*].

19–20 January 2026: Flensburger Förde – Fin whale (different species, not the subject animal)

On 19 and 20 January 2026, a fin whale (*Balaenoptera physalus*) was sighted in the Flensburger Förde, widely covered by German media including NDR and others. Videos

showed the animal surfacing with the characteristic tall, falcate dorsal fin and asymmetric jaw colouration of a fin whale. This sighting is not a sighting of the subject animal. However, the media coverage at the time created confusion: subsequent reports about the humpback whale sighted near Travemünde in early March 2026 referenced the January Flensburg sighting and speculated it was the same animal, despite the different species identification. This media confusion is itself evidence of the institutional incapacity to track and identify large cetaceans in the Baltic [*NDR, 21.01.2026*].

Section C: Other Historical Sightings (Pre-2014)

The following sightings are documented in the NABU chronicle and the work of whale expert Andreas Pfander. They are included to demonstrate that large whale incursions into the Baltic are not a new phenomenon, though their frequency appears to be increasing.

November 1898: Eckernförde Bay – Humpback whale

In November 1898, a humpback whale appeared off the coast of Eckernförde. The event was commemorated on a postcard depicting the whale's oversized form. This sighting is part of the maritime heritage of Schleswig-Holstein and is referenced in the work of whale expert Andreas Pfander [*NABU Schleswig-Holstein, humpback sighting chronicle*].

250+ years ago: Eckernförde Bay – Humpback whale stranding

More than 250 years ago, a humpback whale stranded in Eckernförde Bay after a chase. The Baltic Sea Information Center in Eckernförde commemorates this event as an educational opportunity [*NABU Schleswig-Holstein, humpback sighting chronicle*].

Over 100 years ago: Westerholz – Fin whale

Over 100 years ago, a fin whale was killed off Westerholz. The annual Westerholz Whale Day commemorates this event [*NABU Schleswig-Holstein, humpback sighting chronicle*].

Section D: Confirmed Dead Whales in the Baltic and the North Sea Coast (Other Individuals) – Chronological

The following entries document confirmed dead whales found in the Baltic Sea that are not the subject animal (Buckli/Hope/Timmy). They are presented to establish the broader mortality pattern and to distinguish the subject animal's fate from other documented deaths.

January 2006: Wismar Bay – Fin whale (dead)

In January 2006, a young fin whale (*Balaenoptera physalus*) entered Wismar Bay. Despite various attempts to guide the whale to deeper water, the animal died. Its skeleton was subsequently preserved for scientific purposes and exhibitions. This case is evidence that the German authorities had twenty years of advance notice that large whales entering Wismar Bay could not navigate out unassisted [*B.Z., 03.01.2010*].

14 February 2025: Hörnum, Sylt (North Sea coast) – Dead sperm whale (14.3 metres)

On 14 February 2025, a dead sperm whale measuring 14.3 metres was found on the beach at Hörnum on the island of Sylt, on Germany's North Sea coast. The Bild infographic "Große Wale an der deutschen Küste" records this stranding. Sylt is located on the North Sea side of the Jutland peninsula, approximately 250 kilometres north-west of Wismar. The animal's cause of death is not specified in the available sources [Bild, 'Große Wale an der deutschen Küste' infographic; 11.05.2025].

20 February 2025: Insel Minsener Oog (North Sea coast) – Dead humpback whale (7.4 metres)

On 20 February 2025, a dead humpback whale measuring 7.4 metres was found on the beach at Insel Minsener Oog, an uninhabited island in the Wadden Sea off the coast of Lower Saxony, south-east of Wangerooge. The Bild infographic "Große Wale an der deutschen Küste" records this stranding. The Schleswig-Holstein Wadden Sea National Park administration subsequently described the animal as a "malnourished juvenile." The animal's small size (7.4 metres) is consistent with a young juvenile or calf. This is the earliest confirmed dead humpback whale on the German coast in the 2025–2026 period [Bild, 'Große Wale an der deutschen Küste' infographic, 11.05.2025; WELT, dpa, 11.05.2025].

11 May 2025: St. Peter-Ording (North Sea coast) – Dead humpback whale (10 metres)

On 11 May 2025, a dead male humpback whale measuring approximately ten metres was found on the beach at St. Peter-Ording, on the North Sea coast of Schleswig-Holstein. The whale was discovered by the tourist information centre approximately 800 metres south of the pier in the Bad district. The Schleswig-Holstein Wadden Sea National Park administration announced the discovery. The decomposing carcass was lifted into a container by a specialist company and transported to the animal rendering plant in Jagel. The remains were to be examined by the University of Veterinary Medicine Hannover (TiHo) to determine more about the animal's condition. St. Peter-Ording is located on the Eiderstedt peninsula, approximately 170 kilometres north-west of Wismar. [WELT, dpa, 11.05.2025].

25 July 2025: Świnoujście, Poland – Dead humpback whale (approx. 10 metres)

On 25 July 2025, a dead whale approximately ten metres long was found floating in the harbour basin of Świnoujście (Swinemünde), on the Polish side of the island of Usedom. The carcass had been dragged in on the bow of an LNG tanker. According to WWF Poland spokesperson Agnieszka Veljković, the animal "arrived on the bow of a tanker," and initial suspicions were that it became entangled somewhere in the Danish straits. It was unclear whether the whale was already dead when it became entangled or died in the collision. The species was initially unconfirmed but suspected to be a humpback whale. The carcass was

secured and, after recovery, was taken for examination. On 2 August 2025, the carcass was sunk at sea. However, on 10 August 2025, the decomposing carcass washed ashore at Wiselka, on the island of Wolin, forcing the closure of a section of beach. The whale was in an advanced state of decomposition and was ultimately disposed of on land. [*Interia Zielona, Wojajczyk, 'Martwy wieloryb w Bałtyku,' 25.07.2025; Nordkurier, Haile, 'Meeresgigant findet trauriges Ende in Ostsee-Hafen,' 01.08.2025; TVN24, 'Martwy wieloryb miał zostać zatopiony,' 11.08.2025*].

Note: This whale is not the subject animal. The subject animal was alive and entangled off Międzyzdroje in February 2025 (approximately 180 kilometres east of Świnoujście) and was seen alive off Rügen in July 2025. The Świnoujście decomposed carcass was found on 25 July 2025. Therefore, these are different individuals, confirming that at least two large whales were in the western Baltic simultaneously in the summer of 2025.

10 May 2026: Mewia Łacha nature reserve, Poland – Dead whale (approx. 5 metres)

On 10 May 2026, a dead whale approximately five metres long was found on a protected beach in the Mewia Łacha nature reserve near the mouth of the Vistula River, close to the village of Mikoszewo in Poland's northern Pomeranian region. Initial theories suggested the animal may be a baleen whale. Due to the extent of decomposition, experts could not determine the cause of death. Polish services warned people not to enter the reserve, which is under strict protection, especially during bird breeding season [*TVP World, 'Dead whale found on protected Baltic beach in northern Poland,' 10.05.2026*]

Section E: What the Sighting History Demonstrates

E.1. The subject animal survived in the Baltic for at least thirteen months

The February 2025 Poland disentanglement establishes that the whale was already present in the western Baltic at least thirteen months before the March 2026 German stranding sequence began. She had been entangled, freed, indicating successful feeding throughout that period. The cartel's framing of the whale as an animal that had recently entered the Baltic and was already in terminal decline is contradicted by this prior history.

E.2. The entanglement preceded the German stranding by over a year

The whale was entangled in fishing gear in Poland in February 2025, over a year before the German response began. The incomplete disentanglement in Wismar Harbour (March 2026) was therefore addressing a chronic condition, not an acute one. The cartel's claim that the entanglement was a recent, acute event that had caused "significant loss of health" is not supported by the documented timeline.

E.3. Large whales enter the western Baltic repeatedly, and some die there

Between 2014 and 2026, at least several separate sightings of large whales were recorded in the western Baltic Sea and adjacent German and Polish coastal waters, spanning from

Flensburg in the north to Świnoujście in the east, involving at least two species (humpback and fin whale) and multiple individual animals. Several confirmed dead whales have been documented in the same period, not including the subject animal. Climate change, shifting prey distributions, and the increasing abundance of humpback whale populations in the North Atlantic all suggest that these incursions will become more frequent, not less.

E.4. The German stranding-response system had decades of warning

The 2006 fin whale died in Wismar Bay, but no protocol followed. The 2014 sightings, the 2016 Greifswald Bodden juvenile, and the 2024–2025 sightings accumulated across the western Baltic, and still no protocol followed. By the time the 2026 humpback stranded off Insel Poel, the institutional cupboard was bare. The sighting record demonstrates that the problem was foreseeable, foreseen, and unaddressed.

E.5. Other dead whales in the Baltic are not evidence that the subject animal was doomed

The cartel may attempt to use the 2006 fin whale death, the 2025 Świnoujście carcass, or the May 2026 Mewia Łacha carcass as evidence that large whales cannot survive in the Baltic. This is a category error. The subject animal survived for over a year, grew, fed, self-refloated three times, swam 110 metres into a barge under her own power, sang during transport, and dived to 150 metres after release. The fact that other whales died does not prove that this whale was dying. It proves that the Baltic is a dangerous environment, which is precisely why rescue should have been attempted sooner.

Section F: The Case for Baltic Whale Protocols and the Bridge to ECHO: Early Cetacean Hazard Observation

The sighting record compiled in the preceding sections demonstrates that large whales entering the western Baltic Sea is not an anomalous, once-in-a-generation event. It is a recurring phenomenon. Between April 2024 and March 2026, several separate sighting events of large whales were recorded across German and Polish waters, involving at least two species (humpback and fin whale) and at least three, possibly more, individual animals. When the 2006 Wismar Bay fin whale is included, the pattern extends over two decades. Climate change, shifting prey distributions, and the increasing abundance of humpback whale populations in the North Atlantic all suggest that these incursions will become more frequent, not less.

The western Baltic Sea is a uniquely dangerous environment for large baleen whales. The salinity is low (7–15 PSU compared to 35 PSU in the open Atlantic), causing osmotic stress and the skin damage documented extensively in this case and in the published literature (*Gulland et al. 2008*). The water is shallow, with extensive sandbanks and narrow channels that create stranding traps for animals accustomed to oceanic depths. The coastline is convoluted, with fjords, bays, harbours, and river mouths that large whales can enter but cannot easily exit. The exit routes to the North Sea (the Kiel Canal, the Danish Straits) are narrow, heavily trafficked, and probably not navigable by an unassisted whale.

Despite all of this, as of March 2026, no German federal or state authority had a published protocol for responding to a live large-whale stranding in the Baltic Sea. No equipment was pre-positioned, no herding or escort procedures had been developed or drilled. There was no acoustic deterrent or lure equipment available or any pharmaceutical protocol for large-whale medication by dart had been prepared. No inter-agency coordination framework existed for a multi-day cetacean response involving maritime traffic authorities, veterinary services, law enforcement, and stranding professionals. When the whale stranded off Insel Poel on 8 April 2026, the German stranding-response system was starting from zero.

It is disingenuous to dismiss the need for such a protocol by invoking historical whale strandings dating to the sixteenth century. The whales of the sixteenth century entered a sea that was not industrialised, not polluted with anthropogenic noise, not depleted of fish by commercial trawling, not crisscrossed with shipping lanes, and not bounded by altered coastlines. The whales of the twenty-first century face sonar, shipping noise, seismic surveys, offshore wind construction, reduced prey availability, and degraded acoustic environments. They are more likely to make navigational errors precisely because of pressures that did not exist in prior centuries. The argument that strandings have always happened is not science; it is fatalism disguised as naturalism.

It will always be easier, faster, safer, and cheaper to deter and intercept a whale at the approaches to the western Baltic and escort it back toward the North Sea than to deal with a full stranding after the animal has navigated deep into the shallow, low-salinity inner Baltic. An interception protocol should include continuous acoustic and visual monitoring of the Danish Straits, Kiel Canal approaches, and Fehmarn Belt; a rapid-response escort capacity pre-positioned at Kiel or Travemünde with acoustic deterrent and lure equipment; coordination agreements with Danish maritime authorities; and a standing protocol for gentle deflection at the earliest possible stage.

Part V. The Cartel: Structure, Doctrine, and the Closed Loop

Part I introduced the cartel, its three tiers (institutional core, international validation layer, cartel-adjacent voices), and its named actors. This part goes deeper into the structural architecture that allowed the cartel to produce and sustain the abandonment decision against accumulating contradictory evidence from the live animal, and into the doctrinal foundations on which the architecture rests. The reader who has absorbed Part I’s overview of the actors should read this part as the analysis of how those actors interact, and why the interaction produces the outcomes it does regardless of the facts on the ground.

A. The closed-loop decision-making structure

The structural problem at the heart of the cartel’s operation in this case is a conflict of interest so direct that it would be disqualifying in any other professional context. Ursula Siebert is simultaneously the director of the Institut für Terrestrische und Aquatische Wildtierforschung (ITAW) at the Tierärztliche Hochschule Hannover, whose on-site veterinary team produced the Gutachten of 7 April 2026, and the European representative on the IWC Strandings Expert Panel, whose letter of the same date validated the Gutachten’s conclusions and recommended to Minister Backhaus that further rescue attempts be halted [*IWC SEP First Statement, 07.04.2026; IWC staff page; Documents.docx, Siebert CV section*]. The person whose team wrote the assessment and the person who sat on the panel that validated the assessment occupy the same chair. The local responder is the international peer reviewer. The peer reviewer is validating her own team’s work.

This is not a peripheral detail about institutional governance; it is the load-bearing wall of the entire decision-making structure. The ministry commissioned the assessment from ITAW. ITAW produced the assessment. The IWC SEP, on which ITAW’s director sits, validated the assessment in a signed letter to the minister. The minister published the letter as the procedural basis for the abandonment decision [*MV PM 100/2026, 08.04.2026*]. At no point in this sequence did an actor who was not part of the cartel review the assessment. The loop runs from ITAW to the ministry to the IWC SEP and back to ITAW, and at every node the same institutional network is speaking to itself. The IWC SEP’s letter is presented to the public as independent international scientific endorsement, but it is not independent in any meaningful sense of the word, because the panel’s European representative is the operational lead of the team whose conclusions the panel is endorsing.

The BDMLR email of approximately 5 April 2026 confirms the loop’s existence in writing. BDMLR, a UK stranding-response organisation, states in its email to a German member of the public: “We knew they were in contact with the International Whaling Committee’s Strandings Coordinator and other advisors to discuss the options available at the time” [*BDMLR email to German citizen, ~05.04.2026: BDMLR.jpg, bdmlr2.jpg, bdml1.jpg*]. And on its public website statement of 8 April 2026, BDMLR confirms that it “was assisted in making contact with several organisations in Europe to invite them to a discussion regarding help and advice about the whale” [*BDMLR website statement, 08.04.2026*]. This is a UK stranding organisation confirming, on the public record, that the international network was

actively coordinating its response to a German federal-state-jurisdiction case. The coordination is not alleged by critics; it is stated by participants.

The practical consequence of this architecture is that the cartel’s assessment cannot be challenged from within the system. The ministry has no independent scientific advisory capacity on cetacean medicine and relies on the cartel for that expertise. The IWC SEP, the only international body with the institutional authority to challenge a national stranding-response decision, includes the director of the institute that made the decision. The NGOs embedded in the response (Sea Shepherd, Greenpeace) defer to the institutional scientists and do not challenge the clinical assessment. The international NGOs invited to comment (IFAW) endorse the position without independent verification. There is, in practice, no node in the network where a dissenting clinical judgment could originate, be heard, and change the outcome. This is what makes the network a cartel in the descriptive sense: not that it conspires, but that its structure eliminates the possibility of internal dissent on the question that matters, which is whether this specific animal should be rescued.

B. The doctrine: stranding as symptom, palliative care as default

The cartel’s doctrinal position on large whale strandings is articulated most candidly in the BDMLR email and subsequent website statement, which together constitute the clearest written expression of the doctrine that SNM has encountered in any stranding-response document worldwide. The doctrine rests on three claims, each of which is stated explicitly in the BDMLR texts and each of which is assumed, though less openly stated, in the IWC SEP letters and the Gutachten.

Claim 1: Stranding is a symptom of serious underlying disease. BDMLR’s email states: “Many whales strand because they are already weakened by illness, injury, hunger, exhaustion or old age and have suffered a long-term decline in health before stranding. The stranding is therefore a symptom of a serious, underlying problem” [BDMLR email, ~05.04.2026:BDMLR.jpg, bdmlr2.jpg, bdmld1.jpg]. This claim is the doctrinal foundation. If it is true, then any stranded large whale is already dying, and the appropriate response is palliative care. If it is false, or if it is true for some strandings but not for others, then the categorical application of the doctrine to every case is not evidence-based medicine but institutional habit. Part V of this brief demonstrates, using the NOAA NY4236 necropsy, that the most comprehensive postmortem investigation ever performed on a freshly dead stranded juvenile humpback could not confirm this claim even in the case of an animal that actually died [NY4236 case report].

Claim 2: Active rescue of large whales is not feasible. BDMLR’s email explains that its own pontoon equipment can lift up to two tonnes and was designed for medium-sized cetaceans such as pilot whales and minke whales, and that for a 12-tonne humpback “this method does not work” [BDMLR email, ~05.04.2026:BDMLR.jpg, bdmlr2.jpg, bdmld1.jpg]. The IWC SEP letter states that “further continued attempts to refloat would only cause additional suffering” [IWC SEP First Statement, 07.04.2026]. SNM accepts that BDMLR’s specific pontoon equipment is undersized for a humpback. What SNM disputes is the inference that because BDMLR’s equipment does not work, no equipment works. The published record (Part IX) documents multiple successful rescues of large whales using

methods the cartel’s statements do not mention, including the Tasmania 2007 sperm whale refloat using net-tow at 30+ tonnes [*Thalmann, Gales, Greenwood and Gedamke, Marine Mammal Science, 2008*], strap method recommended by WHOI-2024-05 workshop report [*Sharp et al., WHOI-2024-05, November 2024*] and successfully applied in the humpback rescue in Australia [*Sea World Foundation Facebook post, 17.04.2026; ORRCA/NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service, Forster humpback rescue*], and the Humphrey acoustic lure in San Francisco Bay [*Krause, first-person diary; NMFS operational record, 1985*]. The cartel’s claim that rescue is not feasible is a statement about the cartel’s own operational capacity, presented as a statement about the limits of possibility.

Claim 3: Palliative care is the only humane option. The BDMLR email concludes: “Therefore the only thing left is palliative care or the natural dying of the animal” [*BDMLR email, ~05.04.2026: BDMLR.jpg, bdmlr2.jpg, bdml1.jpg*]. This claim follows logically from the first two: if the animal is already dying (Claim 1) and rescue is not feasible (Claim 2), then palliative care is indeed the only remaining option. The problem is that both premises are contestable, and if either is wrong, the conclusion does not follow. The cartel’s doctrine treats the three claims as a chain in which each link validates the next, but the chain is only as strong as its weakest premise, and Part V and Part IX of this brief are devoted to demonstrating that neither premise survives contact with the published evidence.

C. The sentence on which the entire critique turns

The BDMLR email’s closing paragraph contains the sentence that, more than any other single statement in the documentary record, reveals the doctrinal mechanism at work: “The topics of rescue and euthanasia of stranded large whales are frequently on the agenda, and if there were a solution, it would be applied, because we all want to save the animals that are healthy enough or relieve the suffering of the dying ones” [*BDMLR email, ~05.04.2026: BDMLR.jpg, bdmlr2.jpg, bdml1.jpg; reproduced nearly verbatim in BDMLR website statement, 08.04.2026*]. The sentence appears, with minor variation, in both the private email and the public website statement, indicating that it is not an off-the-cuff remark by one staff member but a considered institutional position.

This sentence is the key to understanding the cartel, because it reveals the epistemological closure that makes the doctrine unfalsifiable. The sentence assumes that the network’s collective negative result is conclusive: the network has discussed rescue at workshops and conferences, the network has not found a solution, therefore no solution exists. The sentence does not allow for the possibility that the network itself is the limiting factor, that the organisations exchanging knowledge in workshops have reached internal consensus on a doctrine, and that the doctrine is filtering out the cases and methods that do not fit. The Tasmania 2007 sperm whale refloat was not mentioned by the IWC or by the BDMLR. The Humphrey rescue was conducted by people outside the established stranding network, over the objections of NMFS. The Sacramento River Delta case involved antibiotic darting by Gulland, a technique the German cartel prohibited [*Focus Online, Wallace interview, 21.04.2026; WEB.DE, Köhn/Scheiner, 18.04.2026*]. These cases exist in the published record. They were discussed, presumably, at the workshops and conferences BDMLR references. They did not change the doctrine. The doctrine absorbed them or excluded them,

and the sentence “if there were a solution, it would be applied” continued to be written, in emails and on websites, as if the solutions documented in the cartel’s own published literature did not exist.

D. How the cartel sustains its framing against contradicting evidence: seven mechanisms

The question that this case forces into the open is not whether the cartel was wrong about this whale; the whale’s continued survival answers that question. The question is how the cartel publishes statements that the live animal directly contradicts in real time and sustains those statements without institutional consequence. SNM identifies seven structural mechanisms.

Mechanism 1: The prognosis is non-falsifiable in any operationally meaningful sense. The cartel’s prognostic language (“negligible” survival chances, “a dying animal,” “likely” organ damage) has the structural feature that, as long as the animal eventually dies, which all animals eventually do, the prognosis will be retrospectively claimed as vindicated. Whether the animal dies tomorrow, next week, next month, or next year, the prognosis was “correct” because the animal eventually died. The longer the whale is alive without intervention, the more the cartel’s framing is held to be vindicated by the animal’s continued non-rescue, and the absence of recovery is treated as evidence that recovery was impossible.

Mechanism 2: The qualifiers do all the work, and qualifiers are not falsifiable. Stephanie Groß said the whale was “likely” already in organ damage [*Bild liveticker*, 07.04.2026, 18:27]. BDMLR said refloat would “very likely” result in re-stranding [*BDMLR website statement*, 08.04.2026]. The IWC SEP said the chances were “negligible” [*IWC SEP First Statement*, 07.04.2026]. Each of these is a probabilistic claim, and none is a finding. The qualifiers are constructed precisely to be unfalsifiable by direct observation: the whale being alive does not refute “survival is very unlikely,” because “very unlikely but not impossible” accommodates any outcome.

Mechanism 3: The diagnostic standard is set so low that no observation can reach it. The cartel made its terminal-prognosis decision on the basis of a one-hour visual inspection by two divers and the experts on the boat with no instruments named in the public record (see Part VII). When the live animal continues to vocalise, breathe, and move, the cartel does not revisit the diagnosis but says that visual observation cannot rule out the underlying organ damage they inferred. “The animal might have organ damage we cannot see” is a claim that no amount of observation of the live animal can refute, because the claim is about what observation cannot see. The diagnostic procedures that could falsify the claim (blood, biopsy, ultrasound) were refused on welfare grounds, and the welfare grounds are then justified by the unfalsified claim.

Mechanism 4: The framing predicts a wide outcome range. Greenpeace’s Thilo Maack said on 1 April 2026 that the prognosis was “very, very difficult to estimate” [*Bild liveticker*, 01.04.2026]. The MV ministry press release no. 100/2026 stated that “experts say it is impossible to predict how much longer the animal will survive” [*MV PM 100/2026*, 08.04.2026]. By saying that the timing is impossible to predict, the cartel makes any actual

timing consistent with its framing. The framing predicts a range of outcomes wide enough to absorb any actual outcome, which is the same rhetorical structure that makes astrological predictions unfalsifiable.

Mechanism 5: The communication channels are coordinated. The Brownlow letter, the Wilson email (discussed in more details below), the BDMLR private email, the BDMLR public website statement, the MV ministry press releases, and the media interviews with Ritter, Madsen, and Stockin all say the same thing in slightly different registers. There is no comparably authoritative source within the cartel’s reach that says anything different. The cartel’s statements do not need to engage with observable reality because the cartel’s statements are the only statements with institutional authority that the public is hearing. The live animal’s contradiction of the framing is visible to the Bild reporter on the beach who writes “He is blowing, he is moving, he is alive” [*Bild liveticker, 02.04.2026, 15:26*], but the Bild reporter on the beach does not have an institutional letterhead, and the cartel does.

Mechanism 6: The harms inflicted by the response become evidence for the framing. The IWC SEP letter states: “each stranding event has caused serious physical harm, including pressure injuries, breathing difficulties, and circulatory stress which further weakens the animal” [*IWC SEP First Statement, 07.04.2026*]. The harms caused by the inadequate response become evidence that further response would cause further harm. The longer the cartel’s inadequate response continues, the more evidence the cartel accumulates for the framing that no adequate response is possible. The framing produces the conditions that vindicate the framing.

Mechanism 7: The eventual death will close the loop and rewrite the history. The cartel announces the framing of “a dying animal” while the animal is still alive, in such a way that whenever the death does occur, the statement will read in retrospect as having been correct all along. The necropsy that follows the death could be performed by the same operational team whose decisions the necropsy will be evaluating, or it will be done late, or it will be very superficial, geared more toward sample and specimen collection than toward determining the cause of death, and, as a result, will be inconclusive, as is often the case in many strandings. The findings will be inconclusive and ambiguous enough to be presented as the underlying causes of stranding and death, rather than as the consequences of the stranding event and the inadequate response, which is precisely what the NOAA NY4236 necropsy (Part V) explicitly characterized the comparable findings as being. The institutional record will close around the case as another example of why nothing could have been done.

E. Why these mechanisms work in this specific case

Several features of this particular case made the mechanisms especially effective. The case is technically complex and the lay public cannot independently assess clinical claims about cetacean physiology, which means the public has to trust someone, and the institutional voices are the ones the public has been trained to trust. The timeline is long enough that public attention drifts: by the time the live animal’s continued survival reaches the point where it could be presented as a clear refutation of the framing, the news cycle has moved on. The cartel’s communication moves are coordinated to deliver the framing while the

public is still in the emotional acute phase, so that by the time the empirical reality catches up to the framing, the framing has already become the conventional wisdom.

The cartel's institutional reach extends across multiple jurisdictions and languages: the BDMLR website is in English, the IWC SEP letter is in English with a German translation, the MV ministry press releases are in German, the Bild liveticker is in German, and the Science and Guardian articles are in English. The public looking for an outside voice has nowhere to go that is not, in some way, downstream of the same network. And most importantly, the cartel's statements are not addressed to the public who can see the live animal but to the public who cannot. Anyone on the beach at Insel Poel who watches the whale blow and move and vocalise knows that the cartel's framing does not match what is in front of them, but almost nobody is on the beach at Insel Poel, and almost everybody is reading the cartel's statements through their phones, in their kitchens, in another country, days later. The public who can see the falsification is too small to matter, and the public who reads the framing is too far away to see the falsification.

F. The standard for accountability

The structural mechanisms described above are not justifications for the cartel's framing; they are descriptions of how the framing is sustained against contradicting evidence. None of them constitutes a defence in an animal welfare framework, in a scientific framework, or in a public-trust framework. Each of them is, however, a defence in the framework the cartel itself operates within: an institutional framework in which the network's collective doctrinal commitment, the network's institutional letterhead, and the network's coordinated public messaging are themselves the standard of correctness. The cartel sustains statements that the live animal directly contradicts because the cartel has, in effect, defined the standard of correctness in such a way that direct contradiction by the live animal is not a relevant input.

The remedy is not to ask the cartel to do better, because the cartel is doing exactly what its incentive structure rewards. The remedy is to subject the cartel's institutional outputs to independent peer review by qualified cetacean clinicians who are not part of the loop, to pursue information-rights requests for the underlying assessment texts, tests and diagnostic tools used, and to create a parallel structure that is not a part of the cartel. The concrete recommendations are set out in Part XIX.

Part VI. The Myth That Only Sick Whales Strand: The NOAA NY4236 Necropsy and What It Actually Shows

The cartel’s doctrine rests on a foundational claim that has been hammered into public consciousness for decades by stranding-response organisations, conservation NGOs, and the scientists who advise both: that stranding is a symptom of serious underlying disease, and that stranded whales are therefore already dying by the time they reach the shore. The BDMLR email states it with unusual directness: “The stranding is therefore a symptom of a serious, underlying problem.” The IWC SEP letter assumes it when it characterises the whale’s survival chances as “negligible.” The Gutachten assumes it when it infers “likely organ damage” from a one-hour visual inspection. The media assumes it when it frames rescue as futile sentimentality against scientific consensus. The claim has been repeated so often and by so many institutional voices that it has acquired the status of established scientific fact, and anyone who questions it is treated as someone who does not understand cetacean biology.

This part dismantles that claim using the cartel’s own best evidence: the NOAA NY4236 case report, the most comprehensive necropsy ever performed on a stranded juvenile humpback whale. The case is positioned early in this brief, before the detailed chronology of the German case, because it demolishes the foundational premise before the reader encounters the cartel’s specific application of that premise to the whale off Insel Poel. If the premise does not hold, then everything built on it collapses, and the question becomes not whether the cartel’s doctrine was applied correctly in this case but whether the doctrine should have been applied at all.

A. The NOAA NY4236 case: East Hampton, New York, 2010

In 2010, a juvenile humpback whale, designated NY4236 in the NOAA stranding database, stranded on a beach near East Hampton on the eastern end of Long Island, New York. The animal is the closest published comparator to the German whale: a young humpback, roughly the same age class, stranded in shallow coastal waters. A rescue attempt was made, but eventually the animal was euthanized. What followed the death is the part that matters for the doctrinal question, because NOAA subjected the fresh carcass to the most comprehensive necropsy ever documented in the published literature for a stranded juvenile humpback [*NOAA NY4236-10 case report, East Hampton, NY, 2010*].

B. What the necropsy found

The NOAA team performed a full battery of diagnostic tests that dwarfs anything attempted, or even proposed, in the German case. The diagnostic workup included a complete blood count and white blood cell differential, serum chemistry analysis, urinalysis with specific testing for urine myoglobin (the diagnostic marker for rhabdomyolysis, which is catastrophic muscle breakdown), bacterial culture by Antech Diagnostics, morbillivirus PCR by the Athens Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory, a biotoxin panel covering okadaic acid, saxitoxin, brevetoxin, and domoic acid through the NOAA Marine Biotoxin Program, and

histopathological examination of every major organ system [NOAA NY4236-10 case report]. This is the diagnostic standard that the word “comprehensive” means in veterinary pathology. When the German cartel described its one-hour, two-diver, instrument-free visual inspection as a “comprehensive evaluation,” it was using the same word to describe a procedure that shares nothing with the NOAA standard except the word itself.

The necropsy found muscle damage localised to the stranding site. The NOAA pathologists explicitly characterised this as a *consequence* of the stranding event, not a pre-existing condition. The muscle damage was positional: the tissue that had borne the animal’s weight against the substrate showed injury, and the tissue that had not borne weight did not. This is what stranding does to muscle, and it is localized [NOAA NY4236-10 case report]. It is important to note that the East Hampton humpback whale was fully stranded for three days, whereas the German whale was semi-submerged for the duration of the stranding.

The necropsy found lung inflammation, which the NOAA pathologists again characterised as a *consequence* of the stranding rather than its cause. Pulmonary compromise in **fully** stranded (and not semi-buoyant) whales results from compression of the thorax under the animal’s own unsupported body weight, a mechanical process that begins the moment the animal strands and worsens with time. Tom Bär of the Deutsches Meeresmuseum made essentially the same point at the 7 April 2026 press conference when he explained that ‘larger whales suffer damage from compression, particularly in the lungs, since they normally don’t have to support their body weight but are buoyant due to the water and air in their lungs’ [Bild liveticker, 07.04.2026]. Bär described the mechanism correctly but drew the wrong conclusion from it. The lung compression he described is a reason to get the whale off the sandbank as quickly as possible, not a reason to leave it there. Bär also did not distinguish between fully stranded and semi-buoyant stranded whales, a very important factor that determines how much localized damage will occur.

The urinalysis specifically tested for and did not detect urine myoglobin, which ruled out systemic rhabdomyolysis. This is a critical negative finding, because the cartel’s framing of “muscle compression damage” in stranded whales implies, and sometimes explicitly states, that the compression causes systemic muscle breakdown whose toxic byproducts then damage the kidneys and other organs. The NY4236 urinalysis demonstrates that in at least this one case, the most closely comparable published case, the systemic cascade that the cartel’s framing assumes did not occur [NOAA NY4236-10 case report]. The muscle damage was real but it was local, not systemic, and the animal’s kidneys were not being destroyed by myoglobin release.

The necropsy found no morbillivirus. It found no biotoxins of any kind: no okadaic acid, no saxitoxin, no brevetoxin, no domoic acid. It found no evidence of chronic disease. It found no evidence of starvation. It found no evidence of the “serious, underlying problem” that the cartel’s doctrine requires as the explanation for why whales strand [NOAA NY4236-10 case report].

C. What the necropsy could not establish

The reason for stranding. Even with every diagnostic tool available to modern veterinary pathology, including tests that the German cartel did not perform, did not attempt, and actively refused on “animal welfare” grounds [*IWC SEP First Statement, 07.04.2026*], the NOAA team could not determine why the whale stranded. The cause of stranding remained unknown. The most thorough postmortem investigation ever conducted on a stranded juvenile humpback whale produced a conclusive answer to many questions (was the animal diseased? no; was it starving? no; was it poisoned? no; was it infected with morbillivirus? no) and no answer at all to the one question that the cartel’s doctrine treats as already answered before the investigation begins: why did the animal strand?

D. What this means for the doctrine

If the most detailed necropsy ever performed on a stranded juvenile humpback cannot establish that the animal was sick before stranding, then the categorical claim that “stranding is a symptom of a serious, underlying problem” is not a scientific finding but a doctrinal assumption. The cartel has treated this assumption as established fact for decades, has used it to justify non-intervention in case after case, and has presented it to the public and to political authorities as if it were evidence-based medicine. The assumption may be true in some cases, perhaps many cases, but it is not universally true, and the NY4236 necropsy is the published proof that it does not survive contact with the evidence the cartel itself generates. Interestingly, the German whale necropsy, which was done weeks late on a severely decomposed whale, also did not find any obvious serious illness that might have caused the whale to strand, nor could it establish the cause of death. While the full report is due in six months, these very findings support what can be inferred from the East Hampton humpback whale necropsy results.

The doctrine’s unfalsifiability is the deeper problem. If the necropsy finds pathology, the doctrine is confirmed: the animal was sick, the stranding was a symptom. If the necropsy finds no pathology, the doctrine is not disconfirmed; instead, the absence of findings is attributed to the limitations of the diagnostic methods, to decomposition artefacts, or to the possibility that the pathology was present but not detectable. The doctrine is structured in such a way that no empirical outcome can count against it, which is the defining characteristic of a belief system rather than a scientific framework. The BDMLR sentence “if there were a solution, it would be applied” is the operational counterpart of this epistemic closure: the network has decided that stranding equals disease, the network has decided that rescue of large whales is not feasible, and both decisions are insulated from the published evidence that contradicts them.

E. The one-hour glance from a boat versus a full NOAA necropsy

The comparison between the NOAA NY4236 diagnostic workup and the German experts’ “comprehensive evaluation” of 7 April 2026 needs to be stated in the plainest possible terms, because the gap between the two is so wide that clinical vocabulary risks softening it. The NOAA team had the **freshly dead** animal on a beach, had days of access, had a full

laboratory chain from field to histopathology to virology to toxicology, had published the results in a formal case report, and still could not determine why the whale stranded. The German cartel had a live animal in shallow water, had one hour of in-water visual observation by two divers, drew no blood, took no biopsy, performed no ultrasound, tested no urine, ran no cultures, ran no PCR, ran no toxin screen, and wrote up a Gutachten in two and a half hours that concluded the animal had “likely organ damage” and “negligible” survival chances [*Bild liveticker*, 07.04.2026, 18:27–18:45; *DMM/ITAW Gutachten*, 07.04.2026].

If a multi-day, multi-laboratory, multi-specialist necropsy on a dead animal cannot establish the cause of stranding, then a one-hour visual inspection of a live animal cannot establish the animal’s internal condition. The Gutachten’s “likely organ damage” is not a finding; it is a guess, dressed in clinical vocabulary, produced by a procedure that would not meet the diagnostic standard of a village veterinary practice. The IWC SEP endorsed it, the ministry published it, the media reported it, and the public was told it was science. But it was not science, it was doctrine, wearing a lab coat.

F. The implications for the German case

The whale off Insel Poel was a juvenile female humpback of roughly the same age class as NY4236. She was entangled in fishing gear, which is a documented, external, mechanically comprehensible cause of distress that does not require any inference about hidden internal pathology. She demonstrated sustained locomotive capacity over five weeks of strandings, self-refloats, and coastal transits covering a significant distance under her own power. She vocalised loud enough to be heard hundreds of metres from shore [*Bild liveticker*, 01.04.2026]. She breathed at rates consistent with healthy resting humpback whales. She was assessed by an independent replacement veterinarian on Day 24 as being in “surprisingly good” health with improving skin condition [*Bild liveticker*, 23.04.2026, quoting Dr. Kirsten Tönnies]. After release, she had up to 150 metres dives [*Walter-Mommert*, *NDR 1 Radio MV interview*, 06.05.2026]. None of this is consistent with the “serious, underlying problem” that the doctrine requires. All of it is consistent with an entangled, disoriented juvenile whale trapped in waters she could not navigate out of, whose primary need was not palliative care but a timely operational rescue.

The cartel applied its doctrine to this animal as it applies its doctrine to every stranded large whale: categorically, without adjusting for the specific clinical evidence, and without reference to the published cases in which rescue succeeded. The NY4236 necropsy demonstrates that the doctrine’s foundational premise does not hold even in the best-documented case in the literature. The whale off Insel Poel demonstrates, by being alive, that the doctrine’s application to this specific animal was wrong. Between the necropsy that could not find the disease and the whale that refused to die, the doctrine has nowhere left to stand.

Part VII. The Initial Response (3 March – 26 March 2026)

This part documents the first phase of the case: from the initial sighting in Wismar Harbour through the dredger operation at Niendorf and the whale’s escape through the dredged channel. Throughout this period, the cartel’s actors are already present, the species misidentification has already occurred, and the doctrinal framework that will later justify abandonment is already visible in the cartel’s public statements and operational decisions. The case begins under Schleswig-Holstein jurisdiction and transfers to Mecklenburg-Vorpommern when the whale strands in Wismarbucht on 28 March.

A. Wismar Harbour: the entanglement, the misidentification, and the incomplete disentanglement (3–4 March 2026)

On 3–4 March 2026, a large whale was observed in the harbour of Wismar, dragging approximately 50 metres of fishing net behind it [*NDR Nordmagazin, 04.03.2026*]. The fire department of Wismar, in coordination with the local fire service’s multipurpose vessel, removed the bulk of the trailing net by hand, though ropes remained wrapped around the front of the animal that the fire department could not free. After several hours, the animal was guided out of the harbour basin by the crew of the Sea Shepherd Deutschland vessel *M/Y Triton*.

Two details from this first encounter are significant for everything that follows. The first is the species misidentification. Lisa Klemens of the Deutsches Meeresmuseum Stralsund, was on board the *Triton* and told NDR Radio MV that the animal was a “fin whale,” raising the possibility that it was the same fin whale seen previously in Flensburger Förde [*NDR Nordmagazin, 04.03.2026*]. Florian Stadler of Sea Shepherd Deutschland likewise identified it as a fin whale in contemporaneous coverage [*Documents.docx, citing zeit.de/dpa 04.03.2026*]. The misidentification was not publicly corrected until 14 March 2026, when Robert Marc Lehmann pointed it out in a YouTube video [*Lehmann YouTube, 'EXPERTEN verwechseln Buckelwal mit Finnwal?!' 14.03.2026*]. An experienced cetacean responder does not confuse a fin whale with a humpback whale; they have markedly different body shape, fin morphology, head shape, and body length. The misidentification by both DMM and Sea Shepherd at the very start of the German response is an early indicator of the operational competence of the cartel actors who would later make the abandonment decision.

The second significant detail is the incomplete disentanglement. The fire department removed the bulk of the trailing net, but Sea Shepherd subsequently reported that two to three lines remained attached to the animal that could not be removed [*NDR Nordmagazin, 04.03.2026*]. These residual lines would remain on the animal throughout the entire case. By 6 March, SHZ reported the whale was “dragging a 50-metre net through the Baltic,” and Sea Shepherd diver Sven Biertümpfel described a planned approach in which responders would grab the line, allow the whale to tow them, and work forward to cut the entanglement around the head [*SHZ, 'Wal schleppt 50-Meter-Netz durch Ostsee,' 06.03.2026*].

The third significant detail is that the IWC SEP letter of 7 April 2026 would later assert that

removing nets and ropes from “the digestive tract” was “medically impossible,” a claim that is anatomically incorrect (baleen whales do not swallow rope into the gut) and operationally contradicted by the fact that lay responders had repeatedly approached the live, free-swimming animal and cut rope from its body in the weeks before the letter was written. Furthermore, the German humpback necropsy did not find any nets or ropes anywhere in the digestive tract of the whale, once again indicating that the IWC made an assumptions in their letter that are not supported by the evidence from the case and peer-reviewed literature [*SNM Public Statement in Response to the DMM/ITAW Expert Report (Contra Gutachten)*, 11.04.2026].

B. Sea Shepherd tracking and further disentanglement attempts (11–20 March 2026)

Sea Shepherd Deutschland posted on 11 March 2026 that, following the Wismar incident, “there were repeated sighting reports along the coast west of Wismar” and that Sea Shepherd had deployed both a land team and a boat team [*Documents.docx, Sea Shepherd 11.03.2026 post*]. On 19–20 March, Sea Shepherd’s divers followed the whale to the Haffkrug area and, with the help of the water protection police, approached the animal in a tube boat and cut a line using a pole-mounted line cutter. Because the animal kept submerging and swimming into deeper areas, the remaining net could not be completely removed and the operation was called off [*Sea Shepherd Deutschland Facebook, 24.03.2026*]. The operational point is that the disentanglement was partially successful, demonstrating that the animal was approachable and that physical rope removal was possible, but that the job was left unfinished because the team did not have the capacity or the mandate to persist until every line was cleared.

C. First stranding at Niendorf (22–23 March 2026)

On the night of 22–23 March 2026, the whale stranded for the first time on a sandbank directly in front of the pier of Niendorf harbour, Timmendorfer Strand, Schleswig-Holstein. A hotel in Niendorf alerted the police at approximately 4:00 AM after guests reported a noise disturbance from the water [*Der Reporter, 23.03.2026; Tini24, 23.03.2026*]. Police, water police, the public order office, and the volunteer fire department responded. ITAW experts from Büsum were expected on site by midday. Schleswig-Holstein Environment Minister Tobias Goldschmidt attended the site and held a brief press conference together with Stephanie Groß (ITAW), Timmendorfer Strand Mayor Sven Partheil-Böhnke, and the police spokesperson [*Der Reporter, 23.03.2026*].

D. The dredger operation (24–26 March 2026)

A first attempt to free the animal using a small suction dredger on 24 March failed because the sand was too firm [*Kurier, 25.03.2026*]. A larger floating dredger from Lower Saxony was brought to the site and assembled, with the plan of digging a 50-metre-long, six-metre-wide, 1.20-metre-deep channel in front of the whale’s head to allow him to swim back into deeper water [*Welt, 25.03.2026; Bild liveticker, 26.03.2026*]. During this operation, Stephanie Groß told reporters that the whale was “motivated,” and ITAW’s Dr. Joseph

Schnitzler stated publicly that “the nutritional condition is good” and that “humpback whales can survive for weeks without food,” while adding the important caveat that “no reliable statements can be made about the animal’s internal condition” [*Bild liveticker*, 26.03.2026, 12:04; *Stern*, 25.03.2026, citing Schnitzler via NWZ]. SNM agrees with Schnitzler’s caveat and notes that the cartel would subsequently abandon it entirely, producing definitive-sounding statements about the animal’s internal condition on the basis of a one-hour visual inspection two weeks later.

Robert Marc Lehmann, a marine biologist and underwater cameraman who had travelled to the site independently, was the only responder in the water with the whale during the dredger operation. His repeated direct observations across multiple *Bild liveticker* entries are the most detailed contemporaneous clinical record of the live animal in the documentary file: “He’s reacting, he has both eyes open, he’s vocalizing, but he’s incredibly insecure and scared. There’s still a rope hanging from his mouth. But: there’s still life in there when I tap him”; and later: “The whale now trusts me and is highly motivated to cooperate”; and: “The whale wants to start! He wants to take off. And he trusts me now, he’s completely calm when I’m with him” [*Bild liveticker*, 26.03.2026, 13:26, ~15:48, ~15:59]. Whether or not one accepts Lehmann’s broader claims about whale communication, the factual content of his observations (eyes open, vocalising, responsive to physical contact, motivated to move forward through the channel) is contemporaneous on-site evidence of an animal whose behaviour was not consistent with the “dying animal” framing that the cartel would adopt eleven days later.

E. Sea Shepherd rejects the rope-and-net method

On the live broadcast of 26 March 2026, Sea Shepherd’s Manuel Abras was asked why the whale was not being rescued using ropes stretched underneath it. His answer: “We decided against that to avoid injuring the whale. The excavators are the best option” [*Bild liveticker*, 26.03.2026, 14:11]. This is the moment at which Sea Shepherd Deutschland, an organisation founded specifically to interpose itself physically against threats to marine life, publicly rejected the rope-and-net method that the published Tasmania 2007 sperm whale refloat had demonstrated to work on animals of 30+ tonnes after 96 hours of stranding [*Thalmann, Gales, Greenwood and Gedamke, Marine Mammal Science, 2008*]. Sea Shepherd’s stated rationale (avoiding injury to the whale) is the standard cartel rationale for refusing the very methodology the published literature identifies as effective, and it illustrates how deeply the cartel’s doctrinal preferences had been internalised even by an NGO whose institutional identity is defined by direct physical action on behalf of marine animals.

F. Groß’s contemporaneous assessment: “well-nourished, has reserves”

On 27 March 2026, after the whale had freed himself through the dredged channel overnight, Stephanie Groß told reporters: “These animals can go for weeks without food. This whale is well-nourished, so it still has reserves. That won’t be its problem” [*Bild liveticker*, 27.03.2026, 12:58]. On 24 March 2026, she had told *The Guardian* that the whale appeared to have arrived in shallow water either because it “didn’t try to move on because he

had enough to feed on, or simply lost its way” [*Guardian*, 24.03.2026]. These are the cartel’s own on-site veterinarian’s own contemporaneous assessments: the whale was well-nourished, had reserves, and was probably lost rather than dying. This is the diagnosis SNM agrees with, and the diagnosis the cartel would abandon without any intervening diagnostic procedure to explain the reversal.

G. The escort plan and the whale’s escape (26–27 March 2026)

Schleswig-Holstein Minister-President Daniel Günther attended the site on 26 March and presented a plan for police boats and the German Maritime Search and Rescue Association (DGzRS) to escort the whale through the Baltic to the North Sea, with Danish authorities expected to support the escort [*Bild liveticker*, 26.03.2026, 16:41]. The whale moved several metres forward through the dredged channel during the late afternoon and evening of 26 March but did not free himself before darkness forced the operation to be suspended for the night [*Bild liveticker*, 26.03.2026, multiple entries: 17:25, 18:30, 18:41, 19:04, 19:10, 19:15].

During the night of 26–27 March, the whale freed himself through the channel and swam out into the open Baltic. When rescue teams returned on the morning of 27 March, the animal was gone. Lehmann’s colleague Noah Boonma posted on Instagram: “We found him/her. He/she is swimming freely. My heart is overflowing” [*Bild liveticker*, 27.03.2026, 13:50]. Excavator operator Lars Hoppe of MBN told NDR: “It immediately struck me how small and insignificant people are. And how important they always take themselves in life. This takes on a whole new dimension. You could feel it: He wanted to be free” [*Bild liveticker*, 27.03.2026, 14:50].

Police and DGzRS escort vessels accompanied the whale across Lübecker Bucht during the afternoon of 27 March. By mid-afternoon the whale’s course had brought him dangerously close to the shore at Boltenhagen, within 400 metres of land, and the escort vessels began trying to keep their distance to avoid pushing him closer [*Bild liveticker*, 27.03.2026, 15:57, 16:06, 16:15]. With darkness, the escort was called off for the second consecutive night. The whale was alone overnight, and by 28 March he had stranded again in Wismarbucht. The escort’s failure to persist through darkness, and the absence of any night-capable herding or tracking plan, meant that the most promising moment of the entire case, when the whale was free and moving under his own power in open water, was lost because the response team did not have the operational capacity or the institutional mandate (or even the full understanding of the importance of the continuous escort) to stay with the animal around the clock.

H. What the initial response reveals

The initial response phase, from 3 March through 27 March 2026, reveals three things about the system that would later produce the abandonment decision. First, the cartel’s operational competence was limited from the outset: the species was misidentified, the disentanglement was left incomplete, the rope-and-net method was rejected on doctrinal grounds without reference to the published literature, and the escort was abandoned at nightfall on both occasions it was attempted. Second, the cartel’s own on-site veterinary assessment during this phase was that the whale was well-nourished, had reserves, and was probably lost rather

than dying, an assessment that would be reversed without any intervening diagnostic procedure. Third, the whale’s own behaviour throughout the phase (freeing himself from the sandbank, swimming through the dredged channel under his own power, transiting across Lübecker Bucht) demonstrated the locomotive capacity and physiological resilience that the cartel’s later framing would require did not exist.

On 28 March 2026, Ursula Siebert herself told Bild: “If we had assessed the chances of survival as low, we wouldn’t have supported bringing the animal out of there at all. But now, of course, it has to find its own way. The whale is swimming in deeper waters again. It’s also diving for longer periods. It’s very active, and therefore we’re hopeful that it will find a good path forward” [*Bild Peilsender, 28.03.2026*]. Eleven days later, the same Siebert, in her parallel role as European representative on the IWC SEP, would underwrite a letter saying the chances were now “negligible.” What changed in those eleven days was not the animal but the cartel’s position.

Part VIII. The Abandonment (27 March – 8 April 2026)

This part documents the twelve days between the whale’s first self-refloat and the cartel’s formal abandonment decision, a period during which the cartel’s own public statements shifted from cautious optimism to categorical despair without any intervening diagnostic procedure that would explain the shift. The whale’s observable behaviour during this period remained broadly consistent: he self-refloated twice, transited independently across Lübecker Bucht, vocalised, breathed at normal humpback intervals, and moved. What changed was not the animal but the cartel’s institutional need.

A. 28 March 2026: second stranding in Wismarbucht; Siebert says survival prognosis is good

By midday on 28 March, the whale had stranded again in Wismarbucht, approximately one kilometre off the Bad Wendorf pier near the platform Walfisch upper light [*Bild liveticker*, 28.03.2026, 13:35–13:52]. ITAW marine biologists Helena Eicher and Dr. Joseph Schnitzler boarded the police boat *Uecker* to search for the animal [*Bild liveticker*, 28.03.2026, 13:12]. Backhaus established a 500-metre exclusion zone and said “unfortunately, we have to assume that the animal is not doing well,” but added that there was “still hope” because a deeper channel lay nearby and the whale might reach it on his own overnight [*Bild liveticker*, 28.03.2026, 18:45].

On the same day, Ursula Siebert gave the statement that would become the single most damaging piece of evidence against the cartel’s later position. Asked about a tracking device, she explained the permit requirements and then said: “If we had assessed the chances of survival as low, we wouldn’t have supported bringing the animal out of there at all. But now, of course, it has to find its own way. The whale is swimming in deeper waters again. It’s also diving for longer periods. It’s very active, and therefore we’re hopeful that it will find a good path forward” [*Bild Peilsender*, 28.03.2026]. This is the director of ITAW, on the public record, stating that the survival prognosis was good enough to support rescue. Ten days later, her own institute would co-author a Gutachten concluding “likely organ damage,” and Siebert herself, in her parallel role as European representative on the IWC SEP, would underwrite a letter calling the chances “negligible.”

B. 29 March 2026: third stranding; Groß says “nutritional condition is good”

By 29 March, the whale had stranded for the third time in Wismarbucht [*NDR liveblog*, 29.03.2026]. Stephanie Groß told reporters the animal “isn’t moving” and appeared “significantly weakened, even compared to yesterday,” but in the same statement confirmed that “the nutritional condition is good” and that “humpback whales can survive for weeks without food” [*Bild liveticker*, 29.03.2026, 12:19–12:21]. She explicitly ruled out euthanasia on technical grounds, explaining that “there is simply no reliable method that can quickly and painlessly euthanize this animal” and that she was “also responsible for animal

protection and welfare” [*Bild liveticker*, 29.03.2026, 12:19]. Backhaus established another exclusion zone and said the whale should be left alone to “recharge.”

On the same day, Robert Marc Lehmann publicly accused ITAW of having “actively excluded” him from the rescue mission after the whale freed himself through the channel [*Welt*, 29.03.2026]. His accusation was indirectly corroborated by the on-site excavator operator known on Instagram as *driver_bibi*, who told Comicschau: “I’ve never heard so much crap. Everything was being covered up at the press conference. We know better, we were there” [*Comicschau*, 29.03.2026]. SNM takes no position on the internal politics of the exclusion but notes that the cartel publicly denied a fact that an on-site witness publicly contradicted, and that this kind of denial-of-the-record is itself part of the pattern. This dispute has been previously discussed in Part IV.

C. 30 March 2026: “He wants to fight”; press release no. 084/2026

On the evening of 30 March, the whale moved out of his stranding position under his own power. The Ministry for Climate Protection, Agriculture, Rural Areas and Environment of Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania issued press release no. 084/2026, titled “Ruhe wirkt – Wal vor Wismar wirkt kräftiger” (“Quiet works – whale near Wismar appears stronger”), which stated: “The whale’s condition was examined and our expectation has been confirmed. The quiet that we have allowed the animal has obviously worked. The whale’s condition is better than this morning and better than yesterday” [*MV PM 084/2026*]. Backhaus told BILD that evening: “He set out on his own. He wants to fight” [*Bild liveticker*, 30.03.2026, 20:58]. Greenpeace’s Dr. Sandra Schöttner confirmed the cartel’s own assessment on the same evening: “Our colleagues are already working with the water police to guide the whale onto the right route. His journey will be very long. But it’s a good first step. We took the experts from abroad, with whom we are in constant contact, seriously. They confirmed that the path we chose could be the right one” [*Bild liveticker*, 30.03.2026, 21:21].

This is the cartel’s own statement, in writing, issued as an official press release by the ministry, that the whale was improving. Two days later the same actors would say his condition required abandonment. SNM’s position is that the 30 March assessment, produced when the cartel still believed rescue might succeed, was closer to the truth than the 1 April assessment, produced when the cartel needed to justify giving up.

D. 31 March 2026: fourth stranding off Insel Poel; “hope dies last”

A question that has never been publicly addressed is how the whale came to be in the Kirchsee in the first place. After self-refloating on the evening of 30 March, the whale was swimming freely in Wismar Bay, heading north at 5–6 knots. Directly to the north lay the shallow, trap-like harbour entrance of the Kirchsee between the island of Poel and the mainland, a dead-end bay from which escape would be difficult once entered.

The water police identify the danger

On the morning of 31 March, the water police recognised the threat. According to dpa reporting syndicated by the Tagesspiegel and the Bietigheimer Zeitung, the priority was to prevent the whale from swimming into “the shallow, narrow channel at the entrance to the

harbour of Poel Island” [*Tagesspiegel/dpa, 31.03.2026; Bietigheimer Zeitung/dpa, 31.03.2026*]. The water police were on site with the coastal patrol boat “Hoben,” and Greenpeace was asked to help keep the whale away from the danger zone.

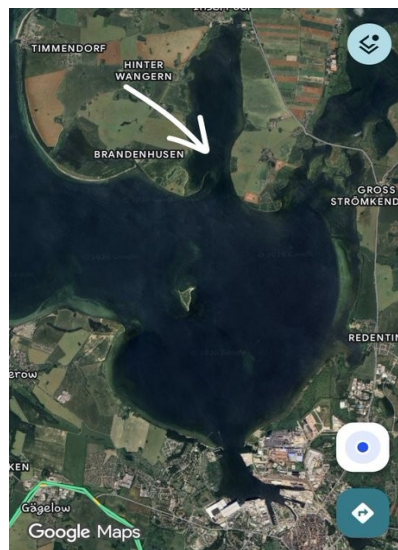
The intervention: one inflatable rubber dinghy

Greenpeace deployed a single inflatable rubber dinghy (“Schlauchboot”) in Wismar Bay to try to keep the whale away from shallow waters [*Tagesspiegel/dpa, 31.03.2026; Bietigheimer Zeitung/dpa, 31.03.2026*]. This was the sole herding intervention attempted for a twelve-metre whale moving at speed toward a known dead-end. No acoustic deterrents, no screening line of multiple vessels, and no other herding techniques were deployed. It failed.

The whale enters the Kirchsee anyway

The DMM/ITAW Gutachten records what happened next, though it does not explain the mechanics: “Kurz danach erreichte das Team von Greenpeace die Kirchsee, in den der Buckelwal bereits hineingeschwommen war” (“Shortly thereafter, the Greenpeace team reached the Kirchsee, into which the humpback whale had already swum”) [*DMM/ITAW Gutachten, 07.04.2026, p. 2–3*]. The critical word is “bereits” (“already”). By the time Greenpeace’s dinghy arrived at the channel entrance or inside the Kirchsee, the whale was already there. The intervention did not prevent entry; it arrived after the fact or was ineffective. The whale either dived under the single dinghy, which a humpback can easily do, or entered the channel before the dinghy was properly positioned. Greenpeace’s Thilo Maack later told reporters: “Unfortunately, the whale did what it wanted and swam into the bay” [*Bild liveticker, 31.03.2026*].

At 13:42 on 31 March, Greenpeace reported that the whale had stranded again, for the fourth time, this time inside the Kirchsee off the island of Poel [*DMM/ITAW Gutachten, 07.04.2026, p. 3*]. A 500-metre exclusion zone and a drone overflight ban were established, and the animal was left to “recover”, which in practice meant being left undisturbed [*DMM/ITAW Gutachten, 07.04.2026, p. 3*].



The final stranding location inside the Kirchsee off the island of Poel

SNM’s assessment of the operational failure

SNM observes that a single inflatable dinghy, without acoustic deterrents, without a screening line of multiple vessels, was a manifestly inadequate intervention for the task the water police had identified. The topography of the Kirchsee entrance is public, mapped, and known to anyone with navigational competence. With a proper multi-boat screening line and acoustic deterrents at the bay mouth, the whale need never have entered the Kirchsee at all. The subsequent framing of this event as a “fourth stranding”, as if the whale had chosen to strand, obscures the operational failure that preceded it.

The cartel’s public statements on 31 March

Despite the failed intervention, the cartel’s public statements on 31 March contained a mixture of caution and continued hope. Greenpeace’s Thilo Maack told reporters that “the current developments demonstrate how weakened and in need of rest the whale is” [*Bild liveticker*, 31.03.2026; *BR*, 31.03.2026]. Backhaus, however, made two striking statements on the same day that stand in tension with Maack’s framing. First: “Many people said then that it was all pointless. He would die. I had a somewhat different opinion from the beginning. I want to make that explicitly clear” [*Bild liveticker*, 31.03.2026, 15:27]. Second, when asked about euthanasia: “Of course. It’s one of the options you have to keep in mind. Anything else would be irresponsible. But for me, hope dies last, and I fight for the lives of animals and people until the very last second” [*Bild liveticker*, 31.03.2026, 14:51].

On the evening of 31 March, the cartel’s combined assessment (Backhaus, Greenpeace, Sea Shepherd, DMM, and ITAW) was that the whale’s position was “unfavourable” and the “overall prognosis is not good” [*Bild liveticker*, 31.03.2026]. Notably, on the afternoon of 30 March, the day before the fourth stranding, Burkard Baschek of DMM had already told reporters: “Tonight we will discuss how to help him die if he cannot swim free” [*Bild liveticker*, 30.03.2026, 13:50]. This means the cartel was discussing euthanasia logistics on 30–31 March, two days before the 1 April press conference at which it would publicly declare euthanasia categorically ruled out.

E. 1 April 2026: the abandonment press conference

On 1 April 2026, the active rescue effort was officially declared over at a press conference attended by the cartel actors and Minister Backhaus. The press conference produced the framing that would define the case for the next four weeks.

Backhaus delivered the abandonment in religious terms: “He had his chance. We are approaching Easter. And I was raised Protestant. And you know what Easter is. It’s about being in God’s hands. And we also know what happened to Jesus. And I wish the whale peace and that it eventually passes away” [*Bild liveticker*, 01.04.2026, ~14:14]. He also told reporters: “The whale chose this fate” and “This is a unique tragedy. But it is one he chose for himself” [*Bild liveticker*, 01.04.2026]. The phrasing produced over 2,000 critical comments on the minister’s Instagram account, after which the ministry disabled the Instagram comment function [*Bild Wegen Wal Timmy*, 02.04.2026].

Burkard Baschek of DMM delivered what he apparently regarded as a compliment to the system: “I am not aware of any other case in which a minister has sought such close advice from scientists. For me, this is a blueprint” [*Screen Shot 2026-04-01 at 8.26.20 AM.png*].

He publicly thanked “the scientific staff of Greenpeace and Sea Shepherd for their good cooperation,” and Backhaus in turn “thanked the scientists” and said “they had worked together in a dialogue on equal terms” [*Screen Shot 2026-04-01 at 8.26.11 AM.png*; *Screen Shot 2026-04-01 at 8.27.12 AM.png*]. The ministry’s framing of the repeated strandings was that they were “considered by scientists to be a clear sign of a serious illness or significant impairment” [*Screen Shot 2026-04-01 at 11.03.58 AM.png*], which is the laundering pattern in real time: repeated strandings, which the cartel produced through an inadequate response that failed to escort the whale through the night or seal off danger zones, are then cited as evidence of underlying disease that justifies the decision to stop trying.

The whale, for his part, was vocalising on the day of his abandonment: a Bild reporter on site described “a short humming, almost groaning. Not loud, but definitely audible. Like the chugging of a locomotive,” and breathing approximately every four minutes [*Bild liveticker, 01.04.2026*].

F. 2 April 2026: criminal complaints

On 2 April 2026, criminal complaints were filed against Minister Backhaus, Greenpeace, and ITAW for animal cruelty under § 17 TierSchG and failure to render assistance under § 323c StGB [*Bild liveticker, 02.04.2026, 14:53*; *Bild Wegen Wal Timmy, 02.04.2026*]. Ministry spokesperson Claus Tantzen responded that “the ministry firmly rejects the accusations” and that it had “involved all available experts and examined all legally and technically feasible measures” [*Bild Wegen Wal Timmy, 02.04.2026*]. On the same day, Bild reporter Henning Schaffner, who had been on site continuously since the Niendorf stranding, reported: “He is blowing, he is moving, he is alive” [*Bild liveticker, 02.04.2026, 15:26*].

G. 3–6 April 2026: the BDMLR doctrine in writing; the propeller wound; the catamaran proposal

On approximately 5 April 2026, the British Divers Marine Life Rescue (BDMLR) sent its doctrinal email to a member of the German public, articulating in writing the cartel’s foundational position that “the stranding is a symptom of a serious, underlying problem” and closing with the sentence on which this entire brief’s critique turns: “if there were a solution, it would be applied, because we all want to save the animals that are healthy enough” [*BDMLR email to German citizen, ~05.04.2026*; *BDMLR.jpg, bdmr2.jpg, bdmr1.jpg*]. On 8 April, BDMLR published substantially the same text as a formal institutional statement on its website [*BDMLR website statement, 08.04.2026*].

During this period, Backhaus publicly attributed a “propeller wound” to the whale, telling reporters on 4 April that “the falling water level revealed further injuries to the whale that had not been visible before. These injuries could have been caused by a ship’s propeller” [*NDR, 06.04.2026*]. On 5 April he told Bild the whale’s lungs and liver were “probably compressed” [*Bild liveticker, 05.04.2026, 19:36*]. SNM notes the qualifiers carefully: “could have been caused,” “probably compressed.” These are speculative attributions presented to the public as if they were diagnoses.

A catamaran-based rescue was explored on 5–6 April: Backhaus told NDR that a catamaran available in Denmark could accommodate the twelve-tonne whale, and that straps 80 centimetres to 1 metre wide would be carefully lowered beneath the animal [NDR, 06.04.2026]. The Stern liveblog of 5 April quoted Backhaus as saying the wetting was “showing initial success” and producing “good data” [Stern catamaran liveblog, 05.04.2026, 15:37].

H. 7 April 2026: the IWC SEP letter, the one-hour assessment, and the press conference

Three operationally distinct things happened on 7 April 2026, and the sequence matters because the three were presented to the public as components of a single scientific process when they were in fact three separate institutional acts with different authors, different evidentiary bases, and different purposes.

The IWC SEP letter. A letter dated 7 April 2026, on official IWC letterhead, addressed personally to Minister Backhaus, signed by Dr. Andrew Brownlow MRCVS as Chair of the IWC SEP [IWC SEP First Statement, 07.04.2026]. The letter endorsed the abandonment, characterised the whale’s survival chances as “negligible,” asserted that further rescue attempts would “only cause additional suffering,” claimed it was “medically impossible” to remove nets from the “digestive tract” (an anatomically irrelevant claim, since baleen whales do not swallow rope into the gut), and refused diagnostic sampling on welfare grounds while simultaneously using the absence of diagnostic data to support a terminal prognosis. The core structural problem is that the panel’s European representative, Ursula Siebert, is the director of ITAW, the institute whose team’s assessment the letter was validating.

The one-hour “comprehensive evaluation.” Between approximately 12:30 and 13:30 on 7 April, two divers entered the water and visually inspected the whale at close range for approximately one hour [Bild liveticker, 07.04.2026, 18:27, 18:43]. The Bild liveticker describes them “circling the animal at close range, observing its back protruding from the water, and repeatedly diving under to get a closer look.” By 13:30 the team was back on land and an expert report was being prepared for a 16:00 public announcement. No blood was drawn, no biopsy was taken, no ultrasound was performed, no urinalysis was conducted, no microbiology or virology was run, and no instruments are named in any contemporaneous source SNM has reviewed. The full methodological critique is in the companion document, the Contra Gutachten. The short version: the procedure that was described to the public as a comprehensive scientific assessment was a one-hour visual inspection followed by a two-and-a-half-hour write-up, and it produced a terminal prognosis on the basis of evidence that would not meet the diagnostic standard of a village veterinary practice.

The press conference. At 16:00, the press conference was held at the Kurhaus Kirchdorf Poel. The ministry’s press invitation, captured as an image, was titled “Kernbotschaften des Gutachtens zum *sterbenden* Wal werden vorgestellt” (“Key messages of the assessment of the *dying* whale will be presented”) [press release_661783327 image]. The whale was described as dying in the press invitation issued before the assessment was presented to the public: the conclusion was loaded into the announcement. At the press conference, ITAW’s Stephanie Groß stated: “this animal is not fit for transport. If the whale were lifted to a

height for a rescue attempt, its skin would peel off. We have to assume that the animal would even die from the stress. It is also likely that the whale already has organ damage” [*Bild liveticker, 07.04.2026, 18:27–18:45*]. SNM notes that every one of these statements is either a prediction about a counterfactual (“skin would peel off,” “would die from the stress”) or an explicitly hedged inference (“likely” organ damage), and that none of them is a clinical finding in any sense the published veterinary literature would recognise.

I. The self-refuting Gutachten

The Gutachten produced from the 7 April assessment contains a mathematical self-contradiction that its own authors either did not notice or chose not to address. On page 2, the authors record that the water depth at the stranding site at 12:40 on 7 April was 1.40 metres ($\pm 0.05\text{m}$). On the next page, the same authors state that based on previous self-refloats near Wismar, the whale required a water depth of approximately 1.90 to 2.00 metres to free himself, and that the BSH water-level forecast for the following three days predicted only 0.05 to 0.15 metres of additional rise [*DMM/ITAW Gutachten, 07.04.2026, pp. 2–3*]. Their own measurements therefore demonstrate a shortfall of approximately 0.50 to 0.60 metres that would not be closed by the predicted tide, which means their own document proves that self-rescue was physically impossible at this location. Yet the ministry and the cartel subsequently spent weeks demanding self-rescue as the precondition for any intervention, a condition their own Gutachten had already proven could not be met.

The full clinical and methodological rebuttal of the Gutachten is presented in the companion document, the Contra Gutachten. Two possibilities account for the arithmetic contradiction, and SNM names them directly without claiming to know which applies. The first is that the authors did not read their own measurements closely enough to notice the discrepancy, which would mean the senior authors of a government-commissioned expert report are not professionally competent to author a clinical assessment that turns on water-level arithmetic. The second is that the authors read their measurements, understood the arithmetic, and allowed the public framing to continue demanding self-rescue from an animal they knew could not self-rescue, because the unmeetable condition served the institutional purpose of maintaining inaction while appearing to leave open the possibility of action.

J. 8 April 2026: press release 100/2026; the dismissed emergency injunctions; necropsy preparation

On 8 April, the MV Ministry issued press release no. 100/2026, “Walschutzorganisation unterstützt Vorgehen des Landes im Umgang mit gestrandetem Wal” (“Whale conservation organisation supports the state’s approach in dealing with stranded whale”), which confirmed: (a) the abandonment decision was made by Backhaus on the basis of a scientific assessment; (b) the decision was also based on a letter from the IWC, which was appended; (c) “no serious expert in the world recommended a different approach”; (d) the Verwaltungsgericht Schwerin had already dismissed three citizen-initiated emergency injunctions against the ministry; and (e) the watering was being continued and the exclusion zone maintained [*MV PM 100/2026, 08.04.2026*]. The claim that “no serious expert in the

world recommended a different approach” is the ministry’s version of the BDMLR sentence (“if there were a solution, it would be applied”): it assumes that the cartel’s collective negative result is comprehensive, and it discredits by exclusion anyone who disagrees, since disagreement with the cartel’s conclusion is, by definition, evidence that the disagreeing expert is not serious.

On the same day, a News5 Facebook post showed the outdoor necropsy site being prepared in Stralsund at the Deutsches Meeresmuseum/Nautineum, with the headline “Tier zu riesig für Halle – Hope soll unter freiem Himmel sezirt werden” (“Animal too large for the hall – Hope is to be dissected outdoors”) [*News5 Facebook, necropsy preparation Stralsund, 08.04.2026*]. The necropsy site was being prepared while the animal was alive, still breathing, still vocalising, and still moving. SNM does not suggest that necropsy preparation is inherently improper for an animal whose death is expected, but the timeline is significant: on Day 3 of the Poel stranding (the whale had been at this specific site since approximately 31 March), the Deutsches Meeresmuseum was already preparing the postmortem facility. The direction was set. Everything that followed, from the Gutachten to the IWC SEP letter to the press release, was managed to produce the outcome that had already been decided.

K. 10–11 April 2026: the impossible verse and the playback of distress calls

Between 10 and 11 April 2026, Minister Backhaus made a sequence of public statements that converted the ministry's position from administrative inaction into a closed framework in which no outcome could trigger rescue. The framework had two elements: a behavioural precondition that was biologically unmeetable, and an acoustic intervention that constituted, in SNM's professional assessment, a welfare violation performed on a trapped animal that could not escape it. Eventually, it was communicated that the animal will be “let go in peace”. [*MV PM 105/2026*].

The impossible verse

On 11 April 2026, at the press conference accompanying the publication of the Gutachten, Minister Backhaus stated that the whale would need to demonstrate “clear signs of activity and truly recovered and regenerated” before further measures could be considered. He then specified what this meant in practice:

“Timmy needs to move his pectoral fins and tail rhythmically and regularly, and not just once. But most importantly: Timmy needs to sing. So far, he's only shown very faint fragments of singing, not a single verse. A verse is when whales sing for at least two minutes.” [*Bild liveticker, 11.04.2026*]

The Minister's precondition for rescue was that the animal produce a complete two-minute verse of humpback song. This precondition was biologically impossible on two separate grounds, each independently disqualifying, and the ministry either did not know this or did not care.

First, the whale was a juvenile. Humpback song, the long-form, phrase-and-theme reproductive display vocalisation first characterised by Payne and McVay in *Science* (1971) —

is produced exclusively by sexually mature males. It is a breeding-season display serving mate attraction and male-male competition functions. Juveniles do not produce full song. They produce social sounds, feeding calls, and occasional fragments, but not the sustained two-minute verse structure the Minister demanded. Requiring a juvenile humpback to produce a breeding-season adult male vocalisation as a precondition for rescue is equivalent to requiring a child to recite a long poem before receiving emergency medical treatment. The condition is structurally unmeetable because the subject is developmentally incapable of meeting it.

Second (and this was not known at the time but is now confirmed) the whale was female. On 16 May 2026, when the dead whale was identified off Anholt, Denmark, the sex was confirmed: she was female, not male as assumed throughout the stranding [*Bild liveticker, 14–16.05.2026; TV2 Østjylland, 14–15.05.2026*]. Female humpback whales do not produce song. The entire peer-reviewed bioacoustics literature on humpback song — [*Payne and McVay 1971, Winn and Winn 1978, Cerchio et al. 2001, Noad et al. 2000*] — establishes song as a male-only behaviour. The Minister demanded a performance that was not merely difficult, not merely unlikely, but categorically impossible for the animal in question. She could not have produced a two-minute verse under any conditions, in any location, at any stage of health or recovery, because female humpback whales do not sing.

The function of an unmeetable precondition in a captured bureaucratic environment is to create the appearance of an open pathway to action while guaranteeing that the action will never have to be taken. The ministry could truthfully say it had not ruled out rescue, that rescue remained available if the animal demonstrated readiness, and that the animal had failed to meet the criteria — while the criteria had been set in a way that no animal in her situation could ever satisfy. The Gutachten's own water-depth measurements, reproduced in the Contra Gutachten, had already established that self-rescue required 1.9–2.0 metres and only 1.4 metres was available. The "sing a verse" demand added a second impossibility on top of the first.

The playback of her own distress calls

On 10 April 2026, in his interview at the exclusion zone, Backhaus announced that the ministry would play the whale's own recorded vocalisations back to her through underwater speakers as a "minimally invasive" attempt to elicit the missing song verse. His words:

"Together with him, with Hope, hope dies last, he sang last night. That is a signal that he is sending, to make an attempt. It is a single attempt that we want to make: to see how he reacts when we play the sounds that he himself sang back into the water." [*Backhaus, 10 April 2026 interview, video record; Bild liveticker, 11.04.2026*]

Every vocalisation recorded from this animal was produced during stranding, entanglement, physical trapping, and continuous stress. The recordings were, by definition, acute distress vocalisations. Playing an animal's own distress calls back to her at close range while she is trapped in 1.4 metres of water, embedded in sediment up to the base of her pectoral flipper, and physically unable to move away from the sound source, is not a "minimally invasive" intervention. It is involuntary acoustic exposure of a confined animal to her own stress

signals, the acoustic equivalent of replaying the sounds of a trauma to a patient who cannot leave the room.

The two elements operated together as a closed system. The impossible verse established that rescue could only proceed if the whale performed a behaviour she was biologically and physically incapable of performing. The playback established that the ministry was nonetheless "trying something," so that the charge of pure inaction could be deflected. If she died, the failure to sing vindicated the prognosis. If she somehow survived, the ministry could claim credit for the attempt. There was no outcome within this framework that would have obligated the ministry to do anything different from what it had already decided to do, which was nothing.

Part IX. The International Validation Machinery

This part groups together the international documents that gave the German abandonment decision its appearance of independent scientific endorsement: the IWC SEP letters to Minister Backhaus, the Kate Wilson reply to a member of the German public, the BDMLR private email and public website statement, and the IFAW endorsement. These documents are analysed here as four facets of the same institutional voice, addressed to four different audiences (the minister, the constituent, the concerned citizen, the general public), in the same week, on the same case. Together they demonstrate how the cartel’s doctrine is communicated upward to political power and downward to the public, and how the closed loop identified in Part IV produces a uniform international consensus that the ministry then cites as independent validation.

A. The IWC SEP first statement to Backhaus (7 April 2026): main findings

The letter, on official IWC letterhead, dated 7 April 2026, addressed personally to Minister Backhaus, and signed by Dr. Andrew Brownlow MRCVS as Chair of the IWC SEP [*IWC SEP First Statement, 07.04.2026*], makes four substantive moves. First, it frames the German response as “extensive efforts,” a characterisation that the operational record does not support: the cartel executed one large-scale physical refloat (the Niendorf dredger) and one escort (called off at darkness), while the whale self-refloated twice without operational support. Second, it asserts that the whale’s survival chances are “negligible,” a doctrinal claim presented as a clinical finding, supported by a list of stranding-induced harms (pressure injuries, breathing difficulties, circulatory stress) that are reframed as evidence of the animal’s underlying decline rather than as consequences of the response’s inadequacy. Third, it contains the anatomically false claim that it is “medically impossible to remove any remaining nets and ropes from the digestive tract,” when baleen whales do not swallow rope into the gut and when lay responders had repeatedly demonstrated the physical ability to cut externally entangled rope from the live animal in the weeks preceding the letter. Fourth, it refuses diagnostic sampling on welfare grounds while using the absence of diagnostic data to support a terminal prognosis, a circular argument in which the procedures that could verify or falsify the diagnosis are declined, and the unverified diagnosis is then used to justify the decision.

The letter closes by commending the “palliative care” being provided and praising “all agencies and individuals involved.” The international peer-review panel is praising the operational team of which its own European representative is the lead, meaning that the cartel is praising itself.

B. The Kate Wilson email to the public: the same doctrine in a reassuring register

Kate Wilson, Media and Communications Manager of the IWC, replied to a member of the German public who had written to the IWC objecting to the abandonment [*Kate Wilson IWC email to a member of the German public*]. The email uses the same opening line as the

Brownlow letter (“The outcome everyone hopes for when a whale strands is a successful return to safe waters”), repeats the “extensive efforts” framing, inflates the operational record by describing “four attempts” (treating passive observation phases as if they were active rescue), and presents the IWC SEP as “global leaders in live stranding of large and small whale species, who have produced best practice protocols and provide training and advice to response teams all over the world.” The description is the closed network describing itself as the global authority. The email’s final substantive section explains that euthanasia is sometimes the best welfare option but that for large whales it is often impossible due to size, in which case “the animal’s welfare is best” served by leaving it alone.

C. The BDMLR email and website statement: the doctrine in writing

The BDMLR private email of approximately 5 April 2026 and the BDMLR public website statement of 8 April 2026 are one the clearest written expression of the cartel’s doctrine available [*BDMLR email, ~05.04.2026: BDMLR.jpg, bdmr2.jpg, bdmld1.jpg; BDMLR website statement, 08.04.2026*]. The email, sent to a German member of the public, articulates the three doctrinal pillars analysed in Part IV (stranding as symptom of underlying disease, rescue of large whales not feasible, palliative care as the only humane option) and confirms in writing that the German cartel actors were in coordination with the IWC Strandings Coordinator and “other organisations.” The website statement, published one day after the IWC SEP letter and on the same day as the ministry’s press release 100/2026, reproduces the email’s doctrine almost word for word on BDMLR’s institutional platform.

The BDMLR documents contain two admissions of particular significance. The first is the equipment confession: BDMLR’s own pontoon equipment can lift up to two tonnes, was designed for medium-sized cetaceans, and does not work for a 12-tonne humpback. SNM accepts this as a true statement about BDMLR’s specific equipment and rejects the inference that because BDMLR’s equipment is undersized, no method exists, since the Tasmania 2007 case used a different method on much larger animals [*Thalmann et al., Marine Mammal Science, 2008*]. The second is the closing sentence: “if there were a solution, it would be applied, because we all want to save the animals that are healthy enough.” This sentence assumes that the network’s collective negative result is conclusive and does not allow for the possibility that the network itself is the limiting factor. It is the sentence on which SNM’s entire critique of the cartel turns (see Part IV, Section C).

The website statement is qualitatively more important than the email because it is institutional rather than individual, public-facing and search-engine indexable rather than private, and dated and citable on a registered charity’s website [*BDMLR website statement, 08.04.2026*]. The doctrine that was being communicated privately to individual citizens on 5 April was published as the official BDMLR position on 8 April and so it is now on the record.

D. The IFAW endorsement (16 April 2026): deference without assessment

IFAW (International Fund for Animal Welfare) published a FAQ page on the stranding, on 16 April 2026, which endorsed the cartel’s position in full. The FAQ stated: “There was no need for additional rescue experts on site, as renowned scientific institutions – the German Oceanographic Museum and the Institute for Terrestrial and Aquatic Wildlife Research (ITAW) – were already involved.” It confirmed that “IFAW only becomes active in rescue operations upon invitation from the responsible authorities.” And it stated: “We share the assessment of the involved scientists that the whale’s health has deteriorated to such an extent that any further rescue attempts would carry a considerable risk of severe additional injuries” [IFAW FAQ, 16.04.2026]. IFAW is one of the largest marine mammal rescue organisations in the world. It did not send a team to Germany nor did it independently assess the animal. It did not examine the Gutachten’s methodology or note the absence of blood work, biopsy, ultrasound, or urinalysis from the assessment it was endorsing. IFAW deferred to the “renowned scientific institutions” that were already involved, institutions whose competence is the central question of this brief. IFAW’s statement is not evidence of the cartel’s correctness; it is evidence of the cartel’s reach.

E. What the four documents say together

The Brownlow letter, the Wilson email, the BDMLR documents, and the IFAW FAQ say the same thing in four voices. In the Brownlow letter the addressee is the German minister and the register is official. In the Wilson email the addressee is a member of the public and the register is reassuring-explanatory. In the BDMLR documents the register is technical-doctinal. In the IFAW FAQ the register is institutional-deferential. All four share the same framing: stranding as symptom of underlying disease, euthanasia as impossible for large whales, palliative care as the humane default, any criticism as a misunderstanding of how difficult these decisions are, and the international network as a source of authority and consensus rather than as a closed loop. Read together, the four documents are the cartel doctrine distributed simultaneously to four different audiences, in the same week, on the same case. This is what makes the cartel a cartel in the descriptive sense: the same line, the same language, the same framing, the same conclusions, and no independent voice anywhere in the distribution chain.

F. The IWC SEP second statement (22 April 2026): exploiting the failed herding

On 22 April 2026, two days after the whale’s self-refloat and a failed herding attempt that led to his re-stranding (documented in Part XI), the IWC SEP issued a second signed statement addressed to Minister Backhaus. The statement cited the re-stranding as confirmation of the original assessment: “Subsequent events have confirmed that repeated intervention has not resulted in sustained recovery” [IWC SEP Second Statement, 22.04.2026]. The panel called for observations to stop and recommended palliative care.

What the IWC SEP did not note in this second statement is revealing. It did not note that the whale had self-refloated under his own power on 20 April, which is the strongest possible evidence that the original assessment of “negligible” survival chances was wrong, since an animal with negligible survival chances does not generate the strength, coordination, and sustained muscular effort required to lift 12 tonnes of body mass off a sandbank. It did not note that the re-stranding was a consequence of the herding method employed, not of the animal’s incapacity. It did not distinguish between a herding attempt that failed because of how it was conducted and a herding attempt that failed because the animal was too debilitated to respond, which are entirely different things with entirely different implications for prognosis. The IWC SEP used the consequences of the rescue initiative’s operational limitations to validate its own prediction, and this is the mechanism SNM identifies as the most structurally important in the entire case: the cartel declares rescue impossible, the ministry blocks qualified rescue while tolerating an under-resourced private attempt, the attempt fails, and the cartel cites the failure as vindication. At no point is the cartel’s original assessment tested against the published comparator literature or the animal’s own observable behaviour.

G. The IWC SEP third and fourth statements (28 April and 2 May 2026)

The IWC SEP issued a third statement on 28 April 2026, the day the whale was loaded into the barge, and a fourth on 2 May 2026, the day of the release into the Skagerrak [*IWC SEP Third Statement, 28.04.2026, iwc.int*; *IWC SEP Fourth Statement, 02.05.2026, iwc.int*]. Each successive statement reaffirmed the original assessment regardless of the accumulating contradictory evidence from the live animal. By the time of the fourth statement, the whale had self-refloated, swum 110 metres into a barge under his own power, survived a multi-day transit through the Baltic, vocalized audibly during transport, shown improving skin condition as the salinity rose, and been released alive into the Skagerrak. The fourth statement nevertheless maintained the panel’s position, framing the release as “the beginning of any recovery process, not its conclusion” and regretting that its offer to source a satellite tag had not been taken up.

The fourth statement’s full text, captured from the IWC website on 9 May 2026, also notes that “the intense public attention on this single animal is understandable, but it is one of many whales to be compromised by entanglement in fishing gear, the leading cause of large whale mortality worldwide” [*IWC SEP Fourth Statement, 02.05.2026, iwc.int*]. This is the pivot to abstraction that institutional bodies make when the specific case has not gone as predicted: the individual animal whose fate the panel had pronounced upon is subsumed into a statistical category (entanglement mortality worldwide), redirecting attention from the panel’s specific predictions about this specific animal to a general policy concern on which the panel’s authority is unchallenged.

H. The pattern across four statements

Taken together, the four IWC SEP statements trace a trajectory of escalating institutional commitment to a position that the animal’s own behaviour was progressively undermining.

The first statement (7 April) declares survival chances “negligible.” The second (22 April) cites the failed herding as vindication, ignoring the self-refloat that preceded it. The third (28 April) maintains the position as the whale swims into a barge under his own power. The fourth (2 May) acknowledges the intervention while maintaining the framing that the whale is still probably going to die. At no point across four statements and twenty-five days does the panel revise its original assessment in light of the accumulating evidence that the assessment was wrong. At no point does the panel note the self-refloat, the replacement veterinarian’s “surprisingly good” assessment, the whale’s vocalizing during transit, or the improving skin condition.

I. The IWC’s institutional overreach: from whale hunting to whale dying

Before leaving the IWC SEP’s role in this case, a more fundamental question needs to be asked, one that the four statements and the institutional letterhead they were printed on tend to obscure: what is the International Whaling Commission doing in the stranding-response business at all?

The IWC was established in 1946 under the International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling, and its founding purpose was, and remains, the regulation of commercial and aboriginal subsistence whaling [*International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling, 1946; IWC website, 'About the Commission'*]. That purpose is not historical since the whale hunt is not over. Japan withdrew from the IWC in 2019 and resumed commercial whaling in its territorial waters and exclusive economic zone. Norway continues commercial whaling under its objection to the 1986 moratorium. Iceland has periodically resumed fin whale hunting. Aboriginal subsistence whaling continues in the United States (Alaska), Russia (Chukotka), Greenland (Denmark), and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines under IWC-granted quotas [*IWC Commercial Whaling page, 2026*]. The threat the IWC was created to address, the killing of whales by humans, is live and ongoing, and the IWC’s own website acknowledges that regulating this threat is its core mandate.

The IWC’s expansion into stranding response came through the establishment of the Strandings Expert Panel, which operates under the IWC’s Scientific Committee. The panel’s stated role is advisory: it provides “best practice protocols” and “training and advice to response teams all over the world,” as Kate Wilson described it in her email to a member of the German public [*Kate Wilson IWC email to a member of the German public*]. But the German case demonstrates that the panel’s role has expanded well beyond advice into something that functions, in practice, as international institutional validation of national abandonment decisions. The panel did not merely advise; it issued four signed statements on official letterhead addressed to a sitting government minister, each of which carried the institutional weight of the International Whaling Commission and each of which was cited by the ministry as the basis for its decision. The panel was not advising; it was underwriting.

The question SNM raises is not whether the IWC SEP’s members are qualified cetacean scientists, because many of them clearly are, but whether the IWC as an institution has any business inserting itself into individual stranding-response decisions in sovereign jurisdictions when the threat the institution was created to address remains unresolved. The

IWC has not ended commercial whaling and it has not prevented Japan’s withdrawal. It has not closed the Norwegian or Icelandic hunts, nor it has resolved the ongoing tensions around aboriginal subsistence quotas. These are the problems the IWC exists to solve, and they remain unsolved. Meanwhile, the IWC’s Strandings Expert Panel is writing letters to German ministers advising them to let individual whales die, and those letters are being used as the procedural basis for abandonment decisions that the published operational literature does not support.

The institutional incentive is not difficult to identify. Stranding response is a domain in which the IWC can exercise visible authority without confronting the politically intractable problem of whale hunting. Writing a letter to a German minister about a stranded humpback is easier than confronting Japan about commercial minke whale catches in the Pacific, and it generates the same institutional output: a document on letterhead, signed by a Chair, carrying the authority of the International Whaling Commission. While the output looks the same, the difficulty is entirely different. The IWC’s expansion into stranding response allows the institution to remain visibly active and relevant in a domain where the political costs are low, while the domain where the political costs are high, the domain the IWC was created for, continues to resist resolution.

There is also a deeper problem with the IWC’s involvement in stranding response that goes beyond institutional mandate. The IWC’s historical and ongoing focus is on whale populations, not on individual whale welfare. The IWC’s Scientific Committee thinks in terms of stock assessments, population dynamics, catch limits, and species-level conservation status. This population-level framing is visible in the fourth statement’s pivot from the individual whale to the general problem of entanglement mortality worldwide: “the intense public attention on this single animal is understandable, but it is one of many whales to be compromised by entanglement in fishing gear, the leading cause of large whale mortality worldwide” [*IWC SEP Fourth Statement, 02.05.2026, iwc.int*]. The sentence is true at the population level, but it is a non sequitur at the individual level, because the question before the panel was not whether entanglement kills many whales worldwide but whether this specific whale could be saved. The IWC’s institutional DNA is population biology, and population biology does not naturally produce an ethic of individual rescue, because from a population perspective a single juvenile humpback is statistically insignificant. The panel’s willingness to recommend abandonment may reflect not only the cartel’s doctrine but also the IWC’s deeper institutional orientation, which is accustomed to thinking about whales as populations to be managed rather than as individuals to be saved.

Furthermore, the IWC has never rescued a whale. It has no operational rescue capacity, no rescue equipment, no rescue teams, no rescue protocols that it has tested in the field, and no institutional track record of saving the life of any individual cetacean. What it has is letterhead, and in this case it lent that letterhead to a closed network of stranding-response organisations whose doctrine on large whale strandings is not supported by the published evidence. The IWC’s contribution to the German humpback case was four letters advising a minister to let a whale die. The whale was rescued by people who ignored the letters. The IWC should return its institutional focus to the threat it was created to address, which is the deliberate killing of whales by humans, a threat that unlike the German humpback stranding

remains very much unresolved, and leave individual stranding-response decisions to the operational professionals on the ground and to the published successful rescues literature, neither of which played any role in the panel’s four statements.

Part X. The Successful Rescues the Cartel Never Mentioned

The cartel’s doctrine requires that successful rescues of large stranded whales either do not exist or are not relevant to the case at hand. They exist, they are relevant, and not a single cartel statement, IWC SEP letter, BDMLR email, IFAW FAQ, Madsen interview, Stockin article, or Ritter commentary cited any of them. This part presents some the published cases (and there are more) that the cartel’s entire public-facing output on the German humpback systematically omitted.

A. Humphrey the Humpback (San Francisco Bay, 1985 and 1990)

In October 1985, an adult humpback whale entered San Francisco Bay and swam approximately 70 miles upriver into the Sacramento River Delta, reaching the town of Rio Vista. The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), the institutional equivalent of ITAW in the American system, initially opposed active intervention, a posture that will be familiar to readers of this brief [*Krause, first-person diary; NMFS operational record, 1985*]. A coalition of outsiders, including marine biologist Louis Herman of the University of Hawaii, developed and executed a plan to lure the whale back to the ocean using underwater playback of humpback social and feeding calls. The acoustic lure moved Humphrey approximately 50 miles in seven hours, and the whale exited the bay under his own power. Humphrey returned to San Francisco Bay in 1990, beached at a mudflat near Candlestick Park, was refloated by rescue teams, and swam back to the Pacific. He was subsequently resighted alive and healthy in the years following both incidents.

The Humphrey case is relevant to the German case for two reasons. First, it demonstrates that a large humpback whale deep inside an enclosed body of water can be guided back to the open sea using non-invasive acoustic methods, a technique that was never attempted in the German case despite the whale’s documented responsiveness to sound (she was vocalising loud enough to be heard from shore). Second, the institutional dynamics mirror the German case almost exactly: the established stranding-response authority (NMFS) resisted intervention, outsiders with operational ideas were initially blocked, and the whale was ultimately rescued by people working around the institutional system rather than through it.

B. Delta and Dawn (Sacramento River Delta, 2007)

In May 2007, two humpback whales, a mother and calf subsequently named Delta and Dawn, entered the Sacramento River and spent approximately 20 days in fresh water, sustaining visible skin damage from the low-salinity environment that closely parallels the skin damage documented in the German case. The rescue effort, led by Dr. Frances Gulland of the Marine Mammal Center (now at UC Davis), included the first documented antibiotic darting of free-ranging humpback whales: the whales were darted with antibiotics from a boat using a modified dart gun, a technique that demonstrated it was possible to medicate a large free-swimming whale without physical restraint [*Gulland et al. 2008*]. The whales

eventually self-navigated back to the ocean after 20 days in fresh water, and the freshwater skin damage reversed within approximately 24 hours of the animals’ return to salt water.

The Delta and Dawn case is relevant to the German case in three ways. First, the freshwater skin damage that the German cartel cited as evidence of terminal decline is the same kind of damage that reversed spontaneously once the Sacramento River whales returned to salt water, which is precisely what the German whale’s improving skin condition during the barge transit through increasingly saline waters demonstrated. Second, the antibiotic darting that Gulland pioneered is exactly the kind of pharmacological intervention that the German ministry prohibited on “animal welfare grounds,” a prohibition that the published literature from this case directly contradicts. Third, the case demonstrates that humpback whales can survive weeks in physiologically hostile fresh water and recover fully, undermining the cartel’s claim that the German whale’s extended time in low-salinity Baltic water constituted irreversible physiological decline.

C. Tasmania 2007 sperm whale refloat

In 2007, a group of sperm whales stranded on the coast of Tasmania and were refloated alive using a net-tow method after 96 hours of stranding. The animals weighed in excess of 30 tonnes each, more than twice the estimated weight of the German humpback. The rescue was published in *Marine Mammal Science* by [Thalmann, Gales, Greenwood, Gedamke (2008)]. Senior author Sam Thalmann confirmed in writing on 10 April 2026, in response to a direct inquiry from a German citizen, that the net-tow method is “fundamentally suitable” for cases such as the German humpback [Thalmann, written communication to the German citizen, 10.04.2026]. Yet the Tasmania 2007 paper is not cited in any IWC SEP statement on the German case. It is not cited in the Gutachten. It is not cited in the BDMLR email or website statement. It is not cited in any media article that covered the German case.

D. NOAA NY4236 (East Hampton, New York, 2010)

The NY4236 case, the closest published comparator to the German whale (a juvenile humpback of similar age class, stranded in coastal waters), is analysed in full in Part V of this brief. The rescue attempt in that case did not succeed and the animal was euthanized, but the comprehensive necropsy that followed is the primary evidence against the doctrine that stranding is a symptom of serious underlying disease, since the necropsy found no underlying disease, no starvation, no biotoxins, no morbillivirus, and could not determine the cause of stranding [NOAA NY4236-10 case report, East Hampton, NY, 2010]. The NY4236 case is included in this list not as a successful rescue but as the published proof that the cartel’s foundational premise does not hold even in the best-documented case in the literature.

E. Rance Estuary, France (2023, published Olhasque et al. 2025)

In 2023, a juvenile humpback whale became trapped behind the tidal power station in the Rance Estuary in Brittany, France. A coordinated rescue operation involving French authorities and marine mammal professionals rescued the whale within approximately two

days using non-invasive methods. The case was published in 2025 by Olhasque et al. in the journal *Animals* [Olhasque et al. 2025]. The Rance estuary case is significant because it was published three months before the German stranding began, making it the most recent peer-reviewed account of a successful juvenile humpback rescue in European waters at the time the German cartel was declaring rescue impossible. The case is not cited in any cartel statement, any IWC SEP letter, the Gutachten, or any media article on the German case.

F. Tasmania 2020 Macquarie Harbour mass rescue and the NRE Cetacean Incident Manual

In September 2020, approximately 470 pilot whales stranded in Macquarie Harbour, Tasmania, in what became the largest documented cetacean stranding event in Australian history. Over the following week, rescue teams refloated 114 animals alive, the largest documented cetacean rescue operation on record. The experience from this event and from decades of prior Tasmanian stranding response was subsequently codified in the NRE Tasmania 2022 Cetacean Incident Manual, the most comprehensive published rescue manual in the world, covering triage, refloating, herding, transport, release, and post-release monitoring for cetaceans of all size classes [NRE Tasmania 2022]. The Gutachten does not cite it. The IWC SEP letters do not cite it. The BDMLR documents do not cite it. The BDMLR sentence “if there were a solution, it would be applied” was written as if this manual did not exist.

G. What these cases prove and what the cartel’s silence about them means

Taken together, these cases demonstrate that large whales can be rescued from strandings and from enclosed bodies of water, that freshwater skin damage reverses upon return to salt water, that entangled whales survive disentanglement, that stranded whales survive refloating even after days of stranding, that pharmacological intervention by dart is possible on free-swimming humpbacks, that acoustic luring can guide a humpback out of an enclosed waterway, and that comprehensive rescue manuals exist in the published literature. The cartel’s categorical claim that rescue of large stranded whales is not feasible is contradicted by the published record of the cartel’s own members.

The cartel’s silence about these cases in its public output on the German humpback is not an oversight. It is a structural feature of how the doctrine operates. The doctrine requires that the network’s collective negative result (“we have discussed rescue at our workshops and meetings and we have not found a solution”) be treated as comprehensive, and any published case that contradicts the negative result must either be excluded from the discussion or reframed as irrelevant to the case at hand. The Rance estuary paper was published months before the German stranding. The NRE Tasmania manual is the most detailed rescue protocol in the world. The Sacramento River case involved the very antibiotic darting technique that the German ministry prohibited. The Humphrey case involved the very acoustic luring technique that was never attempted on an animal who was audibly vocalising. These cases were not unknown to the cartel. They were known and not mentioned, because mentioning them would have required the cartel to explain why the methods documented in

its own published literature were not attempted, and the only honest answer to that question is that the cartel's doctrine had already determined the outcome before the methods were considered.

Part XI. The Ministry: Bureaucracy, Deference, and the Eventual Green Light

This part expands on the ministry’s role as documented in the earlier version of this brief.

A. The ministry as customer of the cartel’s product

The ministry had no independent scientific advisory capacity on cetacean medicine. When the whale stranded, the ministry had exactly one source of expert opinion: the cartel. The ministry commissioned the Gutachten from ITAW and DMM, received the IWC SEP letter, published both as the basis for press release 100/2026 [MV PM 100/2026, 08.04.2026], and stated that “no serious expert in the world recommended a different approach.” Within the information environment the ministry was operating in, this was arguably true, because the only experts the ministry had access to were the cartel. The problem is not that the ministry trusted its experts but that the experts constituted a closed loop (Part VI) whose doctrine was not tested against the published operational literature (Part X), whose assessment methodology fell below the published diagnostic standard (Parts VII and IX), and whose European representative on the international peer-review panel was the operational lead of the team being reviewed.

B. The prohibited interventions

Dr. Jenna Wallace revealed on 21 April that the ministry had prohibited all medication and injections, prohibited commercial lifting straps for “animal welfare reasons,” and required bureaucratic approval for every interaction with the animal [*Focus Online, Wallace interview, 21.04.2026; NDR, 21.04.2026*]. The ministry blocked the tools that the published literature identifies as essential while tolerating a rescue operation that had to improvise around those prohibitions. The motivation was not cruelty but institutional caution: the cartel’s assessment had classified the whale as biologically doomed, and every intervention had to be “as gentle as possible” even for an animal the experts had already declared dead in all but heartbeat. The irony is that by faithfully implementing the cartel’s recommendations, the ministry ensured that the rescue could only be conducted without the evidence-based tools that might have made it succeed faster and with less distress to the animal.

F. Credit where due

When the institutional options had been exhausted and the cartel offered nothing but palliative care, Minister Backhaus chose to let people try. He permitted the private rescue initiative to operate. He did not shut down the barge concept when it was proposed. He did not withdraw toleration after the failed herding attempt, even though the IWC SEP’s second statement explicitly called for all interventions to cease. He visited the whale personally, repeatedly, in a way that most ministers would not. The whale was alive because three things happened: the private initiative persevered, the whale proved more resilient than anyone expected, and the minister allowed the rescue to proceed rather than enforcing the cartel’s recommendation. If Backhaus had followed the IWC SEP’s advice after 22 April, the whale

would have died on the sandbank. Backhaus did not make that choice. He made the opposite choice, under pressure, under risk, and against the advice of his designated experts. That decision came too late and was hedged with too many restrictions, but it was made, and it mattered.

SNM's criticism of the ministry is therefore structural, not personal. The recommendations in Part XXV call for independent scientific advisory capacity, separation of veterinary oversight from the cartel's network, and pre-authorised protocols that specify evidence-based interventions in advance, so that the next minister is not dependent on the same closed loop that produced the outcome in this case.

Part XII. The Rescue Initiative: Good Intentions, Impossible Conditions, and the Chaos of Rescue

This part documents the private rescue initiative from its announcement on 15 April 2026 through the barge loading on 28 April, the transit, and the contested release on 1–2 May 2026. The people involved were motivated by genuine concern for the animal, and their financial generosity and personal perseverance under extraordinary institutional and public pressure should be recognised. At the same time, this brief owes the reader an honest account of what actually happened, because the operational record includes improvised methods with no basis in the published literature, daily promises followed by daily failures, personnel whose qualifications for marine mammal rescue were limited or non-existent, and equipment mishaps that injured the animal the team was trying to save. Good intentions do not immunise an operation from critique, and the critique that follows is offered not to ridicule the individuals involved but to demonstrate that the approved rescue operation was structurally incapable of succeeding on its original terms, and that anyone with relevant expertise would have known this from the outset.

Section A: The Financiers and the Announcement (15 April 2026)

On 15 April 2026, Walter Gunz, a retired co-founder of the MediaMarkt retail group, and Karin Walter-Mommert, described in German media as the largest racehorse owner in the country, announced a privately financed rescue initiative. Their press release explicitly credited Stranded No More's expertise. Walter-Mommert and Gunz assumed the financial risk and the liability, which meant they were privately funding a rescue that the state had declared impossible, against the advice of every credentialed authority in the field. The "Duldung" (toleration) framework placed sole responsibility on the entrepreneurs while the ministry retained the right to prohibit specific interventions [*Walter-Mommert/Gunz press release, 15.04.2026; Bild liveticker, 15.04.2026*].

Section B: Personnel – List of Names

The following individuals were named in the contemporaneous coverage as participants in, affiliated with, or referenced by the private rescue initiative. No bios, qualifications, or descriptions are provided here; this is a simple name list.

Benefactors / Financiers: Walter Gunz; Karin Walter-Mommert.

Operational team / Coordinators (initial): Jens Schulz; Dirk Wippich; Klaus Kraft; Nadine Kraft; Marianne Hess; Veronika Bohnsack; Felix Bohnsack; Christiane Freifrau von Gregory; Sergio Bambarén; Danny Hilse ("Danny First Class"); Constanze von der Meden; Fred Babbel.

Veterinary personnel: Dr. Janine Bahr-van Gemmert; Dr. Jenna Wallace; Dr. Kirsten Tönnies; Dr. Anne Herrschaft.

Whale Sanctuary Project team (arrived 23 April): Jeffrey Foster; Michael Partica; Kyra Wadsworth; Charles Vinick (WSP CEO, facilitated); Pedro Baranda.

Vessel crew and other named individuals: Stefan (barge captain); Howie (first mate on the barge); Dan (diver); Lassie (diver); Mr. Schwarc (journalist covering release).

Section C: The Whale Sanctuary Project Joins (23 April 2026)

On 23 April 2026, the Whale Sanctuary Project's Whale Aid team (Jeffrey Foster, Michael Partica, and Kyra Wadsworth) arrived on site at Insel Poel, facilitated by WSP CEO Charles Vinick. The team was initially contacted for advice on how the stranded humpback could be refloated from sandbars and was invited by the organisers of the rescue effort to join.

Jeff Foster brought extensive experience: he managed day-to-day whale training and care during the Keiko Project (returning the captive whale of "Free Willy" fame to the ocean off Iceland); oversaw the rehabilitation of Springer, a young orca separated from her family off Vancouver; was responsible for the Born Free Foundation's Tom and Misha Project (reintroducing two bottlenose dolphins to the wild); contributed to Whale Aid Russia (the return of 10 orcas and 87 beluga whales to the ocean); and coordinated fieldwork for NOAA to help Scarlet, a young orca from the endangered Southern Resident population [*Whale Sanctuary Project, 'Whale Aid Team Assisting in Humpback Rescue,' whalesanctuaryproject.org, 27.04.2026*].

Section D: Detailed Timeline of the Rescue Initiative (13 April – 28 April 2026)

13 April 2026 (Day 14)

MV Ministry issues PM 109/2026. Backhaus claims "water is accumulating in the whale's lungs" and "organs are severely damaged," still based on the same expert team that declared the animal doomed in late March, still with no new diagnostic evidence. The press release attacks "wild conspiracy theories and misinformation," announces a compiled list of "legally false claims" to discourage criminal complaints, and inverts the Animal Welfare Act: intervention is "only permissible if it actually helps the animal," so rescue attempts "without prospect of success that cause additional suffering would be unlawful." Backhaus frames the endgame: "making its final journey as easy as possible" [*MV PM 106/2026, 13.04.2026*].

14 April 2026 (Day 15)

Bild publishes "Wal-Wahnsinn!" (Whale Madness), a long-form overview of the chaos. Describes Backhaus as "wechselhaft" (changeable/inconsistent): very engaged, almost daily at the whale, but swinging between rejecting rescue (citing experts) and dangling hope of a miracle. The article describes SNM as an "anonymous network" whose "scientific expertise is unknown." Greenpeace and Sea Shepherd are noted as having left the operation [*Bild, 'Wal-Wahnsinn!', archive.is/89gMA, 14.04.2026*].

15 April 2026 (Day 16)

Backhaus gives "green light" to the private rescue initiative, framed as "Duldung" (toleration). The state did not grant permission and could not grant such permission, as there is no legal basis for it. Sole responsibility is placed on the private financiers. The plan:

air cushions to lift the whale, pontoons to transport him to the North Sea, a tugboat to tow the pontoon structure around Denmark to the Atlantic. Rescue is promised to begin Thursday morning (16 April) at 06:00. Divers are scheduled to contact the whale and examine the seabed by 17:30. By 17:32, a Bild reporter on site confirms: "There hasn't been a single diver in the water today." DMM (Baschek) issues a statement saying they were not involved in the rescue preparations and "learned about it from the press conference." Federal President Steinmeier calls for an end to online hostility against "marine experts." Fans celebrate with champagne at the barrier fence. Vocalisation video from this date confirms the whale is still vocalising on Day 16 [*Bild liveticker, 15.04.2026; Walter-Mommert/Gunz press release, 15.04.2026*].

16 April 2026 (Day 17)

Rescue delayed. Air cushion setup still being prepared. Sergio Bambarén, a bestselling novelist, is named as the "whale expert" on the rescue team. US veterinarian and whale expert Jenna Wallace is flown in from Hawaii, but Backhaus himself tells Der Westen's reporter on camera that she does not have a veterinary licence in Europe and can only advise, not treat. The veterinary chamber is "examining whether approval can be granted for this case." Backhaus reiterates: "The sole responsibility lies with the entrepreneurs." Salvage divers finally arrive for a briefing at the port. No actual rescue operations begin on Day 17 [*Bild liveticker, 16.04.2026; Der Westen, 16.04.2026*].

17 April 2026 (Day 18)

The whale suddenly moves violently and spouts water, demonstrating continued vitality on Day 18. The animal becomes entangled in a broken sprinkler hose from the equipment being used to moisten its skin; it is freed but may have sustained a skin injury from the rescue team's own equipment. Cloths on the whale's back are revealed to be coated with zinc ointment. Salt water treatment is administered via watering cans and handfuls of salt thrown onto cloths. The pontoon approaches at "a snail's pace" but retreats when the whale moves. Fred Babbel announces a "pontoon cage" plan: a 6-by-12-metre enclosure around the whale. The tierschutzpartei_sh Instagram account posts an update from the team claiming injuries are "not life-threatening," health rated "unusually good," and that the team plans to examine the whale's mouth (directly contradicting SNM's mouth-opening rebuttal letter of 16 April). NDR reports that straps are now being considered. By evening, the plan shifts again: the whale will be shown the pontoon structure on Saturday so it can "familiarise itself with it." DLRG arrives with six boats [*Bild liveticker, 17.04.2026, multiple entries; tierschutzpartei_sh Instagram, rescue update, 17.04.2026; NDR, 17.04.2026*].

18 April 2026 (Day 19)

Pontoons prepared. The plan is for the whale to "see and familiarise itself with the structure" on Saturday. No rescue operation occurs on Day 19. World media now covering the story (BBC, ABC, CTV News, New York Post). Jens Schulz (rescue team spokesperson, verified Facebook) dismisses SNM's concerns about the pontoon cage plan: "That is without ifs and buts a professional team that I have great respect for. And we really do answer EVERY email.

Their problem is that they believe the garbage in the newspapers" [*Bild liveticker*, 17–18.04.2026 evening edition; Jens Schulz Facebook comment, 18.04.2026].

19 April 2026 – "Whale Sunday" (Day 20)

Walter Gunz: "Today it begins." The net with blue air cushions is shown to the whale so it can "get used to it." Bambarén is described as a "whale whisperer" who has "established a great connection" with the animal. Dredging takes longer than expected due to hard seabed. Water level predicted to rise by up to 70 cm, potentially allowing the whale to swim free, but the rescuers prefer to capture and transport it rather than herd it. "Plan B activated": DLRG boats on standby in case the whale swims off. Vet Janine Bahr-van Gemmert: "He wants to go outside, he wants to be free." Backhaus holds his own separate press conference, not attending the initiative's. Backhaus again: "The full responsibility lies in their hands." By 19:21, excavation work halted. The pontoon needs reconfiguration, which "would take several hours, and by then it will be night." The whale is not rescued on Whale Sunday. Greenpeace reportedly states that "Timmy would drown in the North Sea" [*Bild liveticker*, 19.04.2026].

20 April 2026 (Day 21) – The Self-Refloat

At approximately 07:05, after five consecutive days of the rescue team failing to move him, the whale frees himself from the sandbank and swims away under his own power. This is the single most important physiological event in the entire case. On Day 21, after three weeks of stranding, the animal that the Gutachten declared "not fit for transport" on Day 8 demonstrates the strength, coordination, and will to self-refloat and swim.

Plan B is activated. DLRG boats and jet skis attempt to herd the whale away from the harbour and toward the bay exit. The herding is not conducted according to any published protocol. Four jet skis are dispatched simultaneously. Sergio Bambarén goes into the water to "establish contact" and "calm him down." A water scooter is driven close enough for the whale to spray it with a water spout. The herding proceeds on a zigzag course. Shortly before reaching the bay exit, the whale re-strands on a new sandbank. The initiative reverts to Plan A (pontoons). The tugboat 'Robin Hood' positions itself to block the shipping channel to Wismar, but the whale does not swim. By evening, the water level is dropping rapidly.

Berlin-based whale researcher Fabian Ritter (IWC Scientific Committee member, 20 years; former head of marine conservation at WDC) opposes further rescue: "This whale does what he wants. He is uncontrollable, and we must finally accept that it is impossible for us to actively save this whale." Dr. Jenna Wallace leaves the rescue team and boards a flight back to Hawaii. In a statement to tag24.de, she reports "blatant errors" in the operation, including possibly leading the animal in the wrong direction [*Bild liveticker*, 20.04.2026, tag24.de, 20.04.2026].

21 April 2026 (Day 22) – The Wallace Revelations

This is the most consequential day in the documentary record. Three events occur that, taken together, constitute the smoking gun of this case.

First: Wallace goes public. In interviews with Focus Online, NDR, and social media, Dr. Jenna Wallace reveals three facts that had not previously been on the public record. (1) The Backhaus Ministry prohibited all medication and injections. The team was not permitted to administer any pharmacological treatment to the whale. (2) The Ministry did not allow even the slightest changes to the approved plan. When the team proposed transporting the whale using straps, the Ministry rejected it for "animal welfare reasons." (3) The team was required to contact the Ministry every time someone wanted to go out to see the whale, imposing a bureaucratic gate on every interaction with the animal. [*Focus Online, Wallace interview, 21.04.2026; NDR, 21.04.2026; News5 Live, 21.04.2026*].

Second: the straps are physically blocked. NDR reports at 13:44: 'Environmental Ministry: Straps forbidden' ('Umweltministerium: Gurte verboten'). According to NDR, the Ministry's official veterinarian prohibited the use of straps because they were 'too narrow and would cut in.' Wider straps were 'not currently available.' Separately, Bild reports and a photograph confirms that rescue helpers had physically brought blue straps to the whale on a DLRG boat. But because they have been prohibited, the straps were returned unused [*NDR liveticker, 'Gurte verboten,' 21.04.2026, 13:44; Bild, Schaffner, 20.04.2026*].

Third: Dr. Janine van Gemmert health scare. The lead veterinarian of the private rescue initiative is hospitalised and her condition is described as life-threatening. [*Bild liveticker, 21.04.2026; Focus Online, 'Leitende Tierärztin im Koma,' 22.04.2026*].

Other events on Day 22: An excavator with suction attachment is deployed to remove the sandbank around the whale. Backhaus announces a tracking device has been placed on the whale. Backhaus announces 2.5 kg of mackerel will be fed to the whale. Backhaus presents the 'Big Bag Theory' (sandbags to keep the whale out of shallow water). Dr. Kirsten Tönnies replaces Bahr-van Gemmert as lead veterinarian. At dusk, the rescuers leave Timmy alone for the night. [*Bild liveticker, 21.04.2026*].

22 April 2026 (Day 23) – The Cartel Closes Ranks

The IWC Stranding Expert Panel issues its second signed statement, addressed to Minister Backhaus, signed by Dr. Andrew Brownlow (Chair of the IWC SEP). The statement claims that 'subsequent events have confirmed' the Panel's original assessment of 7 April. It cites the repeated re-stranding as evidence that 'the animal was already severely compromised.' It declares that 'claims that this whale can now be successfully guided over long distances to safety are not supported by the repeated re-stranding events' and 'risk creating false hope.' It calls for observations to be stopped. It recommends 'calm, quiet, palliative care.' At no point does the statement acknowledge that the re-stranding on 20 April was caused by incompetent herding, not by the animal's incapacity. At no point does the statement acknowledge that the animal self-refloated under his own power.

Whale researcher Fabian Ritter: "Right now, I see an apathetic, tormented whale, stretching and writhing... I strongly advise against proceeding now." Rescue team on site: five people including Bambarén standing directly next to the whale. Team still clinging to pontoon plan, 'exact procedure still undecided.' Excavators continue removing sand [*IWC SEP Second Statement, 22.04.2026; Bild liveticker, 22.04.2026*].

23 April 2026 (Day 24) – The Barge Concept Announced

The rescue initiative announces a new plan: a floodable barge (Schute) instead of pontoons. A 20-to-50-metre steel cargo barge without its own engine, towed like a trailer, designed to be flooded so the whale is submerged but unable to escape. This is the third rescue concept in eight days. Backhaus announces a memorial for the whale. A bronze figure on Insel Poel, intended as 'a warning to the people.' He is planning the memorial while the animal is still alive.

Dr. Kirsten Tönnies (replacement veterinarian): 'Considering that the whale lay there for 3 weeks, it's surprising that his health is still so good.' Skin condition has improved. Klaus Kraft (Mecklenburg-Vorpommern animal rescue): 'At the moment, the whale is completely relaxed. He was offered some food today and opened his mouth a little. He can take in the food.' The replacement veterinarian's independent assessment directly contradicts the Gutachten's conclusion.

The Whale Sanctuary Project team (Foster, Partica, Wadsworth) arrives on site this day, facilitated by Charles Vinick [*Bild liveticker*, 23.04.2026; *Eilmeldung Deutschland*, 23.04.2026; *Whale Sanctuary Project*, 'Whale Aid Team Assisting in Humpback Rescue,' 27.04.2026].

24 April 2026 (Day 25)

Backhaus visits the whale again, wades into the water in a dry suit. 'Free Willy' crew on site. Dr. Tönnies repeats her assessment: health 'surprisingly good,' skin improved. Walter Gunz admits the team was not properly coordinated but intends to continue financing. Gunz: 'I hope that Timmy's rescue will finally begin on Sunday.' The barge plan is presented in detail: a 50-metre-long, 13-metre-wide vessel with a rear hatch; the whale is supposed to 'swim in, as if into an underwater aquarium'; if he does not swim in voluntarily, 'soft slings' will be used. A video surfaces showing water suddenly splashing near the whale, raising fears the animal was shot. Tönnies: 'We checked to see if we could find anything. We couldn't find any bullet holes' [*Bild liveticker*, 24.04.2026].

25 April 2026 (Day 26)

Water level very low, hampering preparations. Large sandbags (Big Bags) placed around the whale to prevent drifting into shallower water. A mini excavator is brought to the site to build the sandbag barrier. The barge is en route, currently near Hamburg, expected to arrive Sunday morning. Felix Bohnsack (technical director) describes the barge as 'the bigger brother of the older concept' and explains the whale will be pulled in backwards using a tarpaulin and net secured with ropes in a U-shape, winched into the water-filled steel basin by hydraulic hand winch. Bohnsack: 'Timmy has a reverse gear.' A second blood draw is attempted (the first was unsuccessful). Tönnies: 'Timmy seemed to be in good shape this afternoon. He appeared ready to leave.' The whale is alive on Day 26 [*Bild liveticker*, 25.04.2026].

26 April 2026 (Day 27)

The 'Free Willy' team administers a concentrated glucose and saline solution to the whale, poured directly into its mouth with a green watering can. An endoscope is inserted to check for injuries or foreign objects in the mouth; the attempt is unsuccessful. When gently grasped at the corners of the mouth, the whale opens it approximately 15 centimetres. No net remnants are visible inside. The channel through which the whale will later be guided into the barge is further widened. Backhaus: 'He seems to be preparing himself mentally and emotionally for departure' [*Bild liveticker*].

27 April 2026 (Day 28)

The 50-metre barge arrives in Wismar, undergoes minor renovations at the shipyard, and is moved to Poel Bay by evening. The rescue attempt is set for Tuesday 28 April at 07:00. At 14:45, Dr. Tönnies reports the whale's breathing has become shallow and its condition is deteriorating; she states it urgently needs to be moved off the sandbank. Thirty minutes later, after another visit, Tönnies reverses her assessment: the whale looks 'much better,' the experts are 'really happy.' DLRG announces it will depart on Wednesday regardless of outcome, creating an artificial deadline. Dr. Janine Bvan Gemmert is reported to have improved, though her condition remains serious. Ritter warns on Bild: 'There is a risk that the whale could panic. This is a dangerous undertaking.' The DMM issues its 27 April statement reaffirming palliative care only, warning that the metal barge would create 'very high noise levels' due to sound reflection, which could cause hearing damage to the whale [*Bild liveticker, 27.04.2026; DMM Statement, 27.04.2026*].

28 April 2026 (Day 29) – The Barge Loading

Backhaus gives the go-ahead in the morning. Helpers gather and prepare the harness: fire hoses, not the 30-centimetre commercial lifting straps specified by WHOI-2024-05. The fire hoses are threaded behind the pectoral fins and under the belly. Five people per side will pull manually.

At approximately 12:30, around 20 helpers attempt to turn the whale 180 degrees toward the channel. The first attempt fails. On the second attempt, the whale is turned. On the Bild live broadcast, Fabian Ritter comments: 'That looks creepy!' as a rescuer appears to climb onto the whale's back. At approximately 14:11, the barrier between the whale's hollow and the dredged channel is removed. Within minutes, the whale swims 110 metres into the barge under its own power. The helpers cheer. A green net, not a metal hatch, is lowered at the barge entrance to allow water flow and emergency escape. Whale rescuer Pedro Baranda from Mexico: 'From the beginning it was difficult, but not impossible. Today his journey home begins. It is a miracle.' By evening, the tugboat 'Robin Hood' takes over the barge at the mouth of the Kirchsee. The barge departs Poel Bay.

The IWC Stranding Expert Panel issues its third statement on the same day, declaring that 'active interventions, including refloat or translocation attempts such as towing or movement by barge, are inadvisable on grounds of both animal welfare and human safety' [*Bild liveticker, 28.04.2026; IWC SEP Third Statement, 28.04.2026, iwc.int*].

Section E: The Barge Transit (29 April – 1 May 2026)

During the multi-day transit through the Baltic, the Belt, and the Kattegat, the whale was tossed about in the barge during rough seas. According to a statement from JEB Bereederungs-gesellschaft (via lawyers Cronemeyer Haisch), the whale struck against the longitudinal bulkheads of the barge and sustained scratches. The German Oceanographic Museum noted that "the blubber layer on the head is extremely thin, so it cannot be assumed that the blubber absorbed the impacts" [*JEB statement via Cronemeyer Haisch, 16.05.2026; Cronemeyer Haisch law firm) on behalf of JEB Bereederungs-gesellschaft mbH & Co KG, "Presserechtlisches Informationsschreiben für die JEB Bereederungs-gesellschaft mbH & Co KG und deren Crew," 16.05.2026, Die Welt, DPA, 'Schwierige Bilanz,' 10.05.2026*].

The whale's skin condition improved with increasing salinity, and the whale sang audibly during transport, becoming increasingly active. Walter-Mommert told Bild: "He sings more melodically and powerfully. Overall, he's more lively, hovering and floating in his swimming pool" [*Bild liveticker, 29–30.04.2026*].

According to the crew, the barge was not approved for open ocean waters. The members of the initiative were aware from the beginning that transporting the whale far into the North Sea or even the Atlantic was out of the question [*JEB statement via Cronemeyer Haisch, 16.05.2026; Cronemeyer Haisch law firm) on behalf of JEB Bereederungs-gesellschaft mbH & Co KG, "Presserechtlisches Informationsschreiben für die JEB Bereederungs-gesellschaft mbH & Co KG und deren Crew," 16.05.2026*].

Section F: The Contested Release (1–2 May 2026)

Note: The circumstances of the release are disputed between the Whale Sanctuary Project team and the shipping company JEB Bereederungs-gesellschaft. SNM presents both accounts without adjudicating between them, as the factual record is insufficient to determine which is correct, and legal proceedings between the parties are reported to be pending.

F.1. Whale Sanctuary Project Account (Jeff Foster, 16 May 2026)

On 1 May, the WSP team (Foster, Partica, Wadsworth, Dr. Herrschaft) assessed the whale at approximately 10:00 AM and found multiple visible injuries consistent with overnight contact with the barge structure: lacerations on the anterior head from exposed bolts, abrasions near the blowhole from straps holding sandbags, a scrape approximately two feet long on the right fluke, and a significant abrasion approximately one metre by half a metre on the left lateral body. The team tagged the whale using a modified seal tag with a single pin, then expressed serious concern about the whale's ability to withstand another night in the barge. A release strategy was agreed that evening between Foster, the barge captain (Stefan), the captains of the Fortuna B and Robin Hood, and the first mate, with the Fortuna B captain designating Foster as responsible for overseeing the release. The captain left the whale unattended overnight despite strong objections from the WSP team. On 2 May, at approximately 6:30 AM, Foster learned the transfer process was already underway. He boarded the tugboat but was denied retrieval of the rest of the whale rescue team. Foster

states the tugboat captain attempted to confiscate his phone, was "insolent and contemptuous" of the whale's welfare, and refused to follow the agreed plan. Foster refused to participate in the release as conducted and stated multiple times that the procedure should be stopped. His requests were ignored. The whale was extracted from the barge by opposing forces — the Fortuna B pulling forward and the tugboat pulling in the opposite direction via lines attached to the fluke — significantly faster than the agreed controlled release [*Whale Sanctuary Project, 'Summary of Events Surrounding Release of Timmy the Whale,' whalesanctuaryproject.org, 16.05.2026*].

F.2. JEB Bereederungsgesellschaft Account (via lawyers Cronemeyer Haisch, 9 May and 16 May 2026)

JEB states that its role was limited to the transport of the barge and personnel. Three vessels were chartered: the Fortuna B (owned by a party other than JEB) served as accommodation and tugboat for the barge; the Arne Tiselius served as a dedicated accommodation vessel; and the Robin Hood served as an escort and "taxi" to transfer personnel from the Fortuna B to the barge. JEB states that no employees of JEB were ever on board the barge at any point, and that the release of the whale was "solely the responsibility of the private initiative," carried out by a third-party salvage team (Bergungsteam) commissioned by the initiative. JEB's crew's role was confined to the transport of barge and personnel during the rescue operation.

JEB's account of the original loading plan is noteworthy. The initiative's approved concept envisioned the whale being loaded into the barge backwards (rückwärts). However, the whale swam into the barge forward (vorwärts) of its own accord. JEB states that the initial relief within the initiative at this development was considerable, even though it simultaneously meant that the original release concept could no longer be implemented: "Whales cannot swim backwards. This was known to all involved."

The barge itself was designed for inland waterways (Binnengewässer), not open sea. A special exemption (Ausnahmegenehmigung) was obtained for the transit to the Skagerrak, with conditions limiting maximum wave height, wind strength, and speed. JEB states the initiative was aware of these limitations from the outset, and that a transport far into the North Sea or the Atlantic had been ruled out from the beginning because the barge was not approved for such waters.

Regarding the first release attempt on 1 May, JEB states that veterinarian Dr. Anne Herrschaft was present, examined the animal, and authorised the release. The barge was opened and measures were taken — on the instruction of the initiative, in the presence of veterinarians and experts — to release the whale. When the whale followed the moving barge forward, initiative members attempted to hold her in position using hoses (the same hoses used during the loading swim-in), while the Fortuna B slowly towed the barge away at minimum speed. The whale was supposed to free herself from the departing barge without following it forward. These measures were interrupted due to increasing swell, worsening weather conditions, and approaching darkness.

On the evening of 1 May, due to the unclear chain of command within the initiative and conflicting instructions, JEB's managing director requested that Walter-Mommert designate

a single final decision-maker. Walter-Mommert nominated Jeffrey Foster. A joint meeting then took place between Foster, the captains of the Fortuna B and Robin Hood, and the head of the salvage team. The decision was reached that the same measures should be continued the following morning, weather permitting, and that the Robin Hood would be used instead of the Fortuna B's escort boat due to the weather window. This decision was subsequently discussed by telephone with Dr. Herrschaft and with Walter-Mommert, both of whom gave their consent. JEB states that, contrary to public reporting, there was no objection to a renewed veterinary examination – it was simply unclear, given that the whale might free itself overnight, whether such an examination would even be necessary.

On 2 May at approximately 7:00 AM, JEB states the release was “implemented as planned and successfully; the whale was freed.” JEB confirms that Foster requested additional team members be transferred from the Arne Tiselius to the barge, but states the captains and the head of the salvage team refused because the weather-related safety conditions for transferring additional persons were not met, “especially since these individuals had no experience at sea.” JEB emphasises that every transfer between vessels at sea involves risk, and that the captain's safety decisions are binding: “This applies all the more in higher seas. Every transfer is a risk that must be assessed in advance by the captain on a case-by-case basis. His decisions and expertise are to be respected and followed without question.”

Regarding the phone confiscation allegation, JEB denies that any employee threatened to confiscate Foster's phone or throw it into the sea. JEB states: “At no point was Mr. Foster told by our client not to use his phone, to confiscate it, or even to throw it into the sea. Only during the transfer to the barge was he prohibited from filming with his mobile phone due to the rough seas, so that he could hold on with both hands. Safety first.” JEB adds that the Fortuna B captain was cooperative from the beginning, even offering Foster access to Starlink (satellite internet) for better-quality transmission, and that the News5 captain was asked via radio whether filming was permitted, to which News5 agreed.

Regarding Dr. Tönnies, JEB's supplementary statement of 16 May is detailed and sharp. JEB states that Tönnies's behaviour on board “severely disrupted the workflow” and was described by numerous participants as “highly stressful, confrontational, and not solution-oriented.” JEB states Tönnies repeatedly entered the bridge uninvited and disturbed the captain during his work, insisted on filming despite being asked to stop, and demanded access rights and constant consultations that the captain had no authority to grant. The captain eventually informed Tönnies, in a professional tone, of his maritime authority to confine passengers to their cabins if they persistently endanger the safe operation of the vessel. JEB characterises this as “a factual statement, not a threat.” JEB states it was the initiative itself that recalled Tönnies from further involvement with the whale. JEB further states that Tönnies's claim that a crew member said “Finally the livestock is gone, the main thing is the next project” was denied by both German-speaking crew members (the helmsman and the captain), who stated they never made such a remark. JEB states its crew are facing “massive personal attacks and hostility, including death threats” as a result of what it characterises as “undifferentiated, incomplete, and completely unjustified accusations” [*JEB statement via Cronemeyer Haisch, 09.05.2026 and 16.05.2026; Cronemeyer Haisch law firm*) on behalf of JEB *Bereederungsgesellschaft mbH & Co KG*,

"Presserechtliches Informationsschreiben für die JEB Bereederungsgesellschaft mbH & Co KG und deren Crew," 16.05.2026].

F.3. The Tail-Pulling Incident

A News5 aerial image documents the whale being pulled by lines attached to the tail during the release on 2 May. The Whale Sanctuary Project account confirms that lines were secured to the whale's fluke using a pike pole (a sharp hooked tool) and attached to the tugboat. The whale was then extracted from the barge by opposing forces — the Fortuna B pulling forward and the tugboat pulling in the opposite direction via lines attached to the fluke — significantly faster than the agreed controlled release.

In an interview with journalist Nikita Devidar, Jeff Foster described the plan he had agreed the evening before: "The plan was to hand-pull the animal out. So, the night before we came with a plan and then how we are going to implement it was to, again, tie a very soft tail line onto the tail (fluke), right at the peduncle, just in front of the tail itself where there is a very strong muscle there, and then hand-pull him out gradually. And how we do that is if the whale wants to move his tail over a little bit he can pull us right over if he need to. But we developed that trust so we can pull him backwards and then we gonna hand this line off to the Robin Hood, and then hand-pull him off the boat, not yank him off the boat."

SNM notes Foster's account for the record and observes that the distinction between "hand-pulling" and "yanking", while operationally meaningful to Foster, does not change the anatomical reality of the procedure. The published stranding-response literature is categorical on this point: the Tasmania 2022 Cetacean Incident Manual states "Under NO circumstances should any cetacean be towed by the tail stock," and the WHOI-2024-05 workshop report specifies that towing must be head-first at every phase without exception. These prohibitions are absolute. They do not distinguish between hand-pulling and mechanical pulling, between gentle and forceful pulling, or between short-distance and long-distance pulling. The prohibition exists because towing a whale by the tail risks injury to the caudal peduncle, the spinal column, and the fluke vasculature, regardless of the force applied or the intention behind it. Whether the procedure was conducted as Foster planned (a controlled hand-pull) or as Foster states it was actually conducted (a forceful extraction by opposing tugboat forces against his explicit objection) is a factual dispute that SNM cannot resolve from the available sources. What is not in dispute is that lines were attached to the whale's fluke and the whale was pulled backwards out of the barge. Under the published literature, this procedure should not have been performed at all [*Whale Sanctuary Project account; NRE Tasmania 2022; Sharp et al., WHOI-2024-05; Foster, interview with N. Devidar*].

F.4. The Barge Loading Plan Changes and Unanswered Questions

The evolution of the barge loading plan on a single day, 27 April 2026, the day before the loading attempt, warrants documentation. At 13:26 on 27 April, the Bild liveticker reported Felix Bohnsack's explanation of the loading procedure: the barge would be guided through a

previously dredged channel with its loading opening facing the whale. A tarpaulin, held in place by a net, would be placed underneath the whale. “First, a U-shape will form around the whale, so that it can’t really turn left or right. Then we’ll raise the front of the tarpaulin to create a kind of lip.” The whale would then be loaded backwards into the barge, or “floated in,” as Bohnsack put it, “and this is controlled with the net tarp.”

By 17:36 on the same day, the plan had changed entirely. The Bild liveticker reported: “The planned loading of humpback whale Timmy will no longer involve the use of a net. Instead, the animal will be guided forward into the barge using a wide, flexible strap. The strap will be placed under the chest and behind the flippers to guide the whale in a controlled manner.” The entry added: “Whether the use of the restraints can be implemented as planned remains uncertain. According to the Schwerin Ministry of the Environment, the responsible veterinarians have not yet received any documentation regarding the use of the restraints. The issue at hand is not one of approval, but rather one of toleration.”

The reversal is significant. In the space of four hours, the loading mechanism changed from tarpaulin-and-net with the whale loaded backwards, to strap-guidance with the whale loaded head-first. On the following day, 28 April, the whale swam into the barge head-first under her own power, which JEB’s own lawyers confirm was an unplanned outcome that made the original release concept inoperable: the whale was now facing the closed end of the barge, and whales cannot swim backwards.

This sequence raises a number of questions that the available sources do not answer, and which the brief records for the institutional record:

First: had the initiative measured the whale’s length against the internal dimensions of the barge? The whale was measured by the ministry at 12.35 metres on 6 April. Was the barge’s internal length sufficient for the whale to turn around inside, or was the whale physically unable to reorient herself once loaded head-first? If the barge was too narrow for the whale to turn, then loading her head-first guaranteed that she would have to be extracted tail-first, regardless of what the published literature says about tail-towing.

Second: did the barge open from both ends, or only from one? If the barge opened only from the loading end (the end the whale entered through), and the whale entered head-first, then the only way to release her was either (a) to flood the barge and hope she reversed out on her own, or (b) to pull her out backwards by the tail. If the barge opened from both ends, the whale could have been released head-first from the opposite end. The available sources do not specify the barge’s configuration, and no published diagram of the barge interior has been identified.

Third: how did the initiative envision the release at the point when the loading plan was changed from backwards-loading to forwards-loading on the afternoon of 27 April? If the whale was to be loaded head-first, the release procedure should have been specified at the same time. The available sources contain no evidence that a head-first release procedure was developed before, during, or after the loading plan was changed. The only release procedure documented in the record is the tail-pull.

Fourth: the original plan (tarpaulin, backwards loading) had at least a theoretical release mechanism: the whale, facing the open end of the barge, could simply swim forward out of

the barge when the barge was lowered. The revised plan (strap, forwards loading) eliminated this mechanism. When the whale then entered head-first of her own accord on 28 April, the problem became immediate. JEB's own lawyers confirm the initiative knew from that moment that the original release concept was no longer viable. Yet the barge departed for the Skagerrak anyway, with no documented alternative release plan other than the tail-pull that Foster described to Devidar.

SNM recognises that the initiative was operating under a hard deadline that was not of its making. The DLRG had announced on 27 April that it would depart on Wednesday regardless of outcome. The barge had only just arrived. The whale's condition was fluctuating, Dr. Tönnies reported deteriorating breathing at 14:45 on 27 April, then reversed her assessment thirty minutes later. The loading attempt on 28 April was, in operational terms, the last chance. If the whale was not loaded that day, the support infrastructure would disintegrate and the animal would remain on the sandbank indefinitely, with no further rescue attempt in prospect. Under those conditions, the initiative's decision to proceed, even with an improvised loading plan, even when the whale entered head-first instead of backwards, even without a fully developed release procedure, is understandable as the act of people who had been given one narrow window and used it.

But the narrowness of that window is itself an indictment of the system that created it. The initiative should never have been in a position where a single day determined whether a whale lived or died on a sandbank. The whale should have been intercepted and guided back toward the North Sea as early as February 2025, when Polish rescuers freed her from fishing nets near Międzyzdroje and she swam back into the Baltic. She should have been herded at the Wismar harbour entrance in early March 2026, when she was first sighted in German waters. She should have been refloated with medication, straps, and a short-distance tow during the first stranding at Niendorf on 23 March. She should have been rescued by competent authorities using published protocols at any point during the five weeks she lay on sandbanks while the cartel declared her doomed and the ministry blocked the tools. Instead, the entire institutional apparatus, the ministry, the IWC, BDMLR, IFAW and others spent those weeks explaining why rescue was impossible, until a private initiative was the only option left. The initiative did not fail the whale, because the system failed the initiative, and through the initiative, the whale. It did not have to end on a beach on Anholt, because, if done properly, it did not have to end at all [Bild liveticker, 27.04.2026; JEB statement via Cronemeyer Haisch, 16.05.2026].

Section G: IWC SEP Fourth Statement (2 May 2026)

On 2 May 2026, the IWC Strandings Expert Panel issued its fourth statement, acknowledging the release but emphasising that "release into this area is the beginning of any recovery process, not its conclusion." The Panel noted that a successful rescue would become evident over time if the whale could swim, survive the serious physiological effects of prolonged stranding and transport, return to suitable habitat, resume normal feeding, and regain health.

The Panel noted that it had previously offered to assist in sourcing an appropriate satellite tag and to provide expert advice on its deployment, and that "it is regrettable that this offer was not taken up, and that the global community of strandings expertise was not engaged on essential aspects of this intervention."

The Panel also stated that "the intense public attention on this single animal is understandable, but it is one of many whales to be compromised by entanglement in fishing gear, the leading cause of large whale mortality worldwide, claiming the lives of many hundreds of animals every year" [*IWC SEP Fourth Statement, 02.05.2026, iwc.int*].

Section I: Changing Rescue Concepts

What follows is a description of the concepts proposed, tolerated, or approved for the rescue of a 12-tonne juvenile humpback whale stranded in shallow water off Insel Poel.

Between the rejection of the catamaran concept on 7 April and the eventual barge loading on 28 April, the private initiative cycled through three distinct rescue concepts in rapid succession. All concepts were innovative, and also had significant problems.

I.1a. The Tarp-and-Pontoon Concept (15–17 April)

The original "Operation Walrettung" plan, presented to the public via Bild's theatrical "Der technische Masterplan" graphics (complete with "DOSSIER-NR: 1584-TW // STATUS: GENEHMIGT," radar overlays, and an "Operation Readiness: 96%" dashboard), was built around a "Schwere Spezialplane" (heavy special tarp). The Bild "Das Arsenal" infographic explicitly lists the equipment: diving equipment, Luftkissen (air cushions), Schwere Spezialplane (the tarp), Zwei Schwimmpontons (two floating pontoons), and a Schleppschiff (tugboat). The operational sequence as presented in the Bild Phase 2 graphic ("Das Hebe-Prinzip / Minimalinvasiv"): (1) Sand entfernen — flush sand from under the whale's head and front body using water pressure; (2) Druckausgleich — inflate strategically placed Luftkissen (air cushions) beneath the whale; (3) Gleitmechanik — the combination of receding sand and rising air cushions allows the whale to slide gently onto the Spezialplane. Phase 3 then shows the tarp clamped between two massive Schwimmpontons: "Die Plane wird zwischen zwei massiven Schwimmpontons eingespannt. Diese Konstruktion stabilisiert den Wal, verhindert ein Abrutschen und hält ihn im Wasser." The financiers' role was described in the "Akteurs-Matrix" as "Vollständige private Finanzierung von Helfern, Planen, Luftkissen, Pontons und Booten" — note the plural "Planen" (tarps), confirming the tarp as the load-bearing mechanism.

Phase 4 ("Das Schleppmanöver") shows the tow: 300 metres from sandbank to Fahrrinne (shipping channel), then handoff to larger tugboats, then transit through the Baltic around Denmark to the North Sea, with planned arrival by Friday. The formal Rettungsmaßnahmen document of 13 April 2026, addressed to Minister Backhaus, describes the same concept in official language: Phase 2 is "kontrolliertes Bewegen des Tieres über ca. 300 m, Unterstützung durch modulare Pontonsysteme," Phase 4 is "Schleppverband Richtung Nordsee, langsame, kontinuierliche Verbringung (ca. 2–4 km/h)." [*Bild liveticker, "Operation Walrettung: Der technische Masterplan," 15–17.04.2026*]

The concept had no precedent, no published protocol, no peer-reviewed validation, and no demonstrated mechanism for preventing the animal from injuring itself, overheating, or dying from capture myopathy during what would be a multi-day transit. The WHOI-2024-05 workshop report identifies the maximum feasible transport distance for a restrained cetacean as a matter of hours, not days, even under optimal conditions with dedicated veterinary monitoring [Sharp et al., WHOI-2024-05]. The timeline presented to the public – Wednesday preparation, Thursday lift, Friday arrival at the North Sea – was, in the precise technical sense of the term, unrealistic [Bild liveticker, “Operation Walrettung: Der technische Masterplan,” 15–17.04.2026; Rettungsmaßnahmen document, 13.04.2026].

I.1b. The Net-and-Pontoon Modification (18–19 April)

By 18–19 April, the tarp had been replaced by a net. The Bild liveticker of 19 April reports: “The net with blue air cushions is shown to the whale so it can ‘get used to it.’” This is a different load-bearing mechanism from the Spezialplane shown in the original Phase 2 and Phase 3 graphics. The pontoons remained the same. The air cushions remained the same. The tow-around-Denmark transit plan remained the same. But the element that was supposed to hold a 12-tonne whale during a multi-day ocean transit had changed from a solid tarp to a net, without public explanation of why the original concept was abandoned or how the new mechanism addressed any of the structural deficiencies of the first.

On 17 April, Fred Babbel (head of diving company) announced a “pontoon cage” plan: a 6-by-12-metre enclosure around the whale. By 19 April, Gunz declared “Today it begins,” but by 19:21 excavation work was halted because the pontoon needed reconfiguration “which would take several hours, and by then it will be night.” The whale was not rescued on “Whale Sunday.” The net-and-pontoon concept failed in exactly the same way as the tarp-and-pontoon concept: promises, preparation, failure, darkness, postponement [Bild liveticker, 18–19.04.2026].

I.1c. The Floodable Barge (announced 23 April, loaded 28 April)

The third rescue concept was announced on 23 April: a 50-metre steel cargo barge (Schute) without its own engine, towed like a trailer, designed to be flooded so the whale is submerged but unable to escape. Felix Bohnsack, technical director, described it as “the bigger brother of the older concept” and explained the whale would be pulled in backwards using a tarpaulin and net secured with ropes in a U-shape, winched into the water-filled steel basin by hydraulic hand winch. Bohnsack: “Timmy has a reverse gear.” The concept was presented to the public through another elaborate infographic (“Rettungskonzept: Wal Timmy”) showing five numbered phases: preparation, flooding, whale intake, transport, release. The image was labelled “Foto Gemini Symbolbild,” indicating the visualization was AI-generated.

The barge concept shared every structural deficiency of the first two concepts: it required multi-day ocean transit of a live, un-sedated whale through heavily trafficked shipping lanes; it had no published precedent in the stranding-response literature; and it treated the whale as cargo rather than as a marine mammal that needs to swim. It added a new deficiency: the whale must be loaded backwards into a steel enclosure, an operation that requires the animal to cooperate with a procedure it has no capacity to understand, executed by personnel who have never done it before, on an animal that had spent 26 days stranding and re-stranding.

Three concepts in ten days. Three different load-bearing mechanisms (tarp, net, steel basin). Zero published precedents for any of them [Bild liveticker, 23.04.2026; Eilmeldung Deutschland, 23.04.2026].

I.4. Showing the Pontoon to the Whale

On 18 April, the plan was for the whale to “see the pontoon structure for the first time and become familiar with it.” On 19 April, Walter Gunz confirmed: “We very much hope that he will continue to cooperate as well as before and recognise that we want to help him.” [Bild liveticker, 18–19.04.2026].

I.5. Salt Water from Watering Cans

The whale’s skin, damaged by prolonged exposure to the low-salinity Baltic Sea, was treated by pouring “highly concentrated salt solution” from watering cans and apparently throwing dry salt onto wet cloths draped over the whale’s back. While skin moistening is a standard stranding-response measure, the method described here — applying concentrated salt from garden watering cans — is improvised rather than evidence-based. For comparison: in the Sacramento River Delta case (Gulland et al. 2008), antibiotic therapy was administered by dart, and the skin damage reversed within 24 hours of the animals returning to salt water. The German team was treating the symptom with watering cans instead of addressing the cause by moving the animal [Bild liveticker, 26.04.2026; Gulland et al. 2008]. However, SNM recognized that the initiative faced significant restrictions in what medical treatment the whale could receive.

I.6. The Sprinkler Hose Entanglement

On 17 April, the whale became entangled in a broken piece of hose from the sprinkler system that had been installed to moisten its skin. Veterinarian Janine Bahr-van Gemmert confirmed the entanglement, noting the whale “may have sustained a skin lesion as a result.” [Bild liveticker, 17.04.2026].

Other Interventions Attempted

During the stranding, the rescue team and veterinarians attempted several non-salvage interventions to support the whale's health. Fluids were administered on multiple occasions: a special salt solution was poured over the whale's skin via watering cans to treat his damaged skin [Bild liveticker, 17.04.2026, 20:31], and a concentrated glucose and saline solution was poured directly into the whale's mouth [Bild liveticker, 24.04.2026, 17:07; Bild liveticker, 26.04.2026, 17:07]. The whale was also offered solid food; on 21 April 2026, Environment Minister Backhaus announced that the whale would be fed 2.5 kilograms of mackerel [Bild liveticker, 21.04.2026, 16:44]. Two days later, Klaus Kraft of the Mecklenburg-Vorpommern animal rescue service reported that the whale had opened his mouth when food was offered and was able to take it in [Bild liveticker, 23.04.2026, 18:05]. In addition, a blood draw was attempted on 25 April 2026 to obtain information about the whale's health, but the first attempt was unsuccessful and a second attempt was planned [Bild liveticker, 25.04.2026, 17:42].

I.8. The Five-Day Pattern of Promised Deadlines

The evidence of operational incapacity is not any single failed concept but the pattern of daily promises followed by daily failures. On 15 April: “Divers by 17:30, rescue Thursday 06:00.” No divers entered the water. On 16 April: “Operation Air Cushion begins Thursday morning.” Delayed; briefings only. On 17 April: “Tomorrow the big guy sets off on the great journey to freedom.” Pontoon retreated when the whale moved; the whale was caught in the sprinkler hose. On 18 April: “Whale will see pontoon and get used to it.” Preparation continues. On 19 April: “Today it begins.” Work halted at nightfall; pontoon needs reconfiguration. The whale remained exactly where it had been on Day 14 [Bild liveticker, 15–19.04.2026].

Section H: Summary Assessment

The rescue initiative was well-intentioned, financially generous, and placed in an impossible situation by the institutional framework it was operating within. The ministry prohibited the evidence-based tools. The cartel opposed every step, while no stranding-response institution dared to offer any operational support. Within that vacuum the initiative adapted, recruited international expertise where it could find it (including the Whale Sanctuary Project team with their Keiko, Springer, and Whale Aid Russia experience), and ultimately loaded a whale into a barge and transported her to the open sea.

The critique documented in this part is not a criticism of the people's intentions but of the operational gap between what was attempted and what the published literature says should have been done, a gap that was created not by the initiative but by the institutional system that denied it the tools, the expertise, and the mandate to do the job properly. The initiative persevered, the whale reached the Skagerrak and lived at least several days dying under still undetermined circumstances. While the rescue was imperfect it still worked.

Part XIII. The SNM Plan, the Approved Plan, and What the Comparison Demonstrates

This part documents what Stranded No More actually proposed for the rescue of this specific animal in this specific location, and then compares it with the plan the ministry actually tolerated, so that the reader can judge the distance between the evidence-based specification and the operation that was conducted. The full SNM rescue plan is published as a companion document (*SNM Rescue Plan Brief v2, 11.04.2026*).

A. What Stranded No More proposed

The SNM plan was grounded entirely in two published operational sources: the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution Technical Report WHOI-2024-05 [*Sharp et al., WHOI-2024-05, November 2024*] and the NRE Tasmania 2022 Cetacean Incident Manual [*NRE Tasmania 2022*]. Every technical instruction was traceable to one or both of these sources. The plan was written by stranding professionals and read like a stranding-response document because it was one.

Medical stabilisation first, before any physical contact

The plan began with medication, not equipment. Before any strap was tunnelled, before any pontoon was inflated, before any diver entered the water, four protective medications were to be administered by dart: Vitamin E with selenium, the single most time-critical intervention, protecting against reperfusion injury when blood flow returns to compressed tissue during the lift; calcium gluconate for cardioprotection against hyperkalemia, the elevated blood potassium from damaged muscle that causes sudden cardiac death at the moment of lift; low-dose dexamethasone as a corticosteroid for the generalised inflammatory response; and a long-acting antibiotic covering the skin lesions and any residual entanglement wounds, following the precedent established by Gulland et al. 2008 in the Sacramento River Delta [*Gulland et al. 2008*]. Sedatives were explicitly excluded. The medication protocol was detailed in the companion SNM Medication Urgency Letter of 16 April 2026, whose central warning was that these protective factors are what keeps the animal alive during the physiological stress of rescue, and that any physical manipulation without prior medication dramatically increases the risk of capture myopathy and cardiac arrest.

Water-jet tunnelling, not dredging or excavation

The plan explicitly rejected excavation and dredging. The WHOI report warns of two specific failure modes that excavation produces: “tabling,” where digging around the animal leaves the whale balanced on a hard peak of substrate directly under the thorax, compressing the internal organs; and sinking, where fluidising the sand directly underneath the belly causes the animal to settle deeper and risk drowning. Both failure modes have killed whales in documented rescue attempts. Instead, the plan specified water-jet tunnelling: a curved tube emitting a high-pressure water jet fluidises a narrow channel through the sand underneath

the animal at the level of the axilla, creating a passage just wide enough for a broad load-bearing strap to be fed through while the surrounding substrate remains undisturbed.

Broad straps with published configurations

The plan specified commercial lifting straps with a working load limit of at least 15 tonnes per strap (30-tonne rated with a safety factor of 2), minimum width of 30 centimetres to distribute pressure without creating a cutting edge. Two configurations were described, both from the WHOI report: Configuration A, an under-belly strap tunnelled at the axilla with no contact with the damaged dorsal skin, and Configuration B, an over-back strap with under-flipper loops and four-line tow. For this specific animal, the plan recommended Configuration A because of the documented dorsal skin damage. The entire apparatus could be released by deflating the pontoons, at which point the straps lose tension and fall away, with the quick-release sequence designed to execute within 30 seconds.

Tow at barely-faster-than-drift speed with structured rest cycles

The plan specified towing at the minimum speed required to maintain directional control. The Tasmania manual's published tow cycle was adopted: five minutes of gentle forward motion, stop, allow the animal to rest and breathe undisturbed, resume. Rest periods were not optional and were not shortened if the operation was behind schedule; the schedule was the animal's. The tow had no predetermined endpoint beyond "as far as the animal will allow." A dedicated breathing observer was assigned for the entire operation with no other job, timing intervals between breaths, comparing them against the animal's documented baseline, and holding unconditional authority to halt the entire operation at any moment if the respiratory rate rose significantly above baseline.

Quick release and continuous herding, not transport

The SNM plan did not transport the whale. Once the animal was in water deep enough to swim, the pontoons were rapidly purged of air, the straps fell away, and the animal was free. The operation then transitioned to herding: a flotilla in crescent formation on the shore side and lateral sides of the animal, leaving the seaward path completely open, at the maximum practical distance consistent with maintaining the formation. The herding was continuous through the night, with personnel rotation, minimal artificial lighting, and optional acoustic playback of humpback feeding calls positioned ahead of the animal in the direction it needed to go, following the protocol that moved Humphrey 50 miles in seven hours in 1985. Three commercially available vessels were required: a primary towing vessel with shallow draft, a support vessel with jet drive, and an observation vessel for the breathing observer and veterinarian.

B. What the ministry tolerated instead

On 13 April 2026, two days after the SNM plan was issued, a different document was submitted to Minister Backhaus, titled "Rettungsmaßnahmen für den Buckelwal von der Insel Poel" and dated 13 April 2026. It was not written by stranding professionals. It was the product of, in the document's own words, "experienced maritime specialist companies in the

areas of salvage, towing technology, and offshore operations.” It read like a maritime salvage proposal because it was one. This was the plan the ministry tolerated.

The ministry-tolerated plan contained no medication protocol; the words “medication,” “Vitamin E,” “selenium,” “calcium,” “antibiotic,” and “dart” do not appear. It specified continuous towing at 2 to 4 km/h with no rest cycles; the word “rest” does not appear, the word “breathing” appears only in the context of monitoring, not in the context of structured pauses to allow the animal to breathe. It envisioned a multi-day ocean transit requiring approval from three separate waterway authorities (WSA Ostsee, WSA Nord-Ostsee-Kanal, WSA Elbe-Nordsee), covering approximately 400 to 800 kilometres through some of the most heavily trafficked shipping lanes in Europe, at speeds that would require multiple days of continuous transport of a live, un-sedated, un-medicated humpback whale. It described no quick-release mechanism. It included no herding component. It assigned no breathing observer and no halt authority. It contained no behavioural profile of the animal. And its Variant B, for the scenario in which the animal’s condition deteriorated during transit, envisioned transport to “a suitable specialised receiving station in the Netherlands” that was never named.

C. What the comparison demonstrates

The SNM plan was written by stranding professionals, grounded in peer-reviewed and government-published operational sources, tailored to the documented individual characteristics of this specific animal, and designed around the principle that medication comes first, close contact is a cost to be minimised, and the animal’s physiology sets the pace. The ministry-tolerated plan was written by maritime salvage companies, contained no medication protocol, specified continuous towing with no rest cycles, envisioned a multi-day ocean transit, and proposed an unnamed Dutch facility as a fallback. The financiers credited Stranded No More, but in the end the ministry tolerated a salvage operation.

Part XIV. SNM Reflections

What SNM hopes this document will demonstrate is that the rescue of the whale was set to fail from the very beginning, and those who set it to fail now somehow try to persuade the public that it was a waste of resources, was inhumane, and was an all-around failure. The whale received zero medical support, despite medical treatments that have been not only recommended but successfully used, as indicated in the peer-reviewed literature. The rescue efforts were not properly done, were delayed, the whale was abandoned, and then the rescue initiative was put in an impossible situation to conduct a rescue. Despite all that, the whale survived the neglect, botched rescue attempts, barge transfer, and disputed release. The whale was released in an unsuitable area, yet still managed to survive for several days, demonstrating activities that are entirely within the normal range for humpback whales based on previously published peer-reviewed literature (more on this will be discussed in the sections below). The whale died under mysterious circumstances, which the significantly delayed necropsy failed to identify. The cause of death remains undetermined. It is SNM's position that, despite all obstacles, the rescue of a juvenile female humpback whale should still be considered a success, while all its shortcomings and issues should be treated as a learning experience that should not be used to deny a rescue for the next whale, but to improve the rescue for the next whale.

Part XV. Physiological Evidence from the Live Animal

This part presents the direct physiological evidence from the live animal, drawn from the contemporaneous documentary record covering 23 March through 28 April 2026. The cartel’s diagnosis of multi-organ failure, “likely organ damage,” and “negligible” survival prognosis is contradicted not only by the published comparator literature (Parts VII and X) but by direct, observable, non-invasive evidence from the live whale that the cartel itself documented in writing, day after day, without ever reconciling the evidence with the diagnosis. Three categories of evidence are examined: vocalisation, breathing rate, and visible movement.

A. Vocalisation as proof of a functional respiratory tract

Baleen whale vocalisation is produced in the larynx through a specialised U-shaped laryngeal structure and an air-recycling mechanism that allows the animal to produce sound underwater without losing air to the surrounding water column, as described in the published anatomical model by Elemans et al. in *Nature* (2024) [*Elemans et al. 2024 – Nature*]. The operational consequence of this anatomy is that any baleen whale producing audible vocalisations has, by definition, a functional larynx, functional air-flow control through the laryngeal sac, and functional intercostal and diaphragmatic musculature sufficient to drive air through the vocalisation apparatus. A whale in multi-organ failure with compromised respiratory mechanics does not vocalise. A whale with crushed lungs does not vocalise. A whale that is, in Fabian Ritter’s phrase, “at the physical and mental end” does not produce sounds audible hundreds of metres from shore.

The cartel’s own documentary record establishes that the whale was vocalising throughout the stranding period, including the day the active rescue was abandoned and the day before the so-called “comprehensive evaluation” of 7 April 2026. The following entries are drawn from the contemporaneous record:

On 23 March 2026, at approximately 04:00, a hotel in Niendorf alerted the police because of a noise disturbance from the water that turned out to be the whale [*Der Reporter, 23.03.2026; Tini24, 23.03.2026*]. The first contact between the response system and the live animal was driven by the animal’s vocalisations. On 24 March, a DPA wire report documented that the whale’s “humming sounds” could be heard “hundreds of metres away” [*Kurier, 25.03.2026*]. On the same day, Carsten Mannheimer of Sea Shepherd confirmed to AP that “the animal is still alive, breathing, making sounds and occasionally lifting its head” [*ABC News/AP, 24.03.2026*]. On 26 March, Robert Marc Lehmann, the only responder in the water with the whale during the dredger operation, documented: “He’s reacting, he has both eyes open, he’s vocalizing” [*Bild liveticker, 26.03.2026, 13:26*]. On 27 March, during the failed escort across Lübecker Bucht, the whale was heard vocalising again [*Bild liveticker, 27.03.2026*]. On 1 April, the day of the abandonment press conference, a Bild reporter on site described “a short humming, almost groaning. Not loud, but definitely audible. Like the chugging of a locomotive” [*Bild liveticker, 01.04.2026*]. On 2 April, one day after the abandonment, Bild reporter Henning Schaffner wrote: “He is blowing, he is moving, he is alive” [*Bild liveticker, 02.04.2026, 15:26*]. And during the barge transit after

28 April, the whale vocalized audibly, a fact reported by Walter-Mommert and confirmed by multiple sources aboard the barge [*Bild liveticker*, 29–30.04.2026; *Walter-Mommert quoted in Bild*, 30.04.2026].

The cartel’s diagnosis of “likely organ damage” and “negligible chances of survival” is incompatible with the cartel’s own contemporaneous documentation of the live animal’s vocalisations. A whale that is vocalising audibly from hundreds of metres away has a functional respiratory and laryngeal apparatus, and the Elemans et al. anatomical model is the published basis for that statement.

B. Breathing rate of 3–5 minutes per breath is normal for resting humpback whales

The cartel’s framing in the second half of the case treated the whale’s breathing intervals as evidence of weakness and decline. On 30 March, the whale was breathing every 4 to 5 minutes [*Bild liveticker*, 30.03.2026]. On 1 April, the day of abandonment, the whale was breathing every approximately 4 minutes [*Bild liveticker*, 01.04.2026]. On 2 April: “Timmy breathes every five minutes” [*Bild liveticker*, 02.04.2026]. On 6–7 April, ZDFheute reported: “the animal was breathing approximately every five minutes on Wednesday morning” [*ZDFheute*, 07.04.2026]. Each of these reports framed the breathing interval as evidence of decline.

Breathing intervals of 3 to 5 minutes are within the normal range for *Megaptera novaeangliae* at rest or during periods of reduced activity. Humpback whales are deep-diving baleen whales whose normal breathing pattern alternates between surface-active periods, with breaths every 15 to 60 seconds during travel or feeding, and resting or post-dive periods, with surface breath intervals of several minutes. The relevant comparator from within the documentary file itself is Tamara Narganes Homfeld of WDC, who told *Bild* on 2 April 2026 that sleeping humpback whales “must surface to breathe at least every 20 minutes” [*Bild liveticker*, 02.04.2026, 14:02]. Narganes Homfeld’s published number, that a sleeping humpback breathes at least every 20 minutes, places the cartel’s reported 4–5 minute interval well within the normal range for an awake-but-resting humpback. The cartel cited a normal physiological parameter as evidence of decline. The breathing-rate framing is the cartel’s most accessible empirical claim and the one most easily falsified by reference to standard cetacean physiology, because the cartel did not measure anything the public could not measure with a stopwatch, and the cartel’s interpretation of the measurement was the opposite of what the published baseline supports.

C. Tail and body movement as evidence of neuromuscular function

Visible tail and body movement is a standard component of any clinical evaluation of a stranded large whale. A whale moving its flukes, lifting its head, rolling, or repositioning is an animal whose neuromuscular and vestibular systems are functioning. The contemporaneous record establishes that the whale was actively moving throughout the period the cartel was building the moribund framing. On 24 March, Mannheimer of Sea Shepherd confirmed to AP: “The animal is still alive, breathing, making sounds and

occasionally lifting its head” [ABC News/AP, 24.03.2026]. On 26 March, Lehmann documented the whale moving forward through the dredged channel repeatedly [Bild liveticker, 26.03.2026]. On the night of 26–27 March, the whale freed himself from the Niendorf position entirely and was found in deep water the following morning: self-refloat from a stranded position is direct evidence of intact propulsion and intact body-axis control [Bild liveticker, 27.03.2026, 13:50]. Between 27 and 28 March, the whale swam approximately 25 kilometres on his own from Boltenhagen to Wismarbucht. On 30 March, the whale freed himself again, and the ministry’s own press release 084/2026 confirmed the whale was “only lying lightly on the bottom” [MV PM 084/2026]. Backhaus himself said that evening: “He set out on his own. He wants to fight” [Bild liveticker, 30.03.2026, 20:58]. On 2 April, one day after the abandonment: “He is blowing, he is moving, he is alive” [Bild liveticker, 02.04.2026, 15:26]. On 20 April, the whale self-refloated for the third time [Bild liveticker, 20.04.2026]. And on 28 April, the whale swam 110 metres into a barge under his own power [Bild liveticker, 28.04.2026, 14:11–15:28].

An animal who self-refloated three times from sandbank strandings, swam approximately 25 kilometres unaccompanied between strandings, lifted his head, moved his flukes, and swam 110 metres into a metal enclosure under his own power on Day 29 is not an animal in multi-organ failure with negligible survival prognosis. The cartel’s framing of “barely moving,” “hardly moving,” and “showing no activity that gives cause for hope” is not consistent with the cartel’s own contemporaneous documentation of the animal’s locomotor activity.

D. The clinical evaluation criteria the cartel did not systematically apply

The standard non-invasive clinical evaluation criteria for a live stranded large whale include, at minimum, the following observations, all of which are achievable from the surface or from a small boat without instruments and without contact with the animal: breathing rate and rhythm measured across at least one full hour and compared to the species baseline (baseline for resting humpback: irregular intervals up to 20 minutes); audible vocalisations as direct evidence of a functional respiratory and laryngeal system; visible body movement including tail flukes, head lift, body roll, and repositioning; eye function (Lehmann’s 26 March observation: “both eyes open”); tactile responsiveness (Lehmann: “there’s still life in there when I tap him”); body condition score from visual assessment of subcutaneous fat through the body contour, with Schnitzler’s own contemporaneous assessment that the whale appeared “well-nourished”; and skin condition assessment distinguishing between pre-existing entanglement scarring, fresh stranding injuries, and the effects of dehydration and sun exposure during prolonged stranding.

On the basis of these seven non-invasive observable criteria, the live animal documented in the contemporaneous record from 23 March through at least 28 April 2026 presented: functional respiration, functional vocalisation, functional locomotion, functional eye function, functional tactile response, good body condition (well-nourished, with reserves per the cartel’s own contemporaneous statements), and skin condition substantially deteriorated by the duration of stranding. This is not the clinical picture of multi-organ failure. This is the clinical picture of a stranded large whale suffering significantly from the consequences of

stranding itself, whose primary need was not palliative care but operational rescue, and who would, if the published comparator literature from Part X is taken seriously, have been expected to show significant recovery after refloating into appropriate salinity water.

E. Why the cartel’s prognosis was empirically falsified in real time

The cartel’s prognostic language was empirically falsifiable in real time, and the animal herself was the falsifier. The cartel’s framing on 1 April 2026 was “negligible” survival chances and an imminent natural death. The cartel’s framing on 7 April 2026 was “likely organ damage” and “unfit for transport.” By 20 April, the whale had self-refloated. By 28 April, the whale had swum 110 metres into a barge. By 29 April, the whale was singing during transport. By 2 May, the whale was travelling in the open sea. At no point across 33 days did the cartel revise its assessment in light of the accumulating evidence that the assessment was wrong.

The cartel’s procedural defence to this falsification, visible in its public communications throughout the case, was that the animal was a wild animal, that wild animals do not always die on schedule, and that the eventual outcome would validate the prognosis even if the timing was wrong. This defence is the structural feature that makes the cartel’s prognosis non-falsifiable in any operationally meaningful sense: as long as the animal eventually dies, which all animals eventually do, the prognosis will be retrospectively validated. The whale did eventually die, nine days after release, and the cartel has indeed treated the death as vindication. But a clinical claim that cannot in principle be falsified by the patient’s continued survival is not a clinical claim; it is a doctrinal commitment, and in Kuhn’s framework (Part III) it is the paradigm defending itself against the anomaly of a whale that refused, for 33 days and then for nine more, to die on the schedule the paradigm predicted.

F. The longest stranding survival in the Stranded No More observational record

Stranded No More notes for the institutional record what may be the most important single empirical fact about this case. This whale is the longest stranding survival in the Stranded No More observational record. SNM has tracked live large-whale strandings worldwide since 2010 (the New York humpback EH/NY4236 case is one of the watchdog group’s founding cases). In the SNM record, no juvenile humpback whale that the international stranding-response network had publicly characterised as moribund and unfit for refloat has remained alive, vocalising, breathing at intervals consistent with rest, and visibly moving for as long as this whale did. The first stranding was 23 March 2026. The active rescue effort was abandoned on 1 April 2026. The cartel’s “likely organ damage” framing was issued on 7 April 2026. The BDMLR public website statement calling her “a dying animal” was issued on 8 April 2026. The whale survived through 28 April on the sandbank, was transported and released on 2 May, travelled on 3 May, and was confirmed dead only on 16 May – a total of 54 days from first stranding.

SNM does not claim that this is the longest stranding survival in any global cetacean stranding record, because the brief does not have access to every national stranding network’s case files and the cartel’s record-keeping in this area is not transparent. The brief

claims only what is defensible: that this is the longest such survival in the SNM watchdog group's own observational record over fifteen years of tracking the international stranding-response network. The brief invites correction from any other stranding-response professional who can document a longer survival in a comparable juvenile humpback case where the cartel had publicly characterised the animal as moribund.

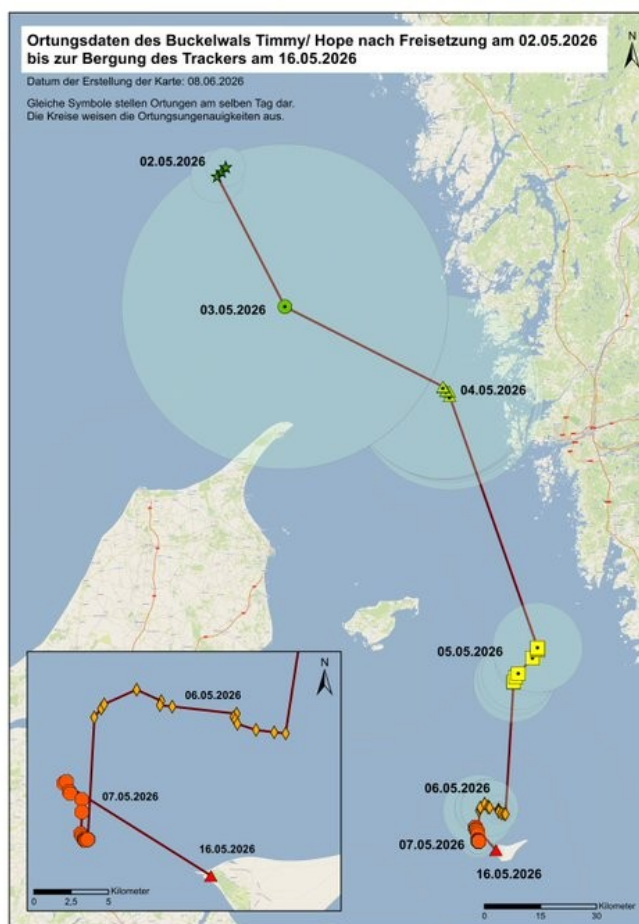
The relevance of the record is operational. The cartel's standard prognostic framing for live large-whale strandings – “too debilitated,” “chances of survival are now negligible,” “a dying animal” – depends operationally on the unstated assumption that animals so characterised will die promptly, and that the framing will be retroactively validated by the prompt death. This whale's continued survival was the empirical refutation of that assumption. More importantly, her survival is the precedent that any future case in which the cartel applies the same framing must be tested against. From this case forward, any cartel actor who tells the public that a juvenile humpback whale at day N of stranding is too far gone must answer the comparator question: how does this case differ from the German humpback, who at day N+M was alive, vocalising, and moving despite having received the same framing? The cartel's prognostic vocabulary has acquired, with this case, an empirical counter-example that did not exist in the SNM record before. The case is precedent and it has to be put on record.

Part XVI. Post-Release: Survival

On 2 May 2026, at approximately 09:00, the whale left the barge into the Skagerrak. A drone captured the animal at 09:24, spouting and swimming; this was the last independently verified sighting [*Bild liveticker, 02.05.2026*]. The DMM's declaration on 5 May that the whale was "highly likely dead" based on the absence of GPS location data [*DMM data statement, 05.05.2026*] is now contradicted by the actual tracker data presented by the Minister on June 212, 2026.

The 12 June 2026 Press Conference

On 12 June 2026, Minister Till Backhaus held a press conference at the Ministry for Climate Protection, Agriculture, Rural Areas and Environment in Schwerin to present the satellite tracking data from the whale's post-release movements [*Tracker press conference, regierung-mv.de, 12.06.2026*]. The press conference was titled "Pressekonferenz zum Buckelwal: Vorstellung der Ortungsdaten" (Press Conference on the Humpback Whale: Presentation of the Tracking Data). The data, which had been retrieved from the tracker's internal memory after the device was recovered, showed the whale's movements from the moment of release on 2 May 2026 until her death.

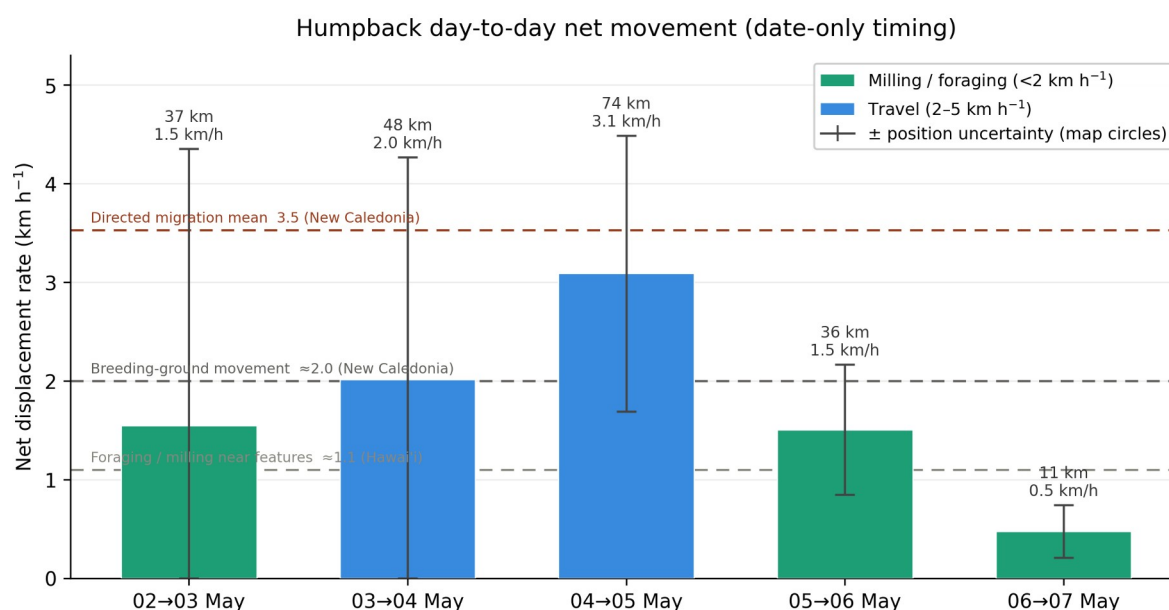


Tracker map presented during the conference

The tracking map released at the press conference tells a devastating story. Clearly, she was released in an unsuitable area, and SNM warned about it. Once again, everything that could go wrong post-release did.

SNM Analysis Based on the Published Image

SNM conducted its own analysis of the whale's movements using the published image from the press conference. It is important to emphasise that SNM has not been granted access to the actual tracker data. The analysis is based solely on the geolocation points visible on the publicly released image, not on the raw data itself. If SNM ever receive the actual data, the analysis will be adjusted. Nevertheless, the available information is quite telling.



Net displacement between daily mean positions \pm 24 h — a lower bound (true swum path is longer). Error bars propagate the CSV's position uncertainty (4–50 km). The source map gives dates only, so no sub-daily speeds are shown. Reference speeds: Garrigue et al. 2015, R. Soc. Open Sci. 2:150489; "Satellite Tracking of Migrating Humpback Whales in Hawaii", DTIC AD1056602.

SNM used the image to geolocate the known points (shown on the image) and to calculate the average speed per time period. Additionally, normal humpback whale speeds at different behavioural states were added for reference. As the analysis shows, the whale was not exactly "on her last leg" during the first four periods. She was not at migration speeds, but her movement was within the normal average range for humpback whales (these are average speeds, since we have no exact data and can only work with the image that has been publicly released). Then, something happened, and her speed dropped drastically. This confirms SNM working thesis that something catastrophic occurred between 5 and 7 May 2026. SNM really hoped the authorities would release the actual data so everyone could analyze it independently.

Interactive Map

SNM also has assembled data for an interactive map to show the whale's path together with the shipping traffic she encountered: 1,706 vessels and their 482,000 track points over 2–7 May 2026. The interactive map will be published on SNM website together with the final report. A demo is available on the SNM website. The map shows: The whale's track (based on the released image), vessel tracks (real AIS data from the Danish Maritime Authority), all notices to mariners (Danish Maritime Authority) during that time period, and WWI ordnance controlled explosion areas [*Tracker press conference, 12.06.2026; SNM interactive map, strandednomore.org*].

Part XVII. Post-Release: Confirmation of Death

A. Discovery at Anholt (14–16 May 2026)

On 14 May 2026, a dead humpback whale was sighted off the island of Anholt, Denmark, lying approximately 75 metres from shore on its back, with seagulls already feeding on the carcass [*Welt*, 'Toter Wal vor dänischer Insel entdeckt,' 15.05.2026]. The Danish Environmental Protection Agency (Miljøstyrelsen) stated the animal had likely been dead for some time. The island warden, Morten Abildstram, described it as 10 to 15 metres in length [*TV2 Østjylland*, 14–15.05.2026; *Bild*, 'Dead whale found off Denmark,' 14.05.2026]. On 15 May, the News5 livestream broadcast aerial footage of the dead whale. On 16 May, the rescue initiative confirmed the dead whale was Buckli/Hope/Timmy, based on two pieces of evidence: the matching serial number of the GPS tracker recovered from the animal by veterinarian Anne Herrschaft working with two Danish divers, and the matching dorsal pigmentation pattern of the right pectoral flipper [*Bild liveticker*, 16.05.2026, captures 09:51, 12:17]. Minister Backhaus confirmed the identification and stated: “Unfortunately, the animal was unable to take advantage of its opportunity.”

B. The sex misidentification

One morphological finding from the Anholt carcass requires comment. The dead whale presents a hemispherical lobe in the ventral genital region, which is a diagnostic feature of female humpback whales. Throughout the Poel stranding, the animal was consistently referred to as male by the ministry, the cartel, and the media. SNM now believes the whale was female and was improperly sexed, most likely because no close ventral examination was ever conducted during the five weeks the animal lay within reach of the German veterinary and scientific establishment. This does not materially affect any argument in this brief, since female humpback whales do vocalise and the vocalisations reported during transport are consistent with either sex. The misidentification of the animal’s sex is, however, a further illustration of how little diagnostic work was actually performed on this animal during the weeks it was accessible.

C. Estimated date and cause of death

Based on the decomposition state of the carcass when found on 14 May, SNM initially estimated that the whale died on or around 9 to 11 May 2026, approximately nine to ten days after release. However based on the Minister’s press-conference, it appears that the signals stopped on May 7th [*Tracker press conference*, 12.06.2026]. More about it will be discussed in the necropsy section below. The necropsy has been consistently delayed with the Danish authorities initially signalling no intention to conduct one; Abildstram told TV2: “He’s not obstructing anyone or anything out there, so a relocation must be at the Germans’ expense” [*TV2 Østjylland*, 15.05.2026].

SNM’s pre-registered necropsy protocol, published weeks before the death, specified exactly what a forensic examination should look for: capture myopathy markers, organ damage from prolonged stranding, blast and blunt trauma, infection, starvation. The cartel, which planned

its own necropsy site on Day 3 while the whale was still alive [*News5 Facebook, necropsy preparation Stralsund, 08.04.2026*], has shown no interest in conducting one promptly when the death has occurred under circumstances that might implicate the response rather than the animal's pre-existing condition.

Part XVIII. The WWII Bomb Detonation

On approximately 5-6 May 2026, the Danish Navy's diving service (Søværnets Dykkertjeneste) detonated multiple World War II-era bombs on the seabed of Aarhus Bay. TV2 Østjylland reported that the bombs had been lying on the bottom since the Second World War and were found using drones capable of identifying ordnance beneath the surface. The detonations were powerful enough that they could be “both seen and heard” from the water off Egå Marina. After the war ended, approximately 45,000 tonnes of German ammunition were dumped in Koraldybet, between Egå and Skødshoved on the Mols peninsula, an area that remains closed to fishing, diving, and sailing to this day [TV2 Østjylland, 'Bomber fra 2. verdenskrig sprængt i luften,' 12.05.2026].

Anholt lies in the Kattegat, approximately 70 kilometres northeast of Aarhus Bay. The whale was released into the Skagerrak on 2 May and was last tracked around 11 May in an unknown location between the Skagerrak and the Kattegat. The temporal coincidence between the estimated date of death (6-7 May) and the WWII bomb detonation is noted. Underwater explosions are a well-documented cause of cetacean injury and death: the pressure wave from a detonation can cause barotrauma, pulmonary haemorrhage, intestinal rupture, and hearing damage at distances far greater than the blast radius in air. The effects depend on charge size, depth, distance, water conditions, and the animal's orientation relative to the blast.

SNM does not claim that the bomb detonation killed the whale. SNM does not have sufficient information to establish the whale's location at the time of the detonation, the distance between the animal and the blast, or the charge sizes involved. What SNM notes is that a weakened humpback whale, recently released from a barge transit during which she received no medication, sustained a mouth injury, and was released without veterinary clearance, was swimming in the waters between the Skagerrak and the Kattegat during a period in which the Danish Navy was detonating World War II ordnance on the seabed of a bay 70 kilometres away. Whether the blast contributed to the death is a question that only a necropsy could answer and it was unable to answer it.

Part XVIII-B. The Necropsy: Too Late, Like Everything in This Case

Decision to Perform the Necropsy (19 May 2026)

On 19 May 2026, Die Zeit reported that Denmark planned to recover and perform an autopsy on the dead whale. Jane Hansen of the Danish Environmental Protection Agency (Miljøstyrelsen) stated that they were working on a solution to simultaneously perform an autopsy and secure valuable scientific samples for research purposes [Die Zeit, 19/05/2026].

This represented a reversal from the Danish authorities' earlier position that there were no plans to remove the whale or examine the carcass. The decision appears to have been driven at least in part by practical concerns: the carcass lay in shallow water on a popular beach on Anholt, and beachgoers had been climbing on the dead animal and posing for photographs. The environmental agency urged citizens to stay away due to infection risk.

The MV Ministry stated that the whale had likely been dead for at least a week, probably longer, and that the advanced state of decomposition would complicate both transport and any examination.

The Necropsy (4 June 2026)

The necropsy was conducted on 4 June 2026, approximately three weeks after the whale was first discovered dead off Anholt on 14 May 2026. The team consisted of Danish researchers, veterinarians, and pathologists, including Danish biologist Charlotte Bie Thøstesen and veterinary scientist Tim Jensen from the University of Copenhagen.

What Was Found

Finding	Result	Source
Sex	Confirmed female (cervix discovered)	Bild, 04.06.2026; SZ/dpa
Age	Approximately 4–5 years old	Bild, 04.06.2026
Length	12.2 metres	Bild liveticker; SNM analysis
Parasites	Found in stomach and kidney (species not yet identified)	Bild, 04.06.2026; SZ/dpa
Stomach/intestines	No food found (at least one month without eating)	News5, 04.06.2026
Lungs	No water (decomposition limits interpretation)	News5, 04.06.2026
Foreign objects	No nets or other objects in mouth or stomach	SZ/dpa, 04.06.2026

Broken bones	None found, including no broken bones on the tail	News5; Bild, 04.06.2026
Nutritional condition	Not emaciated; fat layer present	News5, 04.06.2026
Pregnancy	Not pregnant in recent months	Bild; SZ/dpa, 04.06.2026

What Was Not Found or Could Not Be Determined

Limitation	Detail	Source
Cause of death	Not determined	SZ/dpa, 04.06.2026
Ship strike	No apparent injuries, but blunt trauma/haemorrhage could not be assessed due to decomposition	News5; Bild, 04.06.2026
Time of death	Could not be established	News5, 04.06.2026
Decomposition	Whale dead for at least two weeks; too decomposed for many standard procedures	SZ/dpa, 04.06.2026
Tissue samples	Taken, but results not expected for at least six months	Bild, 04.06.2026

Limitations and Timing

Like everything in this case, the necropsy came too late. The whale had been dead since approximately 9–11 May 2026 (SNM estimate; tracker signals stopped on 7 May) and had been decomposing in shallow water for over three weeks in spring temperatures. Charlotte Bie Thøstesen confirmed that determining the cause of death would be difficult due to the advanced state of decomposition.

The advanced decomposition degrades tissue samples, compromises histopathology, renders blood and serum chemistry impossible, and reduces the diagnostic yield of every standard necropsy procedure.

Whether the carcass can still yield answers to the questions that matter — including capture myopathy markers, blunt trauma, blast trauma, infection, starvation, or ship strike — is uncertain. Some findings (skeletal fractures from blast, large-scale organ damage, foreign bodies in the digestive tract) may survive decomposition. Others (cellular-level muscle damage from capture myopathy) almost certainly will not.

SNM's Position

SNM's pre-registered necropsy protocol, published on 11 April 2026, specified exactly what a forensic examination should look for and the methodology required to distinguish between pre-existing pathology and the consequences of the stranding event and the response.

Whether the Danish examination followed this protocol or any comparable forensic standard is unknown.

Assessment

The necropsy was important to the cartel when it was expected to confirm the doctrine (the DMM prepared its own necropsy site at the Nautineum in Stralsund on Day 3 while the whale was still alive). It became less important when it might have challenged it.

Denmark's willingness to perform the examination, belatedly, is welcome. Whether a decomposed carcass examined weeks after death by a team with no involvement in the case can produce the answers that a fresh necropsy by an independent pathology team on Day 1 would have produced is another question entirely.

Summary of Necropsy Findings

Parameter	Result
Sex	Female (confirmed)
Age	Approximately 4–5 years
Length	12.2 metres
Nutritional condition	Not emaciated; fat layer present
Pregnancy	Not pregnant in recent months
Stomach/intestine contents	No food (at least one month without eating); no nets or foreign objects
Lungs	No water (decomposition limits interpretation)
Broken bones	None found (including tail)
Parasites	Found in stomach and kidney (species not yet identified)
Ship strike	No apparent injuries (decomposition limits assessment)
Cause of death	Not determined
Time of death	Could not be established
Decomposition state	Severe (weeks dead)
Sample results	Not expected for at least six months

Part XIX. What the Death Does Not Prove

The cartel will treat this death as vindication: The framing is simple, clean, and wrong: the whale died, therefore the experts were right, therefore the rescue was a mistake, therefore the system worked as it should. This logic collapses under the weight of its own timeline.

The whale survived 33 days of stranding. She self-refloated on Day 21 and swam under her own power, proving the Gutachten’s conclusion that she was “not fit for transport” was incorrect. She swam 110 metres into the barge voluntarily on Day 29, proving she retained locomotive capacity four weeks into the stranding. She vocalized during transport and her skin improved with increasing salinity, exactly as Gulland et al. 2008 predicted for freshwater-damaged humpback whales returning to appropriate salinity [*Gulland et al. 2008*]. She dove to 150 metres on her first day of freedom, proving she retained the physiological capacity for deep diving, the most demanding physical activity a humpback whale performs. She sent tracker signals for days after release and then she died under unknown circumstances.

The question is not whether the whale died but what killed her, and whether she would have died if the response had been different. Consider the counterfactual that the published literature supports: medication by dart on Day 1, comprising Vitamin E/selenium, calcium, and antibiotics per Gulland et al. 2008 and the SNM Rescue ; broad-strap refloat on Day 2 or 3, per WHOI-2024-05 and the Tasmania 2022 manual, confirmed suitable by Sam Thalmann [*Thalmann, written communication to the German citizen, 10.04.2026*]; acoustic herding to the open Baltic on Day 3 through 5, per the Humphrey 1985 protocol that moved a humpback 50 miles in seven hours. Total elapsed time: under one week. The whale would have been in the North Sea by Day 8 at the latest, with medication on board, with intact muscle tissue, without the cumulative damage of four additional weeks of stranding, repeated re-stranding, incompetent herding, excavator-caused substrate disturbance, a mouth injury sustained in a steel barge, and a release without veterinary oversight into waters where the Danish Navy was about to detonate World War II ordnance.

The death does not prove the cartel was right. It proves the cartel was consequential. The delays they caused, the medication they prohibited, the straps they blocked, the competent rescuers they excluded, the diagnostic work they never performed, and the weeks of inaction they presided over are written into the whale’s body, inseparable now from whatever pre-existing condition she may have had. The self-fulfilling prophecy, documented throughout this brief, has reached its conclusion: the postmortem evidence, had anyone bothered to collect it, would show exactly what the cartel needs it to show (organ damage, muscle necrosis, systemic decline), and no pathologist on earth would be able to tell them how much of that damage was there on Day 1 and how much of it accumulated over five weeks of institutional paralysis. Which is, of course, exactly the point.

Part XX. Post-Event Reaction: Critique as “Science Denial”

Within hours of the death confirmation, a narrative crystallised across social media, institutional communications, and mainstream press that frames any criticism of the cartel’s handling of this case as an attack on science itself. Bild’s report of 17 May leads with: “Marine researchers and experts had predicted this fate... they were met with hostility and threats. Now scientists and conservationists are demanding consequences” [*Bild, 17.05.2026, 15:05*]. The implication is unmistakable: the scientists were right, the public was wrong, and the lesson is that scientific authority must be restored against the dangerous tide of populist emotion.

On social media, the framing is even more direct. One commenter writes: “The amount of science denial and/or science hatred in Germany and in the world is honestly frightening. The case of Timmy clearly shows that this is not isolated to typical cases like anti-vaxx or climate change, but it is basically everywhere. Even literal whale scientists are being described as evil people who know nothing and there are other ways of knowing” [*Facebook comments, post-death reaction, ~16–17.05.2026*]. Another fears that “the conversation WON’T be about the lessons to be learned... science denial always seems to have a way to spin the narrative.” These are sincere people expressing genuine concern about the erosion of trust in scientific expertise, and their concern is not illegitimate. But their application of it to this case is profoundly mistaken, and the ease with which the cartel’s institutional failure is being repackaged as a story about science denial is itself a kind of denial: the denial of accountability.

Stranded No More is not anti-science. The SNM brief cites more peer-reviewed literature than every cartel statement combined. The SNM rescue plan was built on two published operational sources [*Sharp et al., WHOI-2024-05; NRE Tasmania 2022*]. The SNM medication protocol was grounded in Gulland et al. 2008, a peer-reviewed paper. The SNM herding protocol cited six documented rescue cases by name and the SNM breathing analysis used published reference datasets. The pre-registered necropsy standard was designed to meet forensic evidentiary requirements. Every factual claim in the SNM brief is sourced, cited, and open to challenge on its merits.

What the cartel and its defenders are calling “science denial” is not a rejection of the scientific method. It is a rejection of a specific institutional consensus that was formed on the basis of a one-hour visual inspection without blood work, endorsed by a panel whose European representative was the operational lead of the team being evaluated, reaffirmed three times without acknowledging any contradicting evidence, and contradicted by the animal’s own behaviour at every stage. The resistance to this critique is not a defence of science. It is a defence of a paradigm. In Kuhn’s framework (Part III), what is happening now is the paradigm’s immune response: the anomaly (a whale that survived 33 days of stranding, self-refloated, and dove to 150 metres after release) is being absorbed back into the paradigm (“the whale died, therefore we were right”), and anyone who points out that the anomaly should change the paradigm rather than be absorbed by it is labelled a science denier. This is not how science works, but this is how paradigms defend themselves.

Madsen's FAZ interview of 2 June 2026 provides the most explicit articulation of the cartel's position on dissent. Asked what German authorities should learn, says: "Mein Rat ist: Ignoriert eure Experten nicht!" ("My advice: don't ignore your experts!") He states that German politicians "decided to ignore this advice and instead follow the opinion of a very small, but very vocal, segment of the public." He describes the people who challenged the cartel's assessment as "activists", a word he uses five times in the interview, always pejoratively, always as a category distinct from and inferior to "experts." He states: "They shouldn't be allowed to define how we deal with such situations." He concludes with a pandemic analogy: "If the authorities let themselves be pushed around over a whale, what will happen when a real catastrophe strikes? During a pandemic like COVID-19, you don't want activists or any NGO making the political decisions. If we can't trust our politicians to listen to experts, then something is fundamentally wrong" [FAZ, Staib, 02.06.2026].

The rhetorical move is transparent: Madsen equates questioning the cartel's handling of one stranded whale with anti-vaccination activism and pandemic denialism. SNM cites more peer-reviewed literature than every cartel statement combined, demands the diagnostic testing the cartel refused to perform, and challenges the institutional consensus by pointing to the specific published cases that the consensus fails to account for. Madsen's framing does not distinguish between rejecting science and rejecting a specific group of scientists' specific judgment call on a specific case. The collapse of that distinction is the entire rhetorical strategy: if the cartel's judgment is science, then questioning the cartel's judgment is science denial, and the question of whether the judgment was correct never needs to be asked. Every successful rescue, from Humphrey in 1985 to Delta and Dawn in 2007 to the Rance humpback in 2023, challenges the paradigm. Every critique of a failed response threatens it. Labelling that critique as "science denial" is not an argument; it is an immunisation strategy that places the cartel's institutional authority beyond the reach of evidence, beyond the reach of accountability, and beyond the reach of the published literature that the cartel itself has failed to engage with. The paradigm is not science, it is habit the whale paid for with her life.

Part XXI. The Scientist’s Paradox: Expertise Without Accountability

Throughout this case, established scientists and stranding-response professionals complained, publicly and privately, that their expertise was not being listened to, that the public’s emotional response was overriding scientific judgment, and that decisions were being driven by people with social media followings rather than by people with decades of experience. This part examines that complaint on its own terms and finds that the complaint is not wrong about the social dynamics but is fundamentally wrong about the expertise it claims is being ignored, because the expertise in question has never been tested against the outcomes it produces, has never been updated for the cases in which rescue succeeded, and has been deployed throughout this case not as a tool for understanding the animal’s condition but as a shield against any attempt to do something about it.

A. The complaint in their own words

A social media post by a scientist involved in the broader stranding-response community, shared during the case, articulated the complaint with unusual clarity: “Social media is rocket fuel for quick emotional sentiment that stifles long, deliberate contemplation. I fear in this climate, scientists are easily branded as unfeeling monsters instead of subject matter experts. Makes for a fundamentally bad situation for animal welfare, as decisions are made by people with larger public profiles and social media followings, rather than by those with decades of experience” [*Screenshot, scientist social media post, ~April–May 2026*]. The post also noted that “we have a public raised on Hollywood and Disney that is further and further disconnected from the harsh realities of nature.”

The complaint deserves to be taken seriously, because it describes something real. Social media does compress complex situations into emotional binaries. The public does project anthropomorphic narratives onto wild animals. Scientists and veterinarians who make difficult welfare decisions do face hostility from people who have no understanding of the clinical realities involved. These are genuine problems, and SNM does not dismiss them. What SNM disputes is the inference that because the public’s emotional response is sometimes uninformed, the scientists’ clinical response must therefore be correct. The two propositions are independent. The public can be wrong about the reasons for its position and still be right about the conclusion, and the scientists can be right about the public’s lack of understanding and still be wrong about the whale.

B. The reality: expertise that refuses to update

The scientists who complained that their expertise was being ignored were, simultaneously, refusing to adjust that expertise to three categories of evidence that the published record made available to them and that they chose not to engage with.

The first category is the documented cases of successful large-whale rescue (Part IX). The Tasmania 2007 sperm whale refloat, the Humphrey acoustic lure, the Sacramento River antibiotic darting, the Rance estuary rescue, and the NRE Tasmania 2022 manual all exist in

the published, peer-reviewed literature. Not one of the scientists who complained that their expertise was being overridden cited any of these cases in their public commentary on the German whale. Karen Stockin’s article in *The Conversation* did not mention them [Stockin, *The Conversation*, 21.04.2026]. Peter Madsen’s FAZ interview did not mention them [FAZ, *Staib interview with Madsen*, 29.04.2026]. Fabian Ritter’s running commentary across multiple outlets did not mention them. The scientists presented their expertise as comprehensive while omitting from their analysis the published cases that contradicted their position.

The second category is the observable behaviour of the live animal in front of them. The whale self-refloated on Day 21. The whale vocalised throughout, and she breathed at rates consistent with healthy resting humpback whales. She was able to swim 110 metres into a barge under his own power on Day 29. The skin improved, she was able to travel and dive after the release with speeds that are comparable to what was observed in wild whales in published literature. At no point did any of the named scientists publicly revise their assessment in light of any of these observations. Madsen said “it will die one way or another, I’m sure of it” [FAZ, *Staib interview with Madsen*, 29.04.2026] on 29 April, the day after the whale had swum into the barge. Ritter said “that looks creepy!” as the whale swam calmly into the barge [Bild *liveticker*, 28.04.2026]. The confidence of these assessments was inversely proportional to their contact with the evidence.

The third category is the recent research that the established literature has produced within the stranding-response field itself, particularly the WHOI-2024-05 workshop report of November 2024, which represents the most recent international expert consensus on large whale rescue methodology [Sharp *et al.*, WHOI-2024-05, November 2024]. This report was published sixteen months before the German stranding. It specifies medication protocols, strap specifications, tow procedures, and release criteria for large whale strandings. It was not cited by any cartel actor, any IWC SEP statement, or any cartel-adjacent scientist in their public commentary on the German case. The scientists complained that their expertise was being ignored while themselves ignoring the most recent published product of their own field.

C. The underlying problem: the wrong expertise for the situation

The scientists who complained that their expertise was being ignored possess real expertise, but it is expertise in the wrong domain for the question that was being asked. Their expertise is in documentation, necropsy, population biology, and the institutional management of stranding events within the established doctrinal framework. It is not expertise in live large-whale rescue, because the established doctrinal framework does not include live large-whale rescue as a category of response. The cartel’s expertise is, fundamentally, expertise in managing the process by which a stranded large whale dies, and in documenting the death after it occurs. When that expertise is presented as universally applicable, and when it is used to block rescue by people who do have the relevant operational experience (Thalman in Tasmania, Gulland at UC Davis, the WHOI workshop participants, or for that matter even the Whale Sanctuary Project’s team with their Keiko and Russia experience), the result is

exactly what happened here: a whale lies on a sandbank for four weeks while the experts declare him dying and the people who want to help are told they do not understand.

The public is not wrong to question experts who have never rescued a large whale, whose professional incentive structure rewards documentation of death and specimen collections over prevention of death, and whose predictions about this specific animal have been contradicted, week after week, by the animal itself. The complaint that “decisions are made by people with larger public profiles and social media followings, rather than by those with decades of experience” assumes that decades of experience in letting whales die is the same as expertise in rescuing them. It is not the same, and the German humpback is the proof.

Part XXII. The Media as the Cartel’s Amplification Layer

The cartel’s institutional power would be limited to ministerial press releases and IWC letterhead if it were not amplified, uncritically, by the international mainstream media. Throughout this case, the prestige press sourced its expert voices exclusively from within the cartel network, adopted the cartel’s framing in its headlines, did not cite the published rescue comparators that contradict the cartel’s central claim, did not interrogate the Siebert conflict of interest, did not follow up when the cartel’s predictions were falsified by the live animal, and continued to return to the same cartel sources for comment even after those sources had been proved wrong. The media did not investigate the cartel. The media repeated the cartel, and in doing so gave the cartel’s doctrine its reach, its durability, and its immunity from accountability.

A. Science magazine (Enserink, 4 May 2026)

Martin Enserink’s article in *Science*, headlined “Chaotic whale rescue shocks marine biologists,” adopted the cartel’s framing wholesale [*Science, Enserink, 04.05.2026*]. The headline itself tells the reader whose perspective the article inhabits: the rescue is chaotic, the marine biologists are shocked, and the shock of credentialed scientists is the story rather than the rescue of the whale. The article’s named sources were Baschek, who said the whale had “suffered greatly,” and Ritter, who said he had “never seen anything like this.” An anonymous scientist who “feared repercussions” for disagreeing with the cartel was quoted, which is itself evidence of the cartel’s institutional power, reported by *Science* without any apparent awareness that the fear of repercussions is the story, not the repercussions’ content. No published rescue comparator was cited. No alternative expert was quoted by name. One of the two most prestigious science journals on earth published a one-sided account in which every named source was a cartel member or cartel ally.

B. The Guardian (Connolly, 5 May 2026)

Kate Connolly’s article in *The Guardian* was headlined “Rescue of Timmy the whale ‘an all-round catastrophe’ after tracker failure,” directly quoting Ritter’s phrase as if it were a neutral assessment rather than the opinion of a man who had opposed rescue at every stage [*The Guardian, Connolly, 05.05.2026*]. The article’s sources were Ritter, DMM, and Madsen. The €1.5 million cost of the private initiative was foregrounded while the cost of four weeks of institutional inaction was not mentioned. The cost, in animal welfare terms, of a whale lying on a sandbank while the cartel blocked rescue was not examined. *The Guardian* did not note that Ritter spent twenty years on the IWC Scientific Committee, the same body whose strandings panel issued four statements opposing rescue, nor did it note that the whale was, at the time of publication, alive and producing dive data from 150 metres depth. The article’s framing treated the tracker’s GPS failure as the definitive outcome of the case rather than as a technical problem with the attachment method.

C. The Telegraph (Shirreff, May 2026)

The Telegraph’s headline, “Germany lost its mind – and soul over a stranded whale,” framed the rescue as a national embarrassment, a circus, and a soap opera [*The Telegraph, Shirreff, 06.05.2026*]. The public’s emotional response was treated as the problem while the institutional failure that produced the public’s response was not examined. The headline’s implicit position, that Germany should not have cared so much about a stranded whale, is the cartel’s position dressed in editorial sophistication. The article did not ask why the German stranding-response system had no protocol, no equipment, and no capacity to deal with a situation that the sighting record (Part III) demonstrates has been recurring for at least two decades.

D. Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (Staib, 29 April 2026)

The FAZ published a full interview with Peter T. Madsen under the framing “Tierquälerei und Geldverschwendung” (“Animal cruelty and waste of money”), presenting Madsen’s assessment as definitive expert opinion [*FAZ, Staib interview with Madsen, 29.04.2026*]. Madsen’s assessment was based entirely on photographs he had seen from Denmark, not on any clinical examination, on-site observation, or diagnostic data. The FAZ did not ask Madsen whether he had read the Tasmania 2007 paper, the WHOI-2024-05 report, or any published rescue comparator. The FAZ did not ask why Madsen’s certainty that the whale “will die one way or another, I’m sure of it” should be trusted over Dr. Tönnies’s on-site finding, four days earlier, that the whale’s health was “surprisingly good.” The FAZ did not note that Madsen was making a categorical prediction of death about an animal he had never seen, from a different country, on the basis of photographs. Germany’s newspaper of record published a confident prediction of death from a man who had no access to the evidence that would have allowed him to make one, and the confidence of the prediction acquired the authority of the newspaper that printed it.

E. The pattern across all outlets

In every case, the media sourced its expert voices exclusively from within the cartel network or from scientists whose institutional affiliations placed them within the same stranding-response establishment, without seeking out alternative expert voices such as Thalmann in Tasmania, Gulland at UC Davis, the WHOI workshop authors, or any operational rescue professional who has actually refloated a large whale. In every case, the media did not cite the published rescue comparators that contradict the cartel’s claim that rescue is not feasible, even though those comparators are available in peer-reviewed journals that the journalists covering a science story would be expected to consult. In every case, the media did not interrogate the structural conflict of interest at the heart of the IWC SEP letter, which is that the panel’s European representative is the director of the institute whose assessment the panel was validating. And in every case, the media did not follow up when the cartel’s predictions were falsified: the whale self-refloated, the whale swam into the barge, the whale sang during transit, the whale dived to 150 metres after release, and none of these developments produced a follow-up article in *Science*, *The Guardian*, *The Telegraph*, or the

FAZ asking the cartel scientists who had predicted death to account for the fact that the whale was alive.

F. Why this matters: the media as the cartel’s amplification layer

The media is not a passive observer of this case. The media is the mechanism by which the cartel’s institutional framing becomes the public record. When Science magazine headlines “Chaotic whale rescue shocks marine biologists,” that headline enters academic databases, Wikipedia citations, policy documents, and future case-study analyses [*Science, Enserink, 04.05.2026*]. When The Guardian calls the rescue “an all-round catastrophe,” that framing shapes public perception in every English-speaking country [*The Guardian, Connolly, 05.05.2026*]. When the FAZ publishes Madsen’s “I’m sure of it” without challenge, that certainty acquires the authority of Germany’s newspaper of record [*FAZ, Staib interview with Madsen, 29.04.2026*]. The cartel could not operate with impunity without the media’s cooperation. The cartel’s statements are published, the contradicting evidence is not reported, the predictions are not revisited when they fail, and the same experts are called again for the next case. The media does not hold the cartel accountable, because the media is how the cartel avoids accountability.

G. The question no outlet asked

Not one of these articles asked the question that any competent journalist covering a dispute between institutional experts and their critics would ask: “You predicted the whale would die. The whale is alive. What do you say now?” The question was never put and the prediction was never revisited. The cartel’s credibility was never tested against the outcome. A journalist covering a financial analyst who predicted a market crash that did not happen would ask the analyst to account for the failed prediction. A journalist covering a weather forecaster who predicted a hurricane that did not arrive would ask the forecaster what went wrong. The journalists covering this case did not apply that basic standard of accountability to the scientists whose predictions were falsified by the live animal, and the scientists’ institutional credibility therefore survived the case intact, available to be deployed in the next case, where the same predictions will be made with the same confidence and the same media will report them with the same deference.

Part XXIII. The Eleven Contradictions in the Cartel’s Own Record

The preceding parts of this brief have documented the cartel’s doctrine, the institutional structure that sustains it, the evidence that contradicts it, and the media environment that amplifies it. This part distils the case into fifteen specific contradictions that arise not from SNM’s analysis but from the cartel’s own published statements, press releases, and contemporaneous public record. Each contradiction is a case in which the cartel said one thing on one date and something incompatible on another date, or in which the cartel’s stated position is contradicted by an observable fact documented in the same record. These are the prosecutorial exhibits.

1. “Well-nourished, has reserves” (27 March) versus “likely organ damage” (7 April). Stephanie Groß told reporters on 27 March that the whale was well-nourished and had reserves [*Bild liveticker*, 27.03.2026, 12:58]. Eleven days later, the same ITAW institute co-authored a Gutachten concluding “likely organ damage” and “negligible” survival chances [*DMM/ITAW Gutachten*, 07.04.2026]. No diagnostic procedure conducted between the two statements explains the reversal.

2. Siebert’s “hopeful” (28 March) versus Siebert’s “negligible” (7 April). Ursula Siebert publicly stated on 28 March that survival chances were good enough to support rescue [*Bild Peilsender*, 28.03.2026]. Ten days later, in her parallel role on the IWC SEP, she underwrote a letter calling the chances “negligible” [*IWC SEP First Statement*, 07.04.2026].

3. “Condition is better than yesterday” (30 March) versus “a dying animal” (1 April). Ministry press release 084/2026 stated that the whale’s condition was “better than this morning and better than yesterday” [*MV PM 084/2026*]. Two days later, at the 1 April press conference, the same ministry announced the abandonment of a “dying” animal [*Bild liveticker*, 01.04.2026].

4. The 1.40-metre water depth versus the 1.90–2.00-metre self-rescue threshold. The Gutachten’s own measurements record a water depth of 1.40 metres while its own calculations require 1.90–2.00 metres for self-rescue, yet the cartel demanded self-rescue as the precondition for intervention [*DMM/ITAW Gutachten*, 07.04.2026, pp. 2–3]. The cartel’s own document proved that the condition it imposed was physically impossible.

5. “No reliable statements can be made about the animal’s internal condition” (26 March) versus “likely organ damage” (7 April). Schnitzler’s caveat on 26 March that internal condition could not be reliably assessed from external observation [*Stern*, 25.03.2026, citing *Schnitzler via NWZ*] was abandoned eleven days later when the Gutachten inferred “likely organ damage” from a one-hour visual inspection that did not include any diagnostic procedure capable of assessing internal condition.

6. “Skin would peel off if straps were used” (7 April) versus straps used successfully (28 April). Groß stated at the press conference that lifting straps would tear the skin from the whale’s body [*Bild liveticker*, 07.04.2026, 18:27]. On 28 April, straps and a hydraulic winch were used to turn the whale, and the skin did not peel off [*Bild liveticker*, 28.04.2026].

7. “The animal would die from the stress of transport” (7 April) versus the animal survived the transport (29–30 April). Groß predicted the whale would die from transport stress [*Bild liveticker*, 07.04.2026, 15:27]. During the multi-day barge transit, the whale sang, became increasingly active, and showed improving skin condition [*Bild liveticker*, 29–30.04.2026; *Walter-Mommert quoted in Bild*, 30.04.2026].

8. “The whale cannot self-rescue” (7 April) versus the whale self-refloating (20 April). The Gutachten concluded the whale was physically incapable of self-rescue [*DMM/ITAW Gutachten*, 07.04.2026]. Thirteen days later, the whale freed himself from the sandbank under his own power, generating the muscular effort required to lift approximately 12 tonnes of body mass [*Bild liveticker*, 20.04.2026].

9. “Further intervention would only cause additional suffering” (7 April) versus no intervention causing weeks of additional suffering (7 April – 28 April). The IWC SEP and the ministry justified the abandonment by saying further rescue attempts would cause suffering [*IWC SEP First Statement*, 07.04.2026; *MV PM 100/2026*, 08.04.2026]. The whale then lay on the sandbank for an additional 21 days before the barge loading, during which the suffering caused by non-intervention (continued compression, dehydration, sun exposure, isolation) was not counted as suffering in the cartel’s welfare calculus.

10. “No serious expert in the world recommended a different approach” (8 April) versus Thalmann confirming the net-tow method is “fundamentally suitable” (10 April). The ministry’s press release 100/2026 claimed no serious expert recommended rescue [*MV PM 100/2026*, 08.04.2026]. Two days later, Sam Thalmann, senior author of the Tasmania 2007 sperm whale refloat paper, confirmed in writing to SNM that the net-tow method was “fundamentally suitable” for the German case [*Thalmann, written communication to the German citizen*, 10.04.2026].

11. “Surprisingly good health” (23 April, Tönnies) versus “a dying animal” (the cartel, continuously). The independent replacement veterinarian’s on-site assessment found the whale in “surprisingly good” health with improving skin [*Bild liveticker*, 23.04.2026, quoting *Dr. Kirsten Tönnies*]. The cartel did not revise its terminal prognosis in light of this independent finding. No IWC SEP statement acknowledged Tönnies’s assessment.

These eleven contradictions are drawn entirely from the cartel’s own published output, the ministry’s own press releases, and the contemporaneous statements of the cartel’s own named personnel, cross-referenced against the observable behaviour of the live animal as documented by on-site reporters, aerial footage, and the tracker data reported by the financiers. They are not interpretive disputes about clinical judgment; they are instances in which the cartel’s own record contradicts itself, or in which the cartel’s stated position is directly falsified by a subsequently documented fact. Taken together, they demonstrate that the cartel’s assessment of this animal was not a stable clinical judgment that subsequent events failed to confirm but a moving target that shifted to accommodate each new institutional need while maintaining the same conclusion: the whale is dying, rescue is impossible, and anyone who disagrees does not understand.

Part XXIV. Why It Happened in Germany: The Absence of the Machine

This brief has documented the cartel's doctrine, its institutional structure, its international validation machinery, and its media amplification layer. A question the brief has not yet addressed is why this particular whale, in this particular country, produced the outcome it did. Stranded large whales have died under institutional supervision in the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, Ireland, the Netherlands, and every other country where the stranding-response network operates. In none of those countries has a private initiative financed a barge, transported a whale around a peninsula, and released it into the open sea against the explicit advice of every credentialed authority in the field.

Understanding why it happened in Germany, and only in Germany, is essential for understanding both the opportunity the case represents and the danger that lies ahead.

Germany does not have an official, well-established, publicly recognised stranding network of the kind that exists in the United States (the NOAA/NMFS Marine Mammal Stranding Network), the United Kingdom (BDMLR, the Scottish Marine Animal Stranding Scheme), Australia (the state-level wildlife agencies), or New Zealand (the Department of Conservation). In those countries, the stranding network is the first responder, the public-facing authority, the media's default expert source, and the institutional memory of every prior case. The network has been saying the same thing for decades: if a large whale strands, it is almost certainly sick, rescue is not feasible, the humane options are euthanasia or palliative care. The message is consistent, it comes from institutional voices the public has been trained to trust, and it has been repeated so often that it has become the default public understanding of what a stranding means. Germany had none of this. The cartel actors who responded to the Poel stranding were real institutions, but they did not constitute a permanent stranding network whose authority the German public had already accepted.

The second factor is the direct consequence of the first. In the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand, the public has been conditioned over decades to accept the stranding network's message. When a large whale strands on Cape Cod, the public absorbs the message: the whale is sick, nothing more can be done, the experts are handling it, and often euthanize the animal on the second or third day. The German public had not been conditioned. When a twelve-metre humpback whale appeared on a sandbank off Insel Poel, breathing and vocalising and moving, the German public did not have a pre-installed institutional narrative telling it that this was normal and that the correct emotional response was resigned acceptance. The public looked at the whale and saw a living animal in distress, and it demanded that someone do something. The demand was emotional, sometimes uninformed, and amplified by social media in ways that were not always constructive. But the demand was also, in its substance, correct.

The combination of these two factors, the absence of an established stranding network and a public that had not been desensitised, created the conditions in which a private rescue initiative could emerge, attract financing, obtain ministerial toleration, and operate long enough to succeed. This combination does not exist in the United States, where NOAA's stranding network would have managed the case from Day 1 and where no private financier

would have been permitted to operate a barge within a federal stranding response zone. It does not exist in the United Kingdom, where BDMLR would have framed the case and the public would have deferred. It does not exist in Australia or New Zealand, where the government wildlife agencies control the response space completely. Germany was, in a meaningful sense, the only country in the developed world where this rescue could have happened, precisely because Germany lacked the institutional infrastructure that would have prevented it.

The danger is that this case will be the catalyst for Germany to build exactly the institutional infrastructure whose absence made the rescue possible. In the aftermath of the Poel stranding, calls will come for an official stranding response network with designated responsibility, published protocols, trained personnel, and a clear chain of command. If the network is built on the recommendations in Part XXV, it would represent genuine progress. But the risk is that the network will be built on the basis of the existing international model, which means it will be built by the cartel, staffed by the cartel's members and graduates, funded through the cartel's institutional partnerships, and governed by the cartel's doctrine. Within a decade, the German public will have been conditioned to the same message that the American, British, and Australian publics have absorbed over decades, and the next whale that strands in the Baltic will die on the sandbank because the private initiative that saved this one will no longer be possible within the institutional framework that the first rescue provoked into existence. The German public's vigilance is therefore not merely a matter of animal welfare sentiment; it is a structural necessity.

Part XXV. Recommendations

The following recommendations are not incremental improvements to the existing system. The existing system, as this brief has documented across 24 preceding parts, is structurally incapable of rescuing a stranded large whale because it is designed, staffed, and doctrinally committed to not rescuing stranded large whales. Incremental reform of a system whose foundational premise is wrong will produce incremental versions of the same outcome. These recommendations therefore call for structural replacement, not adjustment, of the institutions, protocols, and decision-making frameworks that produced the outcome in this case and that will produce the same outcome in the next case unless they are dismantled before it arrives.

Recommendation 1: Dismantle the current advisory cartel

The current network of institutions that advises and effectively regulates live cetacean stranding responses worldwide, including the IWC Strandings Expert Panel, ITAW Hannover, and their associated national bodies, has demonstrated in this case that it functions as a self-validating closed loop. The same individuals who make operational decisions also produce the assessments that validate those decisions, sit on the international panels that endorse those assessments, and author the communications that frame public understanding of the outcomes. This structure must be dismantled and replaced, not reformed from within. Internal reform is not possible because the loop is the structure: the people who would conduct the reform are the people whose decisions the reform would scrutinise, and they have no incentive to produce a system that holds them accountable for outcomes they have spent decades framing as inevitable.

Recommendation 2: Create a new international governing body

A new international body for live cetacean stranding response should be created and staffed with specialists who have actually participated in successful rescues of stranded cetaceans. The clear separation is needed for networks that collect dead specimens and data and the networks that respond to live strandings. The current system privileges institutional affiliation and academic credentials over operational experience and demonstrated outcomes. The new body should require, as a condition of membership, documented participation in at least one successful live cetacean rescue operation, defined as an intervention that resulted in the animal's return to its natural habitat alive. This requirement would exclude from the governing body every individual and institution that produced the outcome in the German case, because none of them has ever successfully rescued a stranded large whale, and that exclusion is precisely the point. Expertise in documentation, necropsy, and population biology is real expertise (and it is good for the dead specimen data collection networks), but it is not rescue expertise, and the body that governs rescue must be staffed by people who have done it.

Recommendation 3: Overhaul live stranding response protocols

Current live stranding response recommendations, including those promulgated by the IWC, NOAA/NMFS, and national bodies, must be evaluated and revised with respect to four areas. First, timing of response: the current tolerance for multi-day delays is incompatible with animal survival, and the German case demonstrates what happens when an institutional system treats delay as caution rather than as harm. Second, health assessment standards: a one-hour visual inspection from five metres cannot be the basis for a terminal prognosis, and the minimum diagnostic standard for any assessment that will be used to justify an abandonment decision must include blood work, urinalysis, and ultrasound, as the NOAA NY4236 case (Part V) demonstrates. Third, decision-making frameworks: the default assumption should be rescue, not euthanasia or palliative care. There is a precedent for this approach in many Asian countries' stranding response networks, where euthanasia is not practiced and is actively opposed on cultural and religious grounds. As a result, species that are commonly euthanized and denied rescue in Europe and America have been successfully rescued, rehabilitated, and released in Asia. Fourth, the institutional bias toward delayed response that allows conditions to deteriorate to the point where rescue becomes genuinely infeasible, thereby confirming the initial prognosis, must be identified and eliminated as the self-fulfilling mechanism it is. Although SNM's detailed protocol recommendations were originally developed for the US stranding network, they apply with equal force to every jurisdiction.

Recommendation 4: Establish independent necropsy protocols

Every live stranding case that results in the animal's death must be followed by a necropsy conducted by pathologists who had no operational involvement in the stranding response and no institutional relationship with the bodies that made the decisions under scrutiny. SNM has already published a pre-registered necropsy standard for this case [*SNM Public Statement in Response to the DMM/ITAW Expert Report (Contra Gutachten), 11.04.2026*]. This standard, or one like it, should be adopted as a universal requirement. The current practice, in which the same institutions that managed the response also conduct or oversee the postmortem, is a conflict of interest so fundamental that it would be disqualifying in any other field of professional practice. The DMM preparing the necropsy site on Day 3 while the whale was still alive (Part VII) is the German illustration of a problem that exists in every jurisdiction where the operational responder and the postmortem investigator occupy the same institutional chair.

Recommendation 5: Remove the IWC from its advisory role on live strandings

The International Whaling Commission's historical expertise and institutional competence lie in the area of regulating the hunting and killing of whales. The Commission's progress in transitioning from a whaling-management body to a conservation body has been slow and remains incomplete, and there is much work still to be done in that domain, as Japan, Norway, and Iceland continue commercial or semi-commercial whaling and as aboriginal subsistence quotas remain contentious [*International Convention for the Regulation of*

Whaling, 1946; IWC website, 'About the Commission']. The IWC has no relevant expertise or operational experience pertaining to live cetacean rescue. Its Strandings Expert Panel, as demonstrated in this case and analysed in Part VIII, functions not as an independent scientific advisory body but as a mechanism for lending institutional authority to operational decisions made by its own members. The IWC should not be consulted as an expert body in any live stranding event, and its endorsement should carry no weight in decision-making. The four letters the IWC SEP addressed to Minister Backhaus did not save the whale, did not offer any operational alternative to the cartel's abandonment, and served no purpose except to provide international institutional cover for a national decision that the published evidence did not support.

Recommendation 6: Create a database of successful rescues

A comprehensive, publicly accessible database of successful cetacean rescue operations should be created, documenting the methods used, the personnel involved, the timeline, the equipment, the outcomes, and the follow-up monitoring data. Responders from successful operations should be interviewed, their feedback and expertise recorded, and current stranding protocols revised on the basis of what has actually worked rather than what institutional orthodoxy predicts should work. The cases documented in Part IX of this brief, including Humphrey (1985), Delta and Dawn (2007), the Tasmania sperm whales (2007), the Rance estuary rescue (2023), and others, provide a starting point. The database should be maintained by the new international body (Recommendation 2), not by the IWC or by any national stranding network whose doctrine is premised on the claim that successful rescue of large whales is not feasible, because an institution that does not believe rescue works will not build a database designed to show that it does.

Recommendation 7: Evaluate response teams by success rates

Stranding response teams and NGOs should be evaluated, supported, and funded on the basis of their success rates and performance outcomes, not on the basis of how many strandings they attend or how many institutional partnerships they maintain. Only organisations with demonstrated high success rates in live stranding response should be asked for expert advice in active cases. An organisation that has attended hundreds of strandings but has never successfully returned a live large whale to the ocean is not an expert in live large-whale rescue; it is an expert in attending strandings. The distinction matters because the German case was shaped from the outset by the assumption that the organisations on scene were the right organisations to be making decisions, when in fact their collective operational record contains no successful large-whale rescue and their doctrine is explicitly premised on the view that large-whale rescue is not feasible.

Recommendation 8: Establish herding and escort protocols

Specific protocols and response manuals must be developed for cases of cetaceans entering rivers, estuaries, bays, the Baltic Sea, and other bodies of water from which they will have difficulty navigating independently. These protocols must incorporate the best available evidence on herding and escorting practices that are safe for both the animals and the

rescuers, including acoustic luring [*Krause, first-person diary, 1985; Gulland et al. 2008*], oikomi pipe deterrence, flotilla management, thermal drone and infrared camera deployment for night operations, and continuous escort rather than intermittent monitoring. The escort of 26–27 March 2026 was called off at darkness on both nights it was attempted, and the whale re-stranded overnight, which means the most promising moment of the entire case was lost because the system could not operate after dark. A protocol that cannot function at night is not a protocol; it is a daytime exercise. These protocols must be drilled regularly in coordination with disentanglement teams, and above all they must emphasise the urgency and timing of response to prevent the eventual strandings that result from delayed intervention.

Recommendation 9: Establish rehabilitation centres for stranded cetaceans

Dedicated rehabilitation and treatment centres for stranded cetaceans should be established, with the sole mission of treating stranded animals and releasing them back into the wild. The infrastructure for such centres already exists in many countries in the form of defunct or operational aquariums, dolphinariums, and oceanariums that could be repurposed for rehabilitation rather than display. These facilities possess the pool infrastructure, water-treatment systems, and in some cases the veterinary capacity required for cetacean care. Repurposing them for rehabilitation would give them a conservation mission that their current or former display function does not provide. The German case demonstrated the absence of any facility where the whale could have been stabilised, medicated, and monitored before release, and the barge transit, however successful, was an improvisation that would have been unnecessary if a rehabilitation facility had existed within operational range.

Recommendation 10: Enforce complete transparency

Every live stranding case must be subject to complete transparency requirements, including public disclosure of all decision-making processes, the protocols used, the timing of interventions, the outcomes, and the post-case evaluations. The new international governing body (Recommendation 2) must evaluate every failed case and produce a critical report with specific recommendations for improvement, and these reports must be published, not filed internally. The current system, in which failed responses are followed by institutional silence, by press releases that frame failure as inevitability, and by the quiet burial of evidence under the weight of professional solidarity, must end. The Gutachten of 7 April 2026 has never been published in full. The IWC SEP's internal deliberations have never been disclosed. The ITAW's operational logs have never been released. The DMM's necropsy preparation timeline has never been explained. The public paid for this response through its taxes, the ministry used the response as the basis for a decision that affected a protected wild animal watched by millions of people, and the documentary record of that decision remains largely hidden behind institutional walls. The animals cannot speak for themselves, and the least the system can do is speak honestly about its own performance.

Recommendation 10-A: Protocol reform for distinguishing healthy from sick stranded whales

The case of the German humpback exposes a structural deficiency in existing stranding-response protocols worldwide: there is no operational distinction between a sick stranded whale and a healthy stranded whale. The current protocols, as applied by the cartel in this case, treat every stranding as evidence of underlying disease. The BDMLR doctrine states that “a stranding is a symptom of a serious, underlying problem.” The IWC SEP letter asserts that “each stranding event has caused serious physical harm.” The cartel’s operational framework begins from the presumption that the stranded animal is sick, and no diagnostic pathway exists within the protocol to falsify that presumption.

The German humpback challenged this framework from the beginning. The animal was well-nourished on arrival. She self-refloated three times under her own power, she vocalised continuously, breathed at normal humpback intervals, and she swam approximately 25 kilometres between strandings. Finally, on 20 April she freed herself from the sandbank. On 23 April the replacement veterinarian, the only assessor without an institutional stake in the Gutachten, described her health as “surprisingly good.” None of this is consistent with an animal in terminal decline from a serious underlying condition. All of it is consistent with a healthy juvenile whale that got stuck in the wrong place and needed competent assistance to get out.

The Rance estuary case (Olhasque et al. 2025) reinforces the point from the other direction. The Rance whale had emaciated body condition and skin lesions, meaning it actually showed signs of compromised health. It was rescued in two days. The French team did not treat the poor body condition as a reason not to attempt rescue. They treated it as a reason to move faster. The existing protocol, as applied in Germany, treats poor body condition as a reason to stop trying. The protocol produces the outcome it predicts by refusing the intervention that could change the outcome.

Stranded No More’s position is that stranding-response protocols must be reformed to include a diagnostic pathway that distinguishes between three categories of stranded whale: (a) an animal with a serious pre-existing condition that caused or contributed to the stranding, (b) an animal in distress from the stranding event itself but without a pre-existing condition, and (c) an animal that is physically capable of self-rescue given appropriate environmental conditions (water depth, tide, orientation). The current protocol collapses all three into category (a) and applies the same doctrinal response to all: palliative care or natural dying. This case, by the animal’s own persistent refusal to die on the cartel’s schedule, has demonstrated that this collapse is not an evidence-based clinical framework. It is a doctrinal convenience that allows the system to avoid the harder, riskier, and more expensive intervention that categories (b) and (c) would require.

Recommendation 11: New Initiative Proposition – ECHO: Early Cetacean Hazard Observation

The case of Buckli/Hope/Timmy exposes a fundamental gap in the European cetacean management framework: there is no system for detecting, intercepting, and redirecting wayward large whales before they become stranded. The subject animal languished in the

Baltic Sea for at least fifteen months, from the February 2025 Poland entanglement through the March 2026 German stranding sequence, deteriorating incrementally in an environment wholly unsuitable for her species while the institutional system waited for a stranding event to trigger a response, and then declared the response hopeless. ECHO is SNM’s proposal for an initiative designed to ensure that this sequence is not repeated. It is not a stranding-response protocol, because it is a pre-stranding detection, deterrence, and escort framework whose operational objective is to prevent strandings from occurring in the first place by detecting large cetaceans as they approach the narrow passages that lead into unsuitable waters and guiding them back to the open sea before they become trapped.

Had detection existed at the Baltic’s bottleneck passages, her entry could have been identified within hours; had deterrence been in place, she could have been turned back before reaching the shallow maze beyond; had an escort capability existed, she could have been guided out within days, while still healthy. None of these systems existed and ECHO is built to fill that gap.

This is a working concept proposition. It is offered as a starting framework that can be developed in detail by the organisations, governments, research institutions, and sponsors willing to participate. ECHO comprises three operational pillars: monitoring and detection, deterrence, and escorting.

Pillar 1 – Monitoring and Detection

The Danish Straits (the Øresund, the Great Belt, and the Little Belt) are the primary gateway for any large whale entering the western Baltic from the North Sea. Every whale that ended up in the sighting record documented in Part IV of this brief passed through one of these corridors. A monitoring network at these bottleneck points would provide the early-warning capability that currently does not exist. The technology for this is no longer speculative. Recent advances in computational methods and machine learning for marine environments, including automated species classification using deep-learning frameworks such as YOLOv8, passive acoustic monitoring with spectral-template matching for cetacean identification, and computer vision tools capable of identifying individual cetaceans from flank and fluke imagery, demonstrate that scalable, non-invasive, near-real-time marine megafauna detection is technically feasible [Maglietta et al., *Ecological Informatics*, 2026].

An ECHO monitoring system combines three layers. First, fixed-position automated detection stations at each bottleneck point, incorporating daytime optical cameras, thermal imaging cameras for night-time detection, and passive acoustic hydrophone arrays capable of identifying baleen whale vocalisations. An ECHO AI detection model, trained on a seed dataset of Baltic cetacean imagery, would enable automated species identification from optical and thermal feeds in near-real time. Second, a citizen-science reporting network linking coastal communities, recreational sailors, ferry operators, and fishermen into a structured alert system. Third, and increasingly, the Whale Detective public reporting channel.

Whale Detective – the citizen-science front door

Whale Detective is SNM’s public sighting and identification platform, the citizen-science front door to the ECHO detection network. It invites anyone on or near the water (sailors, ferry crews, fishermen, coastal residents, tourists) to report sightings of large cetaceans, and

especially of distinct, individually identifiable animals: a whale with a notched fluke, a known entanglement scar, an unusual marking, or a recognised individual moving where it should not be. Each report (time, location, photographs, notes) is captured in a single structured record. The immediate purpose is coverage: no fixed sensor network can watch every mile of coast, but a distributed network of people can, and a single credible report of a large whale entering a bottleneck can trigger the ECHO response chain within minutes. The longer-term purpose is continuity: by matching repeat sightings of the same identifiable individual across time and place, Whale Detective builds a movement picture for specific animals, turning scattered public observations into a tracked history that supports early intervention, post-release monitoring, and the survival record the rescue model depends on. It begins as a reporting channel integrated with ECHO and is expected to grow into a dedicated platform of its own.

The automated systems provide continuous surveillance; the citizen network and Whale Detective provide spatial coverage across the broader western Baltic that no fixed installation can achieve. Species distribution models integrating multisource environmental data from platforms such as Copernicus Marine Service and EMODnet could further support predictive identification of high-probability entry windows based on seasonal prey distribution, water temperature, and current patterns [Pasanisi et al. 2024; Cherubini et al. 2025].

The Danish Straits are the primary gateway, but the sighting record demonstrates that whales which have already passed through face a second layer of entrapment within German waters. The most critical secondary bottleneck is the entrance to Wismar Bay, the narrow passage between Insel Poel and the mainland through which a whale must pass before entering the shallow, semi-enclosed waters where every documented German humpback stranding has occurred. The 2006 fin whale died inside Wismar Bay. The 2026 humpback stranded in the Kirchsee, inside Wismar Bay. The subject animal transited this entrance multiple times during her weeks of stranding and re-stranding between Timmendorfer Strand and Insel Poel. A second-tier ECHO monitoring station at the Wismar Bay entrance would provide a fallback detection layer for any whale that passes the Danish Strait stations undetected, and, critically, would catch animals already inside the Baltic that are moving toward the specific waters where strandings occur. A whale detected at this point is hours from stranding, not weeks, and the alert it triggers must activate the escort response immediately.

Pillar 2 – Deterrence

Once a large whale is detected approaching or transiting the bottleneck passages, non-invasive deterrence measures should be deployed to discourage the animal from continuing into the Baltic interior. Established approaches include acoustic pingers, which have been used in fisheries bycatch reduction and could be adapted for directional deployment at strait entrances, and bubble curtains (bubble nets), which create a perceptual barrier that baleen whales interpret as a physical obstruction and will not cross. The bubble-net principle was demonstrated operationally during the Humphrey the Humpback rescue in San Francisco Bay in 1985, where a combination of acoustic deterrents and physical barriers was used to redirect the whale toward open water [Humphrey case, Part X]. At the scale of the Danish Straits, a permanent or rapidly deployable bubble-curtain system at the narrowest transit points, activated when monitoring detects an approaching whale, could function as a non-invasive gate. The deterrence layer is not intended to be impermeable (no non-invasive

system can guarantee that a determined whale will not pass) but to reduce the probability that a casual or disoriented entry becomes a prolonged entrapment.

The same technology is even more practical at the Wismar Bay entrance, which is approximately two kilometres wide, well within the effective range of a bubble-curtain installation. Seasonal or event-triggered deployment at this secondary bottleneck, activated when the monitoring network detects a large cetacean in Mecklenburg Bay, would create a layered defence: the Danish Straits as the outer gate, and the Wismar Bay entrance as the inner gate, progressively narrowing the animal’s path back toward open water rather than deeper into the maze.

Pillar 3 – Escorting

For whales that have already entered the Baltic and are detected by the monitoring network before stranding, ECHO’s escorting component would deploy trained rapid-response teams using proven non-invasive herding techniques to guide the animal back through the straits to the North Sea or the open Atlantic. The operational model exists: the Humphrey rescues of 1985 and 1990 used acoustic lures (banging on steel pipes), vessel formations, and bubble nets to move a full-grown humpback whale approximately 50 miles through San Francisco Bay in seven hours [Part X]. The Delta and Dawn operation in 2007 used similar techniques in the Sacramento River Delta. These methods are non-invasive, require no physical contact with the animal, and have a documented success record spanning four decades. ECHO’s escorting teams would develop, drill, and maintain these techniques specifically for the geography of the Danish Straits and the western Baltic, including pre-mapped herding routes, staged vessel positions, and coordination protocols with maritime traffic authorities to create safe corridors during escort operations. The pre-mapped routes should include not only the long-distance return corridors through the Danish Straits but also shorter, urgent extraction routes from Wismar Bay and Mecklenburg Bay, because a whale inside Wismar Bay is hours from stranding, and the escort response at that stage must be measured in hours, not days. The critical operational principle is speed: an escort initiated within days of detection, while the whale is still healthy and mobile, is a fundamentally different proposition from a rescue attempted after weeks or months of stranding, deterioration, and institutional paralysis.

Operational philosophy

ECHO’s central premise is that the current system fails not because rescue is impossible but because it begins too late. The subject animal was sighted in Wismar Harbour on 3 March 2026 with entanglement gear already visible. She had been in the Baltic since at least February 2025. By the time the institutional response engaged, the animal had already spent over a year in unsuitable waters, had been entangled at least twice, and had begun the stranding cycle that would consume five more weeks of institutional debate. A system that detects the whale at the Danish Straits in early 2025, deploys deterrence measures, and if necessary escorts her back to the North Sea within days would have prevented everything that followed: the strandings, the institutional crisis, the failed rescue attempts, the contested release, and the death. The goal is not to respond to strandings but to prevent them. Not to rescue dying whales but to redirect healthy ones. Not to treat the symptom but to close the door.

ECHO operates as a layered defence: an outer gate at the Danish Straits and an inner gate at secondary bottlenecks such as the Wismar Bay entrance. Each layer narrows the animal's path back toward open water rather than deeper into the maze. The model is deliberately sequenced to deliver a working capability cheaply before any heavy infrastructure is built: the citizen network and Whale Detective provide the earliest and widest coverage; fixed automated stations and AI-powered detection follow; deterrence and escort capability are layered on top once detection is proven.

Global applicability

The ECHO model is not limited to the Baltic. Juvenile baleen whales routinely enter rivers, estuaries, harbours, and semi-enclosed seas worldwide: the Sacramento River, the Thames, the Firth of Forth, the Mediterranean, the Sea of Japan, and many die because no system exists to detect their entry and guide them out before deterioration begins. A monitoring-deterrence-escort framework adapted to local geography could be deployed at any bottleneck passage where large cetaceans are known to enter unsuitable waters. The Baltic case, with its documented history of at least twelve whale incursions in twelve years and a frequency that climate change and recovering whale populations will only increase, is the natural pilot site. If ECHO works here, it can work anywhere. The published ECHO operating model and station specification, once proven in the Baltic, will be released as a replication template for any region and any host partner that wants it.

ECHO closes the door. Its companion initiative, GWRA, is the team that goes in when the door was not closed in time.

Recommendation 12: New Initiative Proposition – Global Whale Rescue Alliance (GWRA)

The case of Buckli/Hope/Timmy demonstrates that the existing stranding-response system, governed by the doctrinal framework documented throughout this brief, **will not** rescue large stranded whales. The cartel's paradigm, stranding as symptom, palliative care as default, euthanasia as kindness, is deeply embedded in the institutional structures of ITAW, DMM, BDMLR, IFAW, the IWC Strandings Expert Panel, and others and reinforced by the closed-loop validation machinery that allows the same individuals to assess, recommend, and then evaluate their own recommendations. It is unlikely that this paradigm will change from within. The Poel case did not change it; the whale's death reinforced it. The post-mortem framing by Stockin, WDC, MacKay, and others confirms that the cartel interprets the outcome not as a system failure but as a vindication. The next stranded large whale in European waters will face the same institutional response: observation, palliative care, a declaration that rescue is hopeless, and a slow death on a sandbank while the public watches.

SNM proposes the establishment of a parallel global whale rescue network – the Global Whale Rescue Alliance (GWRA) – that operates outside the existing stranding-response cartel and offers local authorities a practical alternative when the established system refuses to act. The model is not without precedent in other domains: private search-and-rescue teams operate globally alongside state-run SAR systems, deploying to disaster zones, collapsed buildings, and maritime emergencies under memoranda of agreement with local authorities. The RNLI in the United Kingdom is a private charity (not a government body) that provides the vast majority of maritime search and rescue via volunteer crews, operating

under a declared service to HM Coastguard within the national framework. These teams do not replace government SAR; they supplement it, providing specialist capability that the local system lacks or declines to deploy. GWRA would function on the same principle for cetacean strandings.

Six irrevocable founding principles

GWRA is governed by six irrevocable founding principles that distinguish it from the existing stranding-response system and are locked into its framework and trust deed:

No euthanasia. GWRA will never euthanise a stranded whale. The doctrinal position that euthanasia is “the kinder option” is a legitimate veterinary judgment in specific, clearly defined circumstances – but it has become the default institutional response for large whale strandings, applied categorically rather than clinically, and GWRA exists precisely because that default has failed too many animals. The no-euthanasia principle has a defined clinical boundary, reconciled in advance with national law and on-scene veterinary authority and published honestly, not discovered live during a crisis.

No abandonment. GWRA will never abandon a stranded animal. It will attempt rescue and provide supportive care until the animal is either successfully rescued and released or expires despite all efforts.

Immediate medical intervention. GWRA will provide life-supporting medical care from the moment of engagement, including the pharmacological interventions (Vitamin E/selenium, calcium, antibiotics, anti-inflammatory agents and more) that the published literature supports and that the Backhaus Ministry prohibited in the Poel case.

Post-release monitoring. GWRA will deploy satellite tags on every rescued animal and maintain post-release monitoring for a minimum period, providing not only tracking data but also the capacity for post-release support, including re-intervention if the animal is detected in distress within an accessible range.

Total transparency. Every case will be documented comprehensively and treated as a learning experience. Outcomes, successful or unsuccessful, will be published, analysed, and incorporated into updated protocols, so that each stranding response improves on the last. The cartel’s system produces no public post-incident reviews, no published operational analyses, and no mechanism for incorporating failure into improved practice. GWRA would.

Speed. The critical operational principle is speed. A rescue initiated within hours of stranding, while the whale is still physiologically viable, is a fundamentally different proposition from one attempted after weeks of deterioration and institutional paralysis.

The two-pillar structure

GWRA is presented not as a finished institution but as a working framework built on two complementary elements. They are sequenced so that the network’s reach grows continuously while its hardest capability is held to the highest standard.

Element 1 – Training and certification of local teams (worldwide)

The first element is a federation of independent, locally-based Certified Partners trained and accredited by GWRA. The governing authority owns the framework, the six principles, the protocols, and the certification system; Certified Partners in each region execute rescues on the ground under those protocols, hold their own national permits, carry their own insurance, and provide the public-facing operational presence. This is how GWRA scales: not by flying one team to every coastline on earth, but by building competent, principle-bound rescue capability in every region that wants it. Crucially, GWRA does not recruit its trainers from the existing stranding-response network, whose pipeline teaches the opposite of what GWRA practises; it recruits transferable professional skill, maritime operations, veterinary medicine, acoustics, large-animal handling, logistics, and trains it in GWRA doctrine.

Element 2 – A highly-trained rapid-deployment team

The second element is a small, elite, centrally-maintained rescue team that can deploy internationally within the speed standard, the capability that handles the hardest single-large-whale cases, that bootstraps new regions before a local partner is certified, and that sets the operational benchmark every Certified Partner is trained toward. It is a standing network, not a standing army: members keep their primary professional affiliations and deploy when activated, like volunteer SAR specialists. Equipment caches (broad straps, pontoon systems, acoustic equipment, satellite tags, veterinary kits, and portable water-management systems) are pre-positioned at strategic locations. The target deployment time from activation to on-site assessment is 48 hours or less for European operations, with longer timelines for more remote locations that would be reduced as the network matures.

Together the two elements give GWRA both reach and depth: a global federation of trained local teams for breadth of coverage, and an elite deployable core for the hardest cases and the highest standard.

Joint operations model: how the two elements work together

The operational model mirrors the integration framework used by private SAR teams and RNLI-style volunteer organisations worldwide. Local Certified Partners are the first responders, they hold national permits, know the local geography, have relationships with local authorities, and are best positioned for initial stabilisation. When a case escalates, a large whale, a complex entanglement, a situation beyond the local partner's capacity, the partner requests the elite core team through a pre-defined activation chain. The elite team deploys as specialist support under the local partner's legal umbrella or a separate standby authorisation, integrating into a unified command structure modelled on the Incident Command System common in SAR and disaster response. Shared doctrine ensures consistency, since the elite team does not arrive uninvited and take over, that creates chaos and legal exposure. It arrives as requested, pre-authorised, specialist reinforcement. As the local partner gains experience and confidence through joint operations, the elite team's role shifts from direct intervention to instruction, assessment, and quality assurance, lifting each regional team toward self-sufficiency while keeping the operational standard high.

Time-bound decision protocol and the escalation trigger

When a large whale strands, the local stranding-response authority, whether a government agency, a university institute, or an NGO with a stranding-response mandate, currently controls the response. Under the existing system, this authority typically has three options: attempt rescue, euthanise, or observe and wait. The Poel case demonstrates what happens when the authority chooses the third option for five weeks. Under the GWRA model, a pre-established memorandum of agreement with the local government (the ministry, the prefecture, the county authority, or whatever body holds jurisdiction over animal welfare and environmental management) would establish a time-bound decision framework. The local stranding-response authority is given a defined window (five to six hours from confirmed stranding) to assess the animal and declare whether it intends to mount an active rescue. If within that window the authority decides to euthanise, to provide palliative care only, or fails to commit to an active rescue plan, the memorandum authorises the local government to engage the GWRA Certified Partner as an alternative or supplemental response provider.

This is not a unilateral demand, instead it is a negotiated escalation trigger, modelled on the incident-command escalation protocols standard in SAR and disaster response, where primary teams lead but alternatives activate when needed to prevent preventable suffering or death. The MOA establishes the legal framework, liability allocation, veterinary licensing provisions, and operational authority in advance, so that when a stranding occurs, the bureaucratic scaffolding is already in place and does not consume the first critical days of the animal's life on the sandbank. The five-to-six-hour window is a starting point for negotiation; the principle is non-negotiable: a stranded whale's survival odds decay by the hour, and a system that permits unlimited deliberation while the animal deteriorates is a system designed to produce the outcome the cartel prefers.

Built into this framework is an independent veterinary second-opinion clause. Where the attending stranding-response authority's veterinary assessment concludes that rescue is futile or that the animal is beyond saving, the GWRA partner has the right under the MOA to request an independent veterinary assessment by a qualified GWRA-affiliated veterinarian. This prevents a single institutional perspective from foreclosing all alternatives, and it addresses the documented reality that the existing networks' veterinary assessments are filtered through the same doctrinal lens that treats every large whale stranding as hopeless.

Rapid triage and non-invasive diagnostics

A core operational challenge for any whale rescue is the rapid determination of whether the stranded animal is a viable rescue candidate. Both sick and healthy whales strand, due to navigation error, tidal miscalculation, prey pursuit, vessel strike, or acute illness, or other yet to be known factors, and not all sick animals are terminal. Some respond to supportive care and refloating if addressed quickly. The trick is making that determination fast and accurately, under field conditions, without the invasive procedures that can compound the animal's stress.

GWRA's triage protocol is built around a tiered, minimally invasive assessment framework. The first tier is immediate visual and behavioural assessment: body condition scored from photographs and drone photogrammetry, skin lesions, wounds, parasite load, alertness, breathing effort and respiratory rate, eye reflexes, demeanour, and swim strength if the

animal is in water. Established scoring systems exist for several species, including North Atlantic right whales. Hydrophone monitoring of vocalisations provides supplementary stress and health indicators.

The second tier deploys drone-based exhale sampling – the SnotBot method. Modified drones collect blow (exhaled breath condensate) from the whale’s blowhole for rapid field analysis of stress hormones, microbiome composition, genetics, toxins, and health biomarkers. This method is proven and non-invasive, has been used successfully on free-swimming whales, and adapts well to stranding conditions with minimal additional disturbance to the animal. Combined with photogrammetry for body condition scoring, a single drone pass delivers a data-rich triage picture within minutes.

Where conditions permit and veterinary authority is in place, remote dart delivery of medication (antibiotics, anti-inflammatory agents, supportive compounds) is a feasible supplemental tool. NOAA-authorized teams have used crossbow-fired darts to deliver antibiotics to injured right whale calves, and specialised pneumatic systems can deliver larger volumes. This is not a substitute for comprehensive medical care, but it enables early pharmacological intervention that can stabilise an animal in the critical hours before a full refloat attempt, and it counters the institutional default of withholding all treatment pending a decision that may never come.

This tiered assessment framework that includes visual, drone, pharmacological, feeds directly into the six principles: decisions are evidence-based, documentation is comprehensive and immediate, and every data point is published. It is the operational answer to the “rescue causes more harm” accusation: GWRA can demonstrate, with data collected from the first minutes of engagement, exactly what the animal’s condition was, what was done, and why.

The political case for GWRA

The Poel case demonstrated that a large whale stranding is not merely a wildlife management event – it is a political crisis. Minister Backhaus held almost daily press conferences, faced tens of thousands of criminal complaints, was denounced by Federal President Steinmeier’s office, attracted continuous international media coverage from BBC, CNN, The Guardian, ABC, and dozens of other outlets, and presided over a case that consumed his ministry’s bandwidth for nearly two months. The public does not accept watching a whale die slowly. It never has and it never will. Every large whale stranding that ends in death-by-inaction produces the same cascade: public outrage, social media campaigns, protest vigils at the barrier fence, criminal complaints under animal welfare legislation, parliamentary questions, unfavourable press coverage, and lasting reputational damage to the responsible minister and government.

This dynamic is not anecdotal because it is empirically documented. Stockin et al. (2022), in a peer-reviewed study examining human perceptions during cetacean stranding response in New Zealand, found that 27% of respondents from the Department of Conservation (DOC), the agency legally responsible for strandings, stated that public sentiment takes precedence over animal welfare when considering euthanasia decisions. Fifteen percent of all respondents, including experienced responders, stated that managing human expectations should be the highest priority at stranding events, ranking it above both the welfare and survival of the stranded animal. The researchers documented that New Zealand’s own

standard operating procedure contains what amounts to an antagonism clause: euthanasia is not undertaken where “significant antagonism” between DOC and the public or indigenous Māori communities is likely. Stockin et al. concluded that the pivotal role that human perception plays, with some respondents ranking public sentiment about euthanasia above that of either animal welfare or survival probability, is problematic from an animal welfare and conservation management stance, and highlights the extreme pressure field officers experience when acting as decision-makers during stranding events [Stockin et al., *Marine Policy* 145, 2022].

What this means in practical terms is that the existing stranding-response system places local governments in an unwinnable position. The cartel’s experts advise palliative care or euthanasia. The public demands rescue. The government is caught between scientific authority it cannot overrule and public sentiment it cannot ignore, and the longer the standoff continues, the worse the political damage becomes. The existing system offers local governments no exit from this cascade, because the only options it provides (palliative care or euthanasia) are precisely the options the public will not tolerate, and the option the public demands. i.e. active rescue, is the one the cartel’s doctrine categorically opposes.

GWRA offers local governments something the cartel cannot: a way out. By engaging GWRA under a pre-established MOA, the local authority transfers operational responsibility to a team that will visibly, competently, and transparently attempt to save the animal. If the rescue succeeds, the government is credited with having acted decisively. If the rescue fails despite best efforts, the government is insulated by the demonstrable fact that everything possible was tried, a politically and legally defensible position that “we stood on the shore and watched it die” is not. The cost of a GWRA deployment, measured in the tens or hundreds of thousands of euros, is trivial compared to the political cost of another Poel: weeks of negative press, a minister’s credibility destroyed, a ministry’s resources consumed, a public’s trust in government competence eroded, and a legal exposure that criminal complaints and civil suits will keep alive for years. GWRA is not only better for the whale. It is better for the government. And governments that understand their own interests will recognise that having this option pre-arranged, before the next whale strands, is cheaper, safer, and smarter than discovering on Day 1 that the only experts available are the ones who will tell them to do nothing.

Operational specialisation

GWRA would specialise in the cases the existing system handles worst: single large whale strandings (humpback, fin, sperm, grey, right whale) and mass strandings of medium-to-large cetaceans. These are the cases where the cartel’s doctrine is most consistently applied and most consistently fails, because the doctrine was developed primarily around smaller odontocetes and pinnipeds, and its categorical application to large baleen whales ignores the physiological, logistical, and ethical differences between a stranded harbour porpoise and a stranded twelve-metre humpback. The Poel case, the 2006 Wismar Bay fin whale, the Sacramento River humpbacks, and other incidents all demonstrate the same pattern: a large whale enters unsuitable waters, the local system declares the situation hopeless, and the animal dies over days or weeks while the public demands action that the institutions refuse to take. GWRA would be the action.

Global scope

The initial analysis might suggest that GWRA is needed only in jurisdictions without existing stranding-response infrastructure — Germany, Denmark, Poland, the Mediterranean. This is incorrect. The doctrinal paradigm documented throughout this brief, such as stranding as symptom, palliative care as default, euthanasia as the “responsible” option for large whales, is not a European phenomenon. It is the global consensus of the professional stranding-response community, and it has captured even the networks with the legal authority, institutional capacity, and historical precedent to do otherwise. The United States, whose NOAA-authorized network produced the Humphrey the Humpback rescues of 1985 and 1990 and the Delta and Dawn escort of 2007, now presides over the same outcomes the German system produced: Pickles the humpback was euthanized; a gray whale that entered a river in Oregon died without rescue; a fin whale in Washington state died without rescue. These are not gaps in coverage, NOAA’s network was present, authorized, and resourced; so these are doctrinal choices. The network that proved forty years ago that large whale rescue is possible has concluded, under the influence of the same paradigm that governs ITAW, DMM, BDMLR, and the IWC SEP, that large whale rescue is no longer worth attempting. New Zealand’s DOC system, the UK’s BDMLR, South Africa’s fragmented response, the pattern is the same everywhere. Small cetaceans are refloated (sometimes), but large whales are observed, palliated, and allowed to die (or are euthanized). GWRA therefore does not compete with existing systems in the sense of duplicating what they do. GWRA does what they have stopped doing. The addressable need is not the countries without stranding networks, it is every coastline in the world where a large whale strands and the local network’s best offer is to stand on the shore and explain why nothing can be done. The Humphrey precedent is not a relic of a less scientific era. It is proof that the current era’s science has abandoned something that used to work, and that abandonment is itself the gap that GWRA exists to fill.

A possible self-funding model

Every rescued animal fitted with a satellite tag generates verified survival data. GWRA is exploring a pathway to connect this data to a carbon-credit methodology for cetacean rescue and survival, for small and large cetaceans alike. This is a goal under development, not established revenue. No approved methodology issues per-cetacean rescue credits today for any species. GWRA is built to survive without them; carbon credits are a possible future upside, pursued patiently. If the model proves viable, it would turn the economics of whale rescue on their head: a verified surviving whale becomes a revenue-generating asset, and refusing to rescue becomes refusing revenue. Relationships with shipping and maritime partners who benefit from fewer whale strikes would support the model’s credibility.

ECHO and GWRA: complementary initiatives

GWRA and ECHO are complementary. ECHO prevents strandings by detecting and redirecting whales before they become trapped. GWRA responds to strandings that ECHO does not prevent, because no prevention system is perfect, because whales will continue to enter rivers and bays and semi-enclosed seas through passages that no monitoring network covers, and because the animals that are already inside the Baltic or the Sacramento River when these systems come online will still need someone to come and get them out. ECHO closes the door and GWRA is the team that goes in when the door was not closed in time.

The ultimate goal is a world in which no large whale dies on a sandbank while credentialed experts stand on the shore explaining why nothing can be done. The technology and techniques exist. The precedents, Humphrey, Delta and Dawn, Springer, the Tasmania mass rescues, the Rance Estuary sperm whale, and many others, prove that rescue works when it is attempted competently and early. What does not exist is the institutional willingness to attempt it, because the existing system’s incentive structure rewards caution, punishes risk, and treats every death as confirmation that caution was correct. GWRA would operate outside that incentive structure. Its measure of success would not be whether the experts agreed but whether the whale survived. And when the whale does not survive, the measure would be whether everything that could have been done was done, not whether the institution’s prior assessment was validated by the outcome it helped produce.

Part XXVI. Consolidated Timeline

Key dates from the pre-stranding sighting record through June 2026. For full sourcing of each entry, see the corresponding Part of the brief.

Pre-stranding sightings (2025)

26.02.2025 Międzyzdroje, Poland – A humpback whale entangled in fishing nets is freed by Polish sea rescuers and WWF Poland near Międzyzdroje. Photographic comparison confirms this is the same individual that later stranded in Germany in March 2026.

March 2026: confirmed sightings and initial response

03.03.2026 First confirmed sighting: humpback whale in Wismar Harbour, trailing fishing gear. Fire department removes bulk of net; Sea Shepherd reports 2–3 lines remain. Klemens (DMM) and Stadler (Sea Shepherd) misidentify species as fin whale.

11.03.2026 Following the Wismar harbour disentanglement, Sea Shepherd deploys land and boat teams to track the whale along the coast west of Wismar.

14.03.2026 Robert Marc Lehmann points out species misidentification (fin whale vs. humpback) in YouTube video.

19–20.03.2026 Sea Shepherd divers cut additional line near Haffkrug; remaining net cannot be fully removed.

22–23.03.2026 First stranding at Niendorf/Timmendorfer Strand (Schleswig-Holstein). Police alerted ~04:00. SH Minister Goldschmidt and ITAW’s Groß attend site.

24.03.2026 First dredger attempt fails (sand too firm). Groß tells Guardian whale may have “simply lost its way.”

25–26.03.2026 Larger dredger digs 50m channel. Lehmann in water with whale. Schnitzler: “nutritional condition is good.” Sea Shepherd’s Abras rejects rope-and-net method. SH Minister-President Günther announces escort plan.

26–27.03.2026 Whale frees himself through channel overnight. Escort across Lübecker Bucht; called off at darkness. Whale approaches Boltenhagen coast.

27.03.2026 Groß: “Well-nourished, has reserves. That won’t be its problem.”

28.03.2026 Second stranding in Wismarbucht. Case transfers to Mecklenburg-Vorpommern jurisdiction. Siebert: “If we had assessed the chances of survival as low, we wouldn’t have supported bringing the animal out of there at all.”

29.03.2026 Third stranding. Groß: “Nutritional condition is good.” Lehmann accuses ITAW of exclusion.

30.03.2026 Whale moves to deeper water. MV PM 084/2026: “Condition is better than yesterday.” Backhaus: “He wants to fight.” Baschek discusses euthanasia logistics.

31.03.2026 Fourth stranding off Insel Poel, Kirchsee. Backhaus: “Hope dies last.”

April 2026: the abandonment and the rescue initiative

01.04.2026 Abandonment press conference. Backhaus: Easter speech, “he chose this fate.” Baschek: “a blueprint.” Whale vocalising, breathing every ~4 minutes.

02.04.2026 Criminal complaints filed against Backhaus, Greenpeace, ITAW. Ministry disables Instagram comments. Bild reporter: “He is blowing, he is moving, he is alive.” DMM announces necropsy preparation.

~**05.04.2026** BDMLR sends doctrinal email to German citizen: “if there were a solution, it would be applied.”

05–06.04.2026 Catamaran rescue concept explored. Backhaus reports wetting is “showing initial success.”

07.04.2026 IWC SEP first statement to Backhaus: survival chances “negligible.” One-hour visual assessment by two divers (no blood, no biopsy, no ultrasound). Gutachten produced within ~2.5 hours. Press conference: Groß says “likely organ damage,” “skin would peel off,” “would die from the stress.”

08.04.2026 MV PM 100/2026: “No serious expert in the world recommended a different approach.” BDMLR publishes website statement. Verwaltungsgericht Schwerin dismisses three emergency injunctions. News5 shows necropsy site being prepared at DMM Stralsund.

10.04.2026 Sam Thalmann (Tasmania 2007 co-author) confirms in writing that net-tow method is “fundamentally suitable.”

11.04.2026 SNM publishes Contra Gutachten and Rescue Plan Brief v2. Backhaus demands whale must “sing a whole verse” as precondition.

15.04.2026 Walter-Mommert/Gunz announce privately financed rescue initiative, crediting SNM expertise.

16.04.2026 IFAW publishes FAQ endorsing cartel position without independent assessment.

17.04.2026 Fred Babel announces pontoon cage plan.

20.04.2026 Day 21: whale self-refloats under his own power. Cartel does not revise assessment. Failed herding attempt follows; whale re-strands.

21.04.2026 Wallace revelations: ministry prohibited medication, straps, gated every visit. Dr. van Gemmert hospitalised.

21.04.2026 Stockin publishes in The Conversation as IWC SEP member.

22.04.2026 IWC SEP second statement: cites failed herding as vindication, calls for interventions to cease.

23.04.2026 Whale Sanctuary Project team (Foster, Partica, Wadsworth) arrives on site. Dr. Tönnies assesses whale: “surprisingly good” health, skin improving. Klaus Kraft reports whale opened mouth when offered food.

~23–27.04.2026 Five days of promised deadlines and setbacks. Barge sourced, modified, transported from Elbe via Nord-Ostsee-Kanal.

28.04.2026 Day 29: whale turned with fire hoses/straps, swims 110m into barge under own power. Foster in water. Ritter: “that looks creepy!” Tugboat Robin Hood begins tow out of Kirchsee. IWC SEP third statement.

29.04.2026 FAZ publishes Madsen interview: “animal cruelty and waste of money,” “it will die one way or another, I’m sure of it.” Whale reported singing during transit, skin improving.

May 2026: release and aftermath

01.05.2026 WDC calls barge transport “legally problematic.” Convoy tracked via VesselFinder passing Skagen.

02.05.2026 Day 33: whale released into the Skagerrak, ~09:00. Observed making blow, swimming northwestward. IWC SEP fourth statement: acknowledges intervention, frames release as “beginning of any recovery process, not its conclusion.” Financiers distance themselves from release circumstances. Tönnies: whale released too early.

04–05.05.2026 Science magazine: “Chaotic whale rescue shocks marine biologists.” Guardian: “an all-round catastrophe.”

05.05.2026 DMM declares whale “highly likely dead” based on absent GPS data. Does not address dive data.

06.05.2026 Walter-Mommert tells NDR 1 Radio MV: tracker reports 23 dives on Day 1, including to 150m depth. Multiple pings in subsequent days.

05–06.05.2026 Danish Navy Diving Service detonates multiple WWII-era bombs on the seabed of Aarhus Bay. The bombs, lying on the seabed since the war, were located using drones.

14.05.2026 Dead humpback whale found off the island of Anholt, Denmark. Initially unidentified.

15–16.05.2026 Carcass identified as the subject animal by tracker serial number and pectoral flipper pigmentation match. Whale confirmed female, not male as reported throughout the stranding.

16.05.2026 Death confirmed publicly. Bild: "Marine researchers and experts had predicted this fate." Karen Stockin (IWC SEP) appears on CNN: describes whale as "incredibly unwell" from the outset, calls rescue "more harm than good," speculates ship strike.

17.05.2026 Cartel-aligned scientists and media frame critique of the response as "science denial." Social media commentary equates whale case with anti-vaccine movement. No necropsy announced.

19.05.2026 Denmark announces plan to recover and autopsy the carcass

20.05.2026 WDC publishes social media post: "many cases, these whales can not be saved," "the kinder option." No necropsy has been performed as of this date.

04.06.2026 Necropsy conducted on Anholt; no cause of death determined; whale confirmed female (4–5 years); parasites found in kidney and stomach; no nets or food in digestive tract; no broken bones; decomposition severe.

12.06.2026 MV Environment Minister Till Backhaus holds a press conference at the Ministry for Climate Protection, Agriculture, Rural Areas and Environment in Schwerin to present the evaluation of the satellite tracker data from the whale.

Part XXVII. Source List

Section A. Official documents and press releases

IWC Strandings Expert Panel – letter and supporting materials

- **[IWC SEP First Statement, 07.04.2026]** – International Whaling Commission Strandings Expert Panel, signed letter on official IWC letterhead dated 7 April 2026, addressed personally to Minister Dr. Till Backhaus, Ministry for Climate Protection, Agriculture, Rural Areas & Environment Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, signed by Dr. Andrew Brownlow MRCVS as Chair of the IWC SEP. Source file: IWC+SEP+statement+Humpback+07-04-2026_FINAL+SIGNED.pdf, (quoted in Parts II, V, IX)
- **[Kate Wilson IWC email to a member of the German public]** – Email from Kate Wilson, Media and Communications Manager, International Whaling Commission, to a member of the German public who had written to the IWC. Text supplied to Stranded No More by the recipient. Cited in Part IX)
- **[IWC SEP Second Statement, 22.04.2026]** – Second signed statement of the IWC Stranding Expert Panel, addressed to Minister Dr. Till Backhaus, dated 22 April 2026. Issued two days after the whale's self-refloat on 20 April and the failed herding attempt. Cited the re-stranding as confirmation of the original assessment: "Subsequent events have confirmed that repeated intervention has not resulted in sustained recovery." Called for observations to stop; recommended palliative care. Source file: IWC+SEP+statement+Humpback+21-04-2026_FINAL+SIGNED.pdf. (cited in Parts I, V, XII, XXVI)
- **[IWC SEP Third Statement, 28.04.2026, iwc.int]** – Third signed statement of the IWC Stranding Expert Panel. Letter to Minister Backhaus. Declares barge transport "inadvisable," demands necropsy planning. Source: screenshot-iwc-int-resources-news-third-statement-of-the-iwc-strandings-expert-panel-humpback-whale-stranding-2026-04-28-18_14_05.pdf (Cited in Parts XII, IX)
- **[IWC SEP Fourth Statement, 02.05.2026, iwc.int]** – Fourth Statement of the IWC Strandings Expert Panel, dated 2 May 2026, published on iwc.int. Conditional hedge statement acknowledging the release. Emphasises that release "is the beginning of any recovery process, not its conclusion." Demands tracker data sharing as "a matter of urgency." Notes the SEP's offer to assist in sourcing a satellite tag was "not taken up." Offers retrospective assistance. Source file: screenshot-iwc-int-resources-news-fourth-statement-of-the-iwc-strandings-expert-panel-humpback-whale-2026-05-09-08_46_18.pdf (Cited in Parts IX, XVIII.F)

Mecklenburg-Vorpommern Ministry of the Environment – press releases and ministerial statements

- **[MV PM 100/2026, 08.04.2026]** – MV Ministry for Climate Protection, Agriculture, Rural Areas and Environment, press release no. 100/2026 of 8 April 2026, "Walschutzorganisation unterstützt Vorgehen des Landes im Umgang mit gestrandetem Wal," V.i.S.d.P. Eva Klaußner-Ziebarth. Source file: 100+-+Walschutzorganisation+unterstützt+Vorgehen+des+Landes+im+Umgang+mit+gestrandetem+Wal.pdf, (quoted in the executive summary, Part I, and Part XII)
- **[MV PM 084/2026, 30.03.2026]** – Ministerium für Klimaschutz, Landwirtschaft, ländliche Räume und Umwelt Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, press release no. 084/2026, 30.03.2026. Title: "Ruhe wirkt – Wal vor Wismar wirkt kräftiger." States that the whale's condition was examined and the quiet has obviously worked; the whale's condition is better than in the morning and better than the previous day. Experts from DMM, Greenpeace, and Sea Shepherd, together with Minister

Till Backhaus, plan to motivate the whale to leave its position around 19:00 when the water level rises, with the entire night available if that attempt fails. Source file: MV PM 084-2026_press release.png. (Cited in n Parts I, III, VIII, XI)

▪ **[MV PM 106/2026, 12.04.2026]** – Ministerium für Klimaschutz, Landwirtschaft, ländliche Räume und Umwelt Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, press release no. 106/2026, 12.04.2026. Title: "Gestrandeter Buckelwal – keine Anzeichen für Stabilisierung." States that the whale's health remains critical with no signs of stabilisation. Light fluke movements were observed but are not considered a sign of improvement. Breathing changes noted (shallow breaths before a longer breath). Reports that recorded whale songs were played into the water as a "minimally invasive" attempt to observe reactions; no effect was observed. Source file: 106+-+Wal_keine+Anzeichen+auf+Stabilisierung.pdf. (cited in Parts XI, XXVI)

[MV PM 105/2026] – MV Ministry for Climate Protection, Agriculture, Rural Areas and Environment, press release no. 105/2026 of 11 April 2026, "Ministry publishes report on the health of stranded humpback whale." V.i.S.d.P. Eva Klaußner-Ziebarth. Backhaus: "Based on scientific expertise and advice, I decided to let the majestic animal go in peace." Contains the legal argument that neither the Basic Law nor species protection law imposes a legal obligation to rescue; inverts the Animal Welfare Act to argue rescue "would not be legally permissible" because "there is no realistic prospect of rescue"; announces FAQ to "address and refute every conspiracy theory"; names IWC and BDMLR as supporting organisations; links to attached Gutachten PDF and ministerial report. Source file: screencapture-regierung-mv-de-Aktuell-2026-05-26-10_30_04.pdf. (cited in Part VIII)

DMM and ITAW – expert assessment and institutional statements

▪ **[DMM/ITAW Gutachten, 07.04.2026]** – Expert assessment ("Gutachten") of the stranded humpback whale, Kirchsee, Insel Poel, produced on 7 April 2026 by DMM and ITAW. Basis of the abandonment decision. Never published in full. One-hour visual inspection by two divers: no blood, no biopsy, no ultrasound, no urine, no cultures, no PCR, no toxin screen. Concluded "likely organ damage" and "negligible" survival chances. Contains a mathematical self-contradiction (authors' own measurements prove the self-rescue they demanded was physically impossible). The single most consequential document in the case. Source file: Original Assessment_Gutachten_Gesundheitszustand.10.04.2026_DMM.ITAW.pdf. (cited in Parts I, II, III, V, VI, VII, IX, XI, XII, XIII, XXIII, XXVI)

▪ **[DMM statements: 02.04, 07.04, 27.04, 29.04, 05.05.2026]** – Five successive public statements from the Deutsches Meeresmuseum (Burkard Baschek, director), issued between Day 3 and Day 36. Each more categorical than the last, each contradicted by the animal's subsequent behaviour. 02.04: necropsy preparation while whale alive. 07.04: co-authored Gutachten. 27.04: reaffirms palliative care, warns of noise inside barge. 29.04: whale "passive," warns of drowning risk. 05.05: declares whale "highly likely dead" based on absent GPS data while dive data showed whale alive at 150m. Source file for 05.05 statement: screencapture-deutsches-meeresmuseum-de-...-datenermittlung-buckelwal-2026-05-05-08_49_50.pdf. (cited in Parts I, VII, XII, XVII, XXI, XXVI)

▪ **[DMM press release, 02.04.2026]** – Necropsy preparation announcement. DMM preparing the necropsy site on Day 3 while the whale was still alive. (cited in Parts I, VII)

▪ **[DMM statement, 27.04.2026]** – DMM reaffirms palliative care, warns of noise inside barge, announces inability to conduct necropsy due to conflict of interest. (quoted in Part XII)

- **[DMM post-charge statement, 29.04.2026]** – DMM describes whale as "passive," warns of hearing damage, drowning risk. (cited in Part XII)
- **[DMM data statement, 05.05.2026]** – Declaration that whale is "highly likely dead." Demands tracker data. Source file: screenshot-deutsches-meeresmuseum-de-...-2026-05-05-08_49_50.pdf . (Cited in Parts XVII, XVI)

BDMLR (British Divers Marine Life Rescue)

- **[BDMLR.jpg – image 1]** – BDMLR email image 1: opening salutation, the doctrinal framing of stranding as "a symptom of a serious, underlying problem," and the explicit statement that the German operational team had reached out to the IWC Strandings Expert Panel and other organisations. Source file: BDMLR.jpg. file: 30363e_BDMLR.jpg.txt. (quoted in Parts I, V.C)
- **[bdmlr2.jpg – image 2]** – BDMLR email image 2: continuation of the doctrinal framing, the acknowledgement that healthy whales sometimes strand due to navigation error, and the assertion that the German animal had already lost significant health and nutrition due to entanglement (an unverified clinical claim). Source file: bdmlr2.jpg. file: 014a93_bdmlr2.jpg.txt. (quoted in Parts I, V.C)
- **[bdmld1.jpg – image 3]** – BDMLR email image 3: the equipment confession (pontoons can lift up to two tonnes only, insufficient for a 12-tonne humpback), the technical defence of impossibility for euthanasia (chemical and ballistic), and the closing paragraph asserting no solution exists. The most important single page of the cartel's doctrinal documentation. Source file: bdmld1.jpg. file: 6e31c9_bdmld1.jpg.txt. (quoted at length in Parts I, V.C and Part XII)
- **[BDMLR website statement, 08.04.2026]** – British Divers Marine Life Rescue, "Statement – Stranded humpback whale in Germany," published on the BDMLR website, dated 8 April 2026, captured as PDF screencap at 06:59 UTC on 9 April 2026. Contains four central clinical claims: "a significant loss of health and nutritional condition," "refloatation of an unhealthy animal that would then successfully recover would already be very unlikely," "too debilitated/close to death," and "a dying animal." Also confirms coordination with the IWC's Strandings Coordinator. (cited in Parts V.E and V.F)

Other official and institutional sources

- **[IFAW FAQ, 16.04.2026]** – IFAW FAQ page, "Stranded Humpback Whale in the Baltic Sea," ifaw.org, captured 21.04.2026. Contains IFAW's full endorsement of the cartel's position. Source: <https://www.ifaw.org/international/journal/faq-stranded-humpback-whale-baltic-sea> (Cited in Parts VII, IX)
- **[Walter-Mommert/Gunz press release, 15.04.2026]** – Announcement of the privately financed rescue initiative by Walter Gunz and Karin Walter-Mommert. Budget ~€1.5 million. Credited Stranded No More's expertise. Placed sole responsibility on entrepreneurs via "Duldung" (toleration) framework. Source: Walter-Mommert/Gunz press release.png and Walter-Mommert/Gunz press release1.png (cited in Parts I, XI, XII, XXVI)
- **[Walter-Mommert/Gunz official statement, 02.05.2026]** – Post-release statement distancing from the release. Foster isolated from decision-making, vets excluded, phone confiscation threat. Source files: screenshot-archive-is-RC2rH-2026-05-02-11_14_52.pdf ; Walter-Mommert Interview Broadcast.docx (cited in Parts I, II, XII, XIV, XVI, XXVI)
- **[Danish Ministry of the Environment statement, ~30.04.2026]** – "Stranded marine mammals are not rescued in Denmark. Strandings are a naturally occurring phenomenon." Danish authorities declared no attempt would be made to rescue the whale in Danish waters. (quoted in Parts XII, XVII, XVIII-B)

April 1 morning press conference – image captures

- **[Screen Shot 2026-04-01 at 8.26.11 AM.png]** – Bild article image, 1 April 2026 morning. Backhaus thanking the scientists; "worked together in a dialogue on equal terms." Source: ScreenShot2026-04-01at8.26.11AM.png. (Cited in Executive Summary and Parts I, VIII)
- **[Screen Shot 2026-04-01 at 8.26.20 AM.png]** – Bild article image, 1 April 2026 morning. Burkard Baschek's "For me, this is a blueprint" quotation. Source: ScreenShot2026-04-01at8.26.20AM.png. (Cited in Executive Summary and Parts I, VIII)
- **[Screen Shot 2026-04-01 at 8.27.12 AM.png]** – Bild article image, 1 April 2026 morning. Whale experts praising Backhaus as "exemplary." Source: ScreenShot2026-04-01at8.27.12AM.png (Cited in Executive Summary and Parts I, VIII)
- **[Screen Shot 2026-04-01 at 8.27.43 AM.png]** – Bild article image, 1 April 2026 morning. Backhaus's reference to consulting Iceland; "They all said unanimously: the way you're doing it is correct." Source: ScreenShot2026-04-01at8.27.43AM.png. (Cited in Part XI)
- **[Screen Shot 2026-04-01 at 8.28.12 AM.png]** – Bild article image, 1 April 2026 morning. Tamara Narganes Homfeld (WDC) calling for entanglement check and noting that WDC was not part of the German team. Source: ScreenShot2026-04-01at8.28.12AM.png. (Cited in Executive Summary and Part I)
- **[Screen Shot 2026-04-01 at 11.03.58 AM.png]** – Bild/MV ministry article image, 1 April 2026, the "clear sign of a serious illness" framing. Source: Seriouslysick_ScreenShot2026-04-01at11.03.58AM.png.(Cited in Executive Summary and Parts III, VIII)

Section B. Published scientific and technical literature

- **[NY4236 case report]** – U.S. National Marine Fisheries Service Marine Mammal Health and Stranding Response Program, Case Report Summary, Humpback Whale (*Megaptera novaeangliae*), Case Number NY4236-10, East Hampton, New York, April 2010. Includes external exam, internal exam, microscopic findings, environmental data, military activity inquiry, radiography (CT at Mount Sinai), virology, microbiology, urinalysis, complete blood count and serum chemistry, steroids and vitamins, parasitology, and biotoxin analysis. Permit No. 932-1905-MA-009526. Source file: SUMMARY_CASE_REPORT_NY4236_.txt. (cited in Part VI)
- **[Thalmann, Gales, Greenwood, Gedamke (2008)]** – Thalmann, S., Gales, R., Greenwood, M., and Gedamke, J. (2008). A new technique for refloating and release of stranded sperm whales. *Marine Mammal Science* 24(4): 949–955. DOI: 10.1111/j.1748-7692.2008.00223.x. (citation used in Part VII on the basis of the published bibliographic reference and SNM group's operational research files)
- **[Elemans et al. 2024 – Nature]** – Elemans, C. P. H., et al. (2024). How baleen whales produce song under the sea. *Nature*, published 21 February 2024. Anatomical description of the U-shaped laryngeal structure and air-recycling mechanism. (Cited in Part VIII)
- **[Gulland et al. 2008]** – Gulland, F. M. D. et al. (2008). Antibiotic treatment of free-ranging humpback whales, Sacramento River Delta (Delta and Dawn rescue, May 2007). First documented antibiotic darting of free-ranging humpback whales. Demonstrated pharmacological intervention without physical restraint. Freshwater skin damage reversed within 24 hours of return to salt water. Directly relevant because the German ministry prohibited the same kind of intervention. Source file: gulland_34_2_am.pdf. (cited in Parts IV, VII, X, XII, XXVI)
- **[NRE Tasmania 2022]** – Cetacean Incident Manual. Department of Natural Resources and Environment Tasmania. Contains the categorical prohibition: "Under NO circumstances should any cetacean be towed by the tail stock." One of two foundational sources for the SNM rescue plan. (cited in Parts II, X, XII, XIII, XVI)
- **[Sharp et al., WHOI-2024-05, November 2024]** – Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution Technical Report WHOI-2024-05, November 2024. Workshop report on large whale rescue methodology. Maximum feasible transport distance: hours, not days. Towing must be head-first at every phase. Second foundational source for the SNM rescue plan. Source file: WHOI_2024_05.pdf. (cited in Parts II, X, XII, XIII, XVI, XXVI)
- **[Olhasque et al. 2025]** – Olhasque, O. et al. "Successful Rescue of a Juvenile Humpback Whale Trapped Upstream of the Rance Tidal Power Station, Brittany, France." *Animals* 2025, 15, 3503. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ani15233503>. Open access. Published 4 December 2025. (Cited in Parts III, XIII)
- **[International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling, 1946]** – Founding treaty of the International Whaling Commission. Established the IWC's core mandate as regulation of commercial and aboriginal subsistence whaling. The IWC has no relevant operational experience in live cetacean rescue. Source: <https://iwc.int/commission/creation-of-the-iwc> (cited in Parts IX, XXV)
- **[Kuhn, T. S., The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, 1962]** – The theoretical framework for understanding paradigmatic resistance to anomalous evidence. Basis of the Kuhnian analysis in Part III. (cited in Part III)
- **[Krause, first-person diary; NMFS operational record, 1985]** – First-person account of the Humphrey rescue, Sacramento River / San Francisco Bay, 1985. Records NMFS obstruction, Sheridan Stone's shotgun and seal bomb, Charlie Fullerton's tag-firing interruption, radio-channel blocking. (Cited in Parts V, X and XIX).

- **[Stockin et al., Marine Policy 145, 2022]** – Stockin, K. A., Pawley, M. D. M., Jarvis, R. M., Boys, R. M. (2022). *Marine Policy* 145, 105283. DOI: 10.1016/j.marpol.2022.105283. Open access. 268 respondents surveyed. 27% of DOC respondents stated public sentiment takes precedence over animal welfare in euthanasia decisions; 15% ranked managing human expectations as highest priority; SOP contains antagonism clause; legislative body observed deviating from SOP to address public antagonism; experienced responders more welfare-complacent. Source file: *Human_perceptions_of_stranding_events.pdf* (directly uploaded). (cited in Parts V, XXI)
- **[Payne & McVay, 1971]** – R. S. Payne and S. McVay, "Songs of Humpback Whales," *Science*, Vol. 173, No. 3997, pp. 585-597, 13 August 1971. DOI: 10.1126/science.173.3997.585. The foundational paper characterising humpback whale song as a series of sounds repeated with precision over 7–30 minutes. Notes that the sex of the singer was unknown at the time of publication. (Cited in Part VIII.)
- **[Winn & Winn, 1978]** – H. E. Winn and L. K. Winn, "The song of the humpback whale *Megaptera novaeangliae* in the West Indies," *Marine Biology*, Vol. 47, No. 2, pp. 97-114, 1978. DOI: 10.1007/BF00395631. Records and analyses humpback songs from the Bahamas to Venezuela. States that only single individuals produce the song and hypothesises that they are "young, sexually mature males." (Cited for the peer-reviewed finding that humpback song is produced by sexually mature males.)
- **[Cerchio et al., 2001]** – Salvatore Cerchio, Jeff K. Jacobsen, and Thomas F. Norris, "Temporal and geographical variation in songs of humpback whales, *Megaptera novaeangliae*: synchronous change in Hawaiian and Mexican breeding assemblages," *Animal Behaviour*, Vol. 62, No. 2, pp. 313-329, 2001. States explicitly that humpback whale song is "a male breeding display." (Cited in Part VIII)
- **[Noad et al., 2000]** – Michael J. Noad, Douglas H. Cato, and M. M. Bryden, "Introduced song replaces existing song in east Australian humpback whale population," *Journal of the Acoustical Society of America*, Vol. 107, No. 5, Supplement, p. 2774, May 2000. DOI: 10.1121/1.428906. Documents song change in east Australian humpback population; song is produced by male whales. (Cited in Part VIII)
- **[Darling & Bérubé, 2001]** – James D. Darling and Martine Bérubé, "Interactions of singing humpback whales with other males," *Marine Mammal Science*, Vol. 17, No. 3, pp. 570-584, 2001. DOI: 10.1111/j.1748-7692.2001.tb01005.x. Reports that of 22 joining whales biopsied or behaviourally sexed, all were males. Concludes that song functions in male social ordering. (Cited in Part VIII)
- **[Maglietta et al., Ecological Informatics, 2026]** – Three publications on automated marine megafauna detection: YOLOv8 species classification, passive acoustic monitoring, computer vision for cetacean ID. Demonstrate scalable near-real-time detection is technically feasible. Source file for Maglietta: *1-s2.0-S1574954126002323-main.pdf* (cited in Part XXV)
- **[Gusman-Cunha et al., 2025]** – Gusman-Cunha, Ian, Catharina Valadares L. Armini, and Kamilla Avelino-de-Souza. "While There's Life, There's Hope: A Successful Case of Reintroduction of a Stranded Humpback Whale Calf in Espírito Santo, Brazil." *Aquatic Mammals* 51.3 (2025): 197–203. Documents reversal of initial euthanasia decision after mother was sighted nearby; calf successfully reunited and pair re-sighted together two days later. (cited in Part III)
- **[AFP/phys.org, 2021]** – AFP. "Two stranded humpback whales rescued in Argentina." *phys.org*, 06.10.2021. Reports 30-person team near Buenos Aires integrating community efforts with backhoe tractor and special cables to guide two stranded humpbacks back to sea. (cited in Part III)
- **[Pasanisi et al. 2024; Cherubini et al. 2025]** – Species distribution models integrating Copernicus Marine Service and EMODnet data for predictive whale entry window identification. (cited in Part XXV)

Section C. Stranded No More documents

- **[SNM Public Statement in Response to the DMM/ITAW Expert Report (Contra Gutachten), 11.04.2026]** – Full clinical, anatomical, and methodological rebuttal of the expert assessment. Published alongside this brief as a companion document. Contains the pre-registered necropsy protocol. Source files: SNM_Public_Statement_Response_to_DMM_ITAW_Gutachten_11042026.pdf and SNM_Oeffentliche_Stellungnahme_Antwort_auf_DMM_ITAW_Gutachten_11042026_DE.pdf. Also available from strandednomore.org. (cited in Parts I, II, III, VI, VII, XVII, XVIII-B, XIX, XXV, XXVI)
- **[SNM Rescue Plan Brief v2, 11.04.2026]** – Evidence-based operational specification for the rescue of this specific animal in this specific location. Companion document. Grounded in WHOI-2024-05 and NRE Tasmania 2022. Five phases specified. Published separately as companion document. Available from strandednomore.org. (cited in Parts I, II, XII, XIII, XXVI)
- **[Documents.docx]** – Stranded No More research compilation. Internal document containing compiled research notes. Source file: Documents.docx . (cited in Parts I, V, VII, VIII)
- **[Rettungsmaßnahmen für den Buckelwal von der Insel Poel, 13.04.2026]** – Formal five-phase rescue plan from the private initiative, addressed to Minister Backhaus. Includes Variante A (North Sea release) and Variante B (Netherlands facility transfer). Source of the original tarp-and-pontoon concept. (cited in Part XIII)

Section D. German media: Bild liveticker

The Bild liveticker page "Die große Wal-Rettung vom Timmendorfer Strand" was the primary contemporaneous public record of the case. Each later capture contains prior content plus new entries. Entries below are grouped by date.

26 March 2026

- **[Bild liveticker, 26.03.2026, 09:41]** – First capture of 26 March material. Excavator operator Tim Löhndorf, dredger preparation. Source: [screenshot-bild-de-regional-ostsee-live-ticker-die-grosse-wal-rettung-vom-timmendorfer-strand-69c25182ffcdb2ce7075be7e-2026-03-26-09_41_18](#). (Cited in Part V)
- **[Bild liveticker, 26.03.2026, 12:04]** – Contains the Stephanie Groß "motivated" reference. Source: [screenshot-bild-de-regional-ostsee-live-ticker-die-grosse-wal-rettung-vom-timmendorfer-strand-69c25182ffcdb2ce7075be7e-2026-03-26-11_14_34](#). (Cited in Part V)
- **[Bild liveticker, 26.03.2026, 14:23]** – Contains Lehmann eyewitness clinical observations "He's reacting, he has both eyes open, he's vocalizing," the Manuel Abras (Sea Shepherd) rejection of the rope-and-net approach, and the dredger channel work. Source: [screenshot-bild-de-regional-ostsee-live-ticker-die-grosse-wal-rettung-vom-timmendorfer-strand-69c25182ffcdb2ce7075be7e-2026-03-26-14_23_35](#). (Cited in Parts I, V, VIII)
- **[Bild liveticker, 26.03.2026, 18:21]** – Late afternoon capture. Daniel Günther on-site briefing. Source: [screenshot-bild-de-regional-ostsee-live-ticker-die-grosse-wal-rettung-vom-timmendorfer-strand-69c25182ffcdb2ce7075be7e-2026-03-26-18_21_26](#) (Cited in Part V)

27 March 2026

- **[Bild liveticker, 27.03.2026, 09:17]** – First capture of the 27 March self-refloat material. Source: [screenshot-bild-de-regional-ostsee-live-ticker-die-grosse-wal-rettung-vom-timmendorfer-strand-69c25182ffcdb2ce7075be7e-2026-03-27-09_17_36](#). (cited in Part V)
- **[Bild liveticker, 27.03.2026, 11:36, 12:58]** – Contains the Stephanie Groß "well-nourished, has reserves" quotation, the Lars Hoppe excavator-operator reflection, and the Noah Boonma sighting. Source: [screenshot-bild-de-regional-ostsee-live-ticker-die-grosse-wal-rettung-vom-timmendorfer-strand-69c25182ffcdb2ce7075be7e-2026-03-27-11_36_46](#). (cited in Part II, III, V)
- **[Bild liveticker, 27.03.2026, 14:54]** – Escort-across-Lübecker-Bucht material. Source: [screenshot-bild-de-regional-ostsee-live-ticker-die-grosse-wal-rettung-vom-timmendorfer-strand-69c25182ffcdb2ce7075be7e-2026-03-27-14_54_42](#). (Cited in Part V).

28 March 2026

- **[Bild Peilsender, liveticker, 28.03.2026, 09:33]** – Second stranding in Wismarbucht. Helena Eicher and Joseph Schnitzler boarding the Uecker. Source: [screenshot-bild-de-regional-ostsee-live-ticker-die-grosse-wal-rettung-vom-timmendorfer-strand-69c25182ffcdb2ce7075be7e-2026-03-28-09_33_11](#). (cited in Part V).
- **[Bild Peilsender, liveticker, 28.03.2026, 16:27]** – Contains the Backhaus 18:45 quotation "unfortunately, we have to assume that the animal is not doing well" / "there is still hope" / "there is a deeper channel very close to the animal." Source: [screenshot-m-bild-de-regional-ostsee-live-ticker-die-grosse-wal-rettung-vom-timmendorfer-strand-69c25182ffcdb2ce7075be7e-2026-03-28-16_27_22](#). (Cited in Part V)

29 March 2026

- **[Bild liveticker, 29.03.2026, 09:36]** – Contains the Stephanie Groß "There is simply no reliable method that can quickly and painlessly euthanize this animal" quotation, third stranding context. Source: screenshot-bild-de-regional-ostsee-live-ticker-die-grosse-wal-rettung-vom-timmendorfer-strand-69c25182ffcdb2ce7075be7e-2026-03-29-09_36_37. (read; quotations drawn in Parts I, VIII, XI)

30 March 2026

- **[Bild liveticker, 30.03.2026, 07:36]** – Saalman examination, Baschek "tonight we will discuss how to help him die," Maack and Backhaus statements. Source: screenshot-bild-de-regional-ostsee-live-ticker-die-grosse-wal-rettung-vom-timmendorfer-strand-69c25182ffcdb2ce7075be7e-2026-03-30-19_42_01. (Cited in Part VIII)
- **[Bild liveticker, 30.03.2026, 19:42]** – Contains Backhaus 20:58 "He set out on his own. He wants to fight," and the Schöttner (Greenpeace) reference to international experts. screenshot-bild-de-regional-ostsee-live-ticker-die-grosse-wal-rettung-vom-timmendorfer-strand-69c25182ffcdb2ce7075be7e-2026-03-30-19_42_01 (Cited in Part VIII)

31 March 2026

- **[Bild liveticker, 31.03.2026, 11:08]** – Fourth stranding (Insel Poel) initial reporting, the Backhaus 14:51 "hope dies last" quotation, and the 15:27 "Many people said it was all pointless" quotation. Source: screenshot-bild-de-regional-ostsee-live-ticker-die-grosse-wal-rettung-vom-timmendorfer-strand-69c25182ffcdb2ce7075be7e-2026-03-31-11_08_31.pdf (Cited in Part VIII)
- **[Bild liveticker, 31.03.2026, 19:38]** – Evening capture; cartel collective assessment. Source: screenshot-bild-de-regional-ostsee-live-ticker-die-grosse-wal-rettung-vom-timmendorfer-strand-69c25182ffcdb2ce7075be7e-2026-03-31-19_38_56.pdf (Cited in Part VIII)

1 April 2026 – Abandonment Day

- **[Bild liveticker, 01.04.2026, Screen Shot 2026-04-01 at 8.28.12 AM.png]** – Bild article image, 1 April 2026 morning. Whale vocalizes loudly. Tamara Narganes Homfeld (WDC) calling for entanglement check and noting that WDC was not part of the German team. Source: screenshot-bild-de-regional-ostsee-live-ticker-die-grosse-wal-rettung-vom-timmendorfer-strand-69c25182ffcdb2ce7075be7e-2026-04-01-11_04_30. (Cited in *Executive Summary and Part I, VIII*)
- **[Bild liveticker, 01.04.2026, 11:04]** – Contains the Easter/God speech, the "the whale chose this fate" framing, Maack categorical exclusion of euthanasia, Bild reporter on-site vocalisations "like the chugging of a locomotive," and the 4-minute breathing interval. Source: screenshot-bild-de-regional-ostsee-live-ticker-die-grosse-wal-rettung-vom-timmendorfer-strand-69c25182ffcdb2ce7075be7e-2026-04-01-11_55_56, (Cited in Parts I, III, VIII)

2 April 2026

- **[Bild liveticker, 02.04.2026, 15:22]** – Criminal complaint reporting, Tantzén ministry response, Henning Schaffner "He is blowing, he is moving, he is alive," Tamara Narganes Homfeld (WDC) on humpback sleep and 20-minute breath intervals, Instagram comment disabling. Source: screenshot-bild-de-regional-ostsee-live-ticker-die-grosse-wal-rettung-vom-timmendorfer-strand-69c25182ffcdb2ce7075be7e-2026-04-02-15_22_05. (cited in Parts I, VIII)
- **[Bild Wegen Wal Timmy, 02.04.2026]** – BILD Redaktion, "Wegen Wal Timmy: Unterlassene Hilfeleistung! Minister Backhaus angezeigt," Bild.de, 02.04.2026, 20:41. Reports that criminal complaints have been filed against Environment Minister Till Backhaus, Greenpeace, and ITAW for animal cruelty and failure to render assistance. Backhaus has received death threats by email. Ministry spokesperson Claus Tantzén states that the ministry rejects the

accusations and has involved all available experts. The article also notes that Backhaus's statement "the whale chose this fate" generated over 2,000 critical comments on Instagram, after which the comment function was disabled. Source file: [screenshot-bild-de-regional-ostsee-wegen-wal-timmy-unterlassene-hilfeleistung-minister-backhaus-angezeigt-69ce70b7de66bddfe53e37dd-2026-04-02-15_17_05.pdf](#) (Pages 1–5). (Cited in Part VIII)

5 April 2026

- **[Bild liveticker, 05.04.2026, 09:15]** – Backhaus "propeller wound" framing and "lungs and liver probably compressed" framing. Source: [screenshot-bild-de-regional-ostsee-live-ticker-die-grosse-wal-rettung-vom-timmendorfer-strand-69c25182ffcdb2ce7075be7e-2026-04-05-09_15_42.pdf](#). (Cited in Parts I, III, VIII)

7 April 2026 – Gutachten Press Conference

- **[Bild liveticker, 07.04.2026]** – Full reporting of the "comprehensive evaluation": Groß press conference statements ("this animal is not fit for transport," "likely organ damage"), Backhaus quotations, Tom Bär (DMM) "positional damage, overheating, pre-existing injuries," catamaran rejection, harpoon discussion. Source: [screenshot-bild-de-regional-ostsee-live-ticker-die-grosse-wal-rettung-vom-timmendorfer-strand-69c25182ffcdb2ce7075be7e-2026-04-07-15_04_02.pdf](#). (quoted in Parts I, II, IV, XI)

11 April 2026

- **[Bild liveticker, 11.04.2026]** – "Sing a whole verse" entry. Whale vocalisations on Day 11 of the fourth stranding. Physiological evidence that the whale retained functional respiratory mechanics. Source: 04112026 playback plan. Docx. (cited in Parts VIII, XV)

14–19 April 2026 – Private Rescue Initiative Phase 1

- **[Bild, 'Wal-Wahnsinn!', archive.is/89gMA, 14.04.2026]** – Headline article on private initiative announcement. Source file: [screenshot-archive-is-r1XKp-2026-05-03-08_34_17.pdf](#) (cited in Parts XI, XII, XXVI)
- **[Bild liveticker, 15.04–28.04.2026]** – Multiple entries covering the full rescue initiative period. Source files: multiple sequential Bild liveticker capture PDFs (Cited in Parts XI, XII, XVI, XXVI)
- **[Bild, "Operation Walrettung: Der technische Masterplan," infographic series, 15–17.04.2026]** – Full infographic series: Das Arsenal, Phase 1–4, Lagebericht, Akteurs-Matrix, Operations-Zeitstrahl. Source of the Spezialplane (tarp) vs. net evolution documented in Part XII Section I. (Cited in Part XII)
- **[Bild liveticker, 19.04.2026]** – Bambarén-related entries. Net with blue air cushions shown to whale. Walter Gunz: whale whisperer "established a great connection." DLRG on standby. Greenpeace reportedly states whale "would drown in the North Sea." Source files: in sequential Bild liveticker captures. Source: [screenshot-bild-de-regional-ostsee-wal-rettung-im-liveticker-das-geheimnis-der-timmy-tuecher-69c25182ffcdb2ce7075be7e-2026-04-19-13_25_38.pdf](#) (cited in Parts I, V, XI, XII, XXVI)

20–21 April 2026 – Self-Refloat and Failed Herding

- **[Bild liveticker, 20.04.2026]** – Self-refloat. Plan B activated. DLRG boats, jet skis. Herding on zigzag course. Whale re-stranded before bay exit. Source files: in sequential Bild liveticker captures. (cited in Parts I, XI, XII, XV, XXVI)

- **[Bild liveticker, 21.04.2026]** – Failed herding, re-stranding. Wallace departure. Source files: in sequential Bild liveticker captures. (Cited in Parts V, XI, XII, XXVI)

22–27 April 2026 – Deadlines and Barge Arrival

- **[Bild liveticker, 22–27.04.2026]** – Five days of deadlines. Ritter warning. Tönnies assessment. Klaus Kraft re: food. Barge concept. Endoscope failure. WDC criticism. Source files: in sequential Bild liveticker captures. (cited in Parts XI, XII, XXVI)
- **[Bild liveticker, 23.04.2026]** – Dr. Tönnies assessment ("surprisingly good"); Klaus Kraft re: food. Barge concept announced. Source files: in sequential Bild liveticker captures. (cited in Parts II, V, XII, XV, XXVI)
- **[Bild liveticker, 26.04.2026]** – Screenshot "Das Geheimnis der Timmy-Tücher." Contains Backhaus "preparing mentally and emotionally for departure," endoscope failure, watering can glucose/saline, WDC criticism, Tönnies blood draw, Pedro Veranda and Jeff Foster statements, barge timeline. (Cited in Parts XI, XII, XVIII)
- **[Bild liveticker, 27.04.2026, captures 08:43–15:39]** – Barge arrival, Tönnies alarm/all-clear, Ritter warning, DLRG deadline. (Cited in Part XII)
- **[Bild liveticker, 27.04.2026, 13:26]** – Felix Bohnsack's description of the original barge loading procedure: tarpaulin held by net, U-shape formation, whale loaded backwards. Source of the tarp-backwards loading concept. (Cited in Parts XII, XVI.F)
- **[Bild liveticker, 27.04.2026, 17:36]** – Loading plan change: net no longer used; whale guided forward using wide flexible strap. Ministry notes vets have not received documentation. Source of the strap-forwards loading concept. (Cited in Parts XII, XVI.F)

28 April 2026 – Barge Loading

- **[Bild liveticker, 28.04.2026, captures 07:01–19:10]** – Barge loading day: fire hose harness, 20 helpers turning whale, rescuer on back, whale swims 110m into barge, departure. (cited in Part XII)

29–30 April 2026 – Transit

- **[Bild liveticker, 29.04.2026, captures 13:24, 23:56]** – Transit through Fehmarn Belt, Great Belt Bridge, Backhaus press conference, Danish Ministry statement. (Cited in Part XII)
- **[Bild liveticker, 30.04.2026, capture 08:28]** – Kattegat transit, whale "singing more melodically," skin improving, 130km to North Sea. (Cited in Part XII)

1–7 May 2026 – Release and Aftermath

- **[Bild liveticker, 02.05.2026]** – Release coverage. Drone footage at 09:24 captured whale spouting and swimming – last independently verified sighting. Source files: screenshot-bild-de-...-2026-05-02-09_10_39.pdf and ...-2026-05-02-15_21_49.pdf. (cited in Parts XVI, XVII, XXVI)
- **[Bild liveticker, 01–07.05.2026, multiple captures]** – Release information. Source files: sequential captures (cited in Parts XII, XVI, XVII, XX, XXVI)

14–17 May 2026 – Death Confirmation

- **[Bild, 'Dead whale found off Denmark,' 14.05.2026, capture 17:09]** – Dead whale Anholt, 75m from shore, Danish authorities, tissue sample planned. Source file: screenshot-bild-de-news-ausland-...-wal-vor-daenemarks-kueste-...-2026-05-14-17_09_32.pdf. (cited in Parts II, XIII)

- **[Bild liveticker, 16.05.2026, captures 09:51, 12:17]** — Confirmation as Timmy. Tracker serial number match. Flipper ID. Backhaus statement. Initiative statement. Anne Herrschaft emotional interview. Denmark: relocation at Germany's expense. Source files: screencapture-bild-de-...-2026-05-16-09_51_44.pdf and ...-2026-05-16-12_17_01.pdf . (cited in Parts II, XIII)
- **[Bild, 17.05.2026, 15:05]** — Death confirmed. "Marine researchers predicted this fate." Scientists demand consequences. (cited in Parts II, VIII, XIII)

14 June 2026 — Necropsy

- **[Bild necropsy, 04.06.2026]** — BILD Redaktion, "Parasiten in Niere des Wals gefunden," Bild.de, 04.06.2026. Reports on the autopsy of Timmy on Anholt. Notes the discovery of an as-yet-identified parasite in the whale's kidney. Confirms the whale was female and approximately 4–5 years old. Tissue samples were taken from heart and brain; the hyoid bone and cervical vertebrae were removed for examination. Initial autopsy results are not expected for at least six months. Source file: screencapture-bild-de-news-ausland-toter-timmy-am-strand-zerlegt-parasiten-in-niere-des-wals-gefunden-6a21d9ce8d84dbd8a4ed51e1-2026-06-04-19_20_53.pdf (Cited in Part XVIII-B)

Other Bild articles (not liveticker)

- **[Bild Peilsender, 28.03.2026]** — "Darum bekommt der Wal keinen Peilsender." Contains Ursula Siebert: "If we had assessed the chances of survival as low, we wouldn't have supported bringing the animal out of there at all" — directly contradicting the IWC SEP letter's later "negligible chances" framing. (Cited in Parts I, III, IV, XII)
- **[Bild, Schaffner, 20.04.2026]** — Henning Schaffner (photographer), BILD Redaktion, "Retter wollten Timmy mit Gurten ziehen," Bild.de, 20.04.2026. Reports that whale helpers wanted to pull Timmy with straps (Gurten) off the sandbank. The official veterinarian (Amtstierärztin) of Environment Minister Till Backhaus intervened and prohibited the attempt. The straps were brought back to shore. A photograph by Henning Schaffner shows the blue straps that were to be used. The article includes social media comments, including a query addressed to Minister Backhaus asking whether this is true. Source file: belt_forbidden_674435593_26834999832802245_3490255431110528821_n.jpg. (Cited in Part XII)
- **[Bild, 'Große Wale an der deutschen Küste' infographic/map, 11.05.2025]** — Map titled "Große Wale an der deutschen Küste: Buckel- und Pottwale verirren sich immer öfter in Nord- und Ostsee." Records six events from February–May 2025. Source: <https://www.bild.de/regional/ostsee/wo-kommen-ploetzlich-die-vielen-wale-in-ostsee-und-nordsee-her-681f6d390daee93e56272f7c> (cited in Part IV, Sections B and D)

Section E. German media: other outlets

- **[NDR Nordmagazin, 04.03.2026]** – NDR Mecklenburg-Vorpommern article on the 4 March 2026 Wismar harbour incident. Contains Lisa Klemens (DMM) misidentification as fin whale, Florian Stadler (Sea Shepherd) operational role, partial net removal by Wismar fire department. <https://www.ndr.de/nachrichten/mecklenburg-vorpommern/wal-in-wismar-tier-wurde-mit-tauchern-aus-dem-hafen-geleitet,walwismar-102.html>. (quotations drawn for Part II)
- **[NDR, 05.03.2026]** – "Buckelwal vor Travemünde gesichtet." NDR Schleswig-Holstein, 5 March 2026. Whale movement westward along the coast. Source file: may correspond to [screenshot-web-archiv-org...ln-online...travemuende-...-2026-05-19-12_04_20.pdf](#). (cited in Parts IV, VII)
- **[Süddeutsche Zeitung/dpa, 04.06.2026]** – Süddeutsche Zeitung Redaktion / dpa, "Walkadaver auf dänischer Insel: Keine klare Todesursache – Obduktion von Buckelwal beendet," Süddeutsche Zeitung, 04.06.2026. Reports that the autopsy of the humpback whale known as "Timmy" was completed on the Danish island of Anholt. The expert team (including Danish biologist Charlotte Bie Thøstesen and veterinary scientist Tim Jensen from the University of Copenhagen) was unable to determine a clear cause of death. No injuries were apparent, but this could be due to decomposition. Parasites were found but were not responsible for death. The whale is confirmed female and had not been pregnant in recent months. Examination of the mouth and stomach revealed no nets or other objects. Source file: [*screenshot-sueddeutsche-de-wissen-walkadaver-auf-daenischer-insel-keine-klare-todesursache-obduktion-von-buckelwal-beendet-dpa-urn-newsml-dpa-com-20090101-260604-930-170426-2026-06-04-19_21_29.pdf*](#) (Pages 1–3). (Cited in Part XVIII-B).
- **[News5 necropsy interview, 04.06.2026]** – News5, interview with Charlotte Bie Thøstesen and Tim Jensen on Anholt, 04.06.2026. Statements recorded during the necropsy: no food in stomach or intestines (the whale had not eaten for at least one month); no water in lungs (but due to decomposition cannot distinguish between salt water and body fluids); cannot establish time of death (the whale was already dead when found on 14 May); no injuries from ship strike (but blunt trauma, haemorrhage, and broken bones could not be assessed due to decomposition); no broken bones on the tail; overall results inconclusive. Source file: Bild liveticker, 04.06.2026, multiple entries; News5 livestream coverage: <https://www.youtube.com/@News5de/streams> (Cited in Part XVIII-B).
- **[Eilmeldung Deutschland, 23.04.2026]** – Eilmeldung Deutschland (Facebook page), "Der Neue Plan bei der Rettung von Buckelwal Hope (Timmy) ist Final," Facebook post, 23.04.2026. Announces that the rescue concept for humpback whale Hope (Timmy) has been finalized. Instead of an unstable pontoon, the whale will be transported in a floodable barge (Schute) – a specialized, engineless cargo barge – towed toward the Atlantic. The barge allows the whale to be kept safely in water during the multi-day journey, ensuring survival. Minister Backhaus has reviewed the new concept and raised no objections. The rescue operation is scheduled to begin on Thursday (23 April 2026). Source file: new concept [677776317_122221569488347389_1359967875866238209_n.jpg](#); new concept1 [677776317_122221569488347389_1359967875866238209_n.jpg](#). (Cited in Part XII)
- **[NDR, 21.01.2026]** – NDR Redaktion, "Flensburger Förde: Finnwal sorgt für Aufsehen in der Ostsee," NDR (Norddeutscher Rundfunk), 21.01.2026, 12:42 Uhr. Reports that a young fin whale (Finnwal) approximately eight meters long has been swimming in the Flensburg Fjord since the beginning of January 2026. Judith Denkinger from the German Oceanographic Museum in Stralsund confirmed the identification by the notch on its dorsal fin through photo comparison

with known individuals. The whale was first reported to her on 7 January 2026. It has been observed between the Flensburg harbor and the Danish town of Kollund, with frequent sightings from Fahrensodde and Wassersleben beach in Harrislee. Dagmar Struß (former head of the NABU Baltic Sea Protection Office) is quoted noting that fin whales have historically appeared in the Baltic Sea when herring arrive. The article advises spectators to keep their distance and not disturb the animal. Source:

https://www.ndr.de/nachrichten/schleswig-holstein/flensburg_nordfriesland_schleswig-flensburg/flensburger-foerde-finnwal-sorgt-fuer-aufsehen-in-der-ostsee,wal-166.html (Cited in Part IV)

- **[NDR liveblog, 29.03.2026]** – "Verirrter Buckelwal in der Wismarer Bucht." NDR Mecklenburg-Vorpommern live coverage of the whale following the second stranding, published 29 March 2026. The whale had freed itself from the sandbank near Insel Walfisch overnight and was lying in approximately two metres of water. URL confirmed via the compiled whale sightings record: [ndr.de/nachrichten/mecklenburg-vorpommern/liveblog-verirrter-buckelwal-in-der-wismarer-bucht-deutlich-geschwaecht,wal-298.html](https://www.ndr.de/nachrichten/mecklenburg-vorpommern/liveblog-verirrter-buckelwal-in-der-wismarer-bucht-deutlich-geschwaecht,wal-298.html). (cited in Part VIII)
- **[NDR, 06.04.2026]** – "Buckelwal vor Poel: Entscheidung über weiteres Vorgehen am Dienstag." Contains Backhaus "As long as the whale is alive, it has a right to be rescued" and catamaran proposal details. Source: [screenshot-ndr.de-nachrichten-schleswig-holstein-buckelwal-vor-poel-entscheidung-ueber-weiteres-vorgehen-am-dienstag-wal-180-html-2026-04-06-12_35_24.pdf](https://www.ndr.de/nachrichten-schleswig-holstein-buckelwal-vor-poel-entscheidung-ueber-weiteres-vorgehen-am-dienstag-wal-180-html-2026-04-06-12_35_24.pdf) (rCited in Part VIII)
- **[NDR, 21.04.2026]** – NDR article/broadcast containing Wallace's statement: "Shame on the Minister of Agriculture, shame on the veterinarians who have no clue but are allowed to make decisions, shame on Sergio and Danny Firstclass." Source: <https://www.ndr.de/nachrichten/mecklenburg-vorpommern/ostsee-wal-schwere-vorwuerfe-gegen-rettungsteam,wal-440.html> (quoted in Parts I, V, XI)
- **[NDR, 'Travemünde: Wal in der Trave gesichtet,' 08.05.2025]** – Reports that a humpback whale was sighted in the Trave river in Travemünde on Tuesday, May 6, 2025. Eyewitness André Vázquez, an employee at the boat fueling station on the Priwall, filmed the approximately seven-meter-long animal surfacing just meters away from him and his colleague. Dagmar Struss, head of the NABU State Office for Baltic Sea Protection, reviewed the footage and stated it is very likely a young humpback whale. She explained that young animals are active and curious like young humans, and due to declining fish stocks worldwide, whales are searching for new feeding grounds and occasionally deviate from their usual migration routes. Struss warned spectators to maintain distance, noting that approaching by boat could stress the animal, cause collisions, or even capsize small vessels due to suction. The article notes that it remains unclear whether this is the same whale sighted off Hiddensee in April 2025. Source: www.ndr.de/nachrichten/schleswig-holstein/Travemuende-Wal-in-der-Trave-gesichtet,wal826.html(cited in Part IV)
- **[NDR liveticker, 'Gurte verboten,' 21.04.2026, 13:44]** – Straps returned to shore after ministry prohibition. Confirms active obstruction of evidence-based equipment. Source files: multiple Bild liveticker captures from 21.04.2026. (cited in Parts I, V, XII, XXVI)
- **[News5, 04.03.2026]** – News5 Redaktion, "Finnwal weiter auf Irrwegen: Junger Drohnenpilot filmt Giganten der Meere in der Lübecker Bucht," News5.de, News Nr. 41042, 04.03.2026, Lübeck. Reports that a stressed fin whale (Finnwal) continues its erratic journey through the Baltic Sea. A 17-year-old drone pilot, Jasper Haack, filmed the approximately 10–12 meter long fin whale in the Lübeck Bay on the evening of 4 March 2026 off Travemünde. The footage clearly shows a rope or net line trailing behind

the animal. The whale had become entangled in a gillnet in Wismar harbor on 3 March 2026, from which fire department, water police, and Sea Shepherd divers removed most of the net, though rope remnants remained. Experts note that a fin whale has been sighted multiple times in the Flensburg Fjord since the beginning of the year, possibly the same individual now seen off Wismar and Travemünde. Source: www.news5.de/news/news/read/41042. (Cited in Part IV).

- **[SHZ, 06.03.2026]** – "Wal schleppt 50-Meter-Netz durch Ostsee." Schleswig-Holsteinische Zeitung. Whale dragging ~50 metres of fishing net. <https://www.shz.de/lokales/eutin-ostholstein/artikel/ostsee-jung-finnwal-vor-travemuende-mit-50-meter-netz-gesichtet-50124227> (cited in Parts II, IV, VII, XXVII, Sections D, E)

- **[Der Reporter, 23.03.2026]** – Timmendorfer Strand local newspaper, first stranding at Niendorf. SH Environment Minister Tobias Goldschmidt visit, Niendorf hotel noise alert at 04:00. <https://www.der-reporter.de/tdf-strand/artikel/buckelwal-vor-niendorf-ostsee-gestrandet> (cited in Part I)

- **[Tini24 23.03.2026]** – Timmendorf local news, first stranding companion report. Source: <https://tini24.de/news/buckelwal-vor-niendorf-ostsee-gestrandet-gibt-es-noch-eine-rettung/>. (Cited in Part V)

- **[NZZ, Gallus, 08.04.2026]** – NZZ with interview contributions from Anja Gallus (marine biologist and coordinator of the Marine Mammal Working Group at the German Oceanographic Museum in Stralsund), "Obduktion eines Buckelwals: «Das ist reine Handarbeit, und es braucht viel Kraft», " Neue Zürcher Zeitung (NZZ), 08.04.2026. Reports on the planned necropsy of the stranded humpback whale Timmy, detailing that the German Oceanographic Museum prepared its outdoor facility on the small island of Dänholm near Stralsund as the necropsy site. Gallus explains the procedure will follow an internationally valid protocol: a team of 20–30 people will work under the open sky using large flensing knives (no cranes or chainsaws) to remove up to 50 cm of blubber, weigh and examine all organs, and collect tissue samples for viral, bacterial, and disease analysis. The museum will freeze the skeleton for future institutional requests. Crucially, the article notes the museum was forced to implement increased security measures due to insults, harassment, and death threats directed at researchers from people who accused them of letting the whale die intentionally to obtain its skeleton. Source: www.nzz.ch/wissenschaft/obduktion-von-wal-timmy-in-stralsund-so-wird-die-untersuchung-ablaufen-ld.1932656 (Cited in Part IV)

- **[Welt, 25.03.2026]** – Siebert "eating well" quotation. Source: [screencapture-welt-de-vermischtes-article69c3b62faf187d606b8125ba-schleswig-holstein-gestrandeter-wal-wird-schwaecher-hoffnungen-ruhen-nun-auf-schwimmbagger.html-2026-03-25-10_42_47](https://www.welt.de/vermischtes/article69c3b62faf187d606b8125ba-schleswig-holstein-gestrandeter-wal-wird-schwaecher-hoffnungen-ruhen-nun-auf-schwimmbagger.html-2026-03-25-10_42_47) (Cited in Part V)

[Kurier, 25.03.2026] – Kurier Redaktion / dpa (Deutsche Presse-Agentur), "Wal in Deutschland gestrandet: Größerer Bagger soll Tier retten," Kurier.at, 25.03.2026, 11:57. Reports that a young humpback whale has been stranded on a sandbank off Niendorf (Timmendorfer Strand) since Monday, 23 March 2026. A rescue attempt with a smaller suction dredger on Tuesday failed. ITAW whale expert Stephanie Groß is quoted: "Leider hat sich herausgestellt, dass der Sand zu fest ist" ("Unfortunately, it turned out that the sand was too firm"). The article states that several rescue attempts had already failed on Monday, and that a larger suction dredger was expected to arrive on Wednesday to try a different approach—digging a channel in front of the whale's head so that the animal would not have to turn around to reach deeper water. The article also notes that euthanasia was ruled out due to technical difficulties and international agreements. Source: kurier.at/chronik/welt/wal-buckelwal-gestrandet-rettung-deutschland-ostsee-niendorf/403144173. (Cited in Part V)

- **[Welt, 29.03.2026]** – Long-form interview with Robert Marc Lehmann. Exclusion accusation by ITAW, three-options framing, "whale experts wear wetsuits" quotation. Source: [screencapture-](https://www.welt.de/vermischtes/article69c3b62faf187d606b8125ba-schleswig-holstein-gestrandeter-wal-wird-schwaecher-hoffnungen-ruhen-nun-auf-schwimmbagger.html-2026-03-25-10_42_47)

welt-de-vermischtes-article69c8146a04eeb30f4b108255-wal-in-der-ostsee-kotzt-mich-mega-an-meeresbiologe-hat-nur-wenig-hoffnung-und-erhebt-schwere-vorwuerfe-html-2026-03-29-09_43_01. (Cited in Parts I, II, III, VIII)

▪ **[WELT, dpa, 11.05.2025]** – WELT Redaktion / dpa (Deutsche Presse-Agentur), "Nordsee: Toter Buckelwal am Strand von Sankt Peter-Ording geborgen," WELT, 11.05.2025. Reports that a dead humpback whale was recovered from the beach of Sankt Peter-Ording on 11 May 2025. The approximately ten-meter-long male humpback was discovered by the tourist information centre about 800 metres south of the pier in the Bad district. The decomposing carcass was lifted into a container by a specialist company and transported to the animal rendering plant in Jagel, with further examination to be conducted by the University of Veterinary Medicine Hannover. The article also notes that at the end of February 2025, a dead humpback whale had already washed ashore on the uninhabited island of Minsener Oog, southeast of Wangerooge, which the national park administration described as a "malnourished juvenile" (abgemagertes Jungtier). Source <https://www.welt.de/regionales/hamburg/article256100276/Nordsee-Toter-Buckelwal-am-Strand-von-Sankt-Peter-Ording-geborgen.html>. (Cited in Part IV)

▪ **[tag24.de, 20.04.2026]** – NEWS5 Redaktion, "Walexpertin Dr. Jenna Wallace hat das Rettungsteam verlassen," NEWS5, 20.04.2026, 22:05. Reports that whale expert Dr. Jenna Wallace has left the rescue team and is on a flight back to Hawaii. According to NEWS5 information, she spoke of "blatant errors" (eklatanten Fehlern) that occurred during the whale rescue. Her main criticism concerns the operational leadership of the organization. She spent a total of six days with the operation, including travel time, and left of her own accord. Source file: Dr Wallace_HGYRTguaEAAxb7B.jpeg. (Cited in Part XII)

▪ **[Welt, 'Schwierige Bilanz,' retrospective, 10.05.2026]** – "Experts warned, fans hoped, politicians acted – and the humpback whale disappeared." Source file: [screenshot-welt-de-...-schwierige-bilanz-...-2026-05-10-14_49_00.pdf](#). Peter Madsen: lack of data "very strange and unprofessional." (Cited in Parts XVII, XX, XXI)

▪ **[Welt, 'Toter Wal vor dänischer Insel entdeckt,' 15.05.2026]** – "Dead whale discovered off Danish island – seagulls already feasting on the carcass." Source file: [screenshot-welt-de-...-ostsee-toter-wal-...-2026-05-15-19_52_18.pdf](#). Whale off Anholt, 75m from shore. (cited in Part XVII)

▪ **[t-online, Hartmann, 10.04.2026]** – Matti Hartmann, "No matter what he did, it went wrong," t-online, 10.04.2026. Reports new allegations against marine biologist Robert Marc Lehmann ("whale whisperer") in the failed rescue of humpback whale Timmy in Wismar Bay / Lübeck Bay (March–April 2026). Mayor Sven Partheil-Bohnke (Timmendorfer Strand) claims Lehmann acted as an unqualified operations manager, prioritized selfie sticks and Instagram content over the whale, made repeated miscalculations (e.g., 0.1% chance estimates), persuaded escort vessels to switch to a one-sided formation causing the whale to dive and re-strand, and left "in a huff" after being told to stop commanding. An unnamed rescue participant offers a different view: Lehmann was a nuisance but never assumed command; the dive was bad luck. Lehmann has deactivated his Instagram and not responded to t-online inquiries. Source file: [screenshot-t-online-de-nachrichten-panorama-tiere-id-101203382-wal-timmy-vor-poel-vorwuerfe-gegen-walfluesterer-robert-marc-lehmann-html-2026-06-05-10_27-20.pdf](#) (Pages 1–7). (cited in Part IV.)

▪ **[t-online, Pollok, 20.04.2026]** – Leon Pollok, "Buckelwal «Timmy» in Ostsee: Zweifel über Angaben von Robert Marc Lehmann," t-online, 20.04.2026. Investigates discrepancies in Lehmann's self-presentation following Mayor Partheil-Böhnke's allegations. Reports Lehmann changed his website credentials from "Diplom-Meeresbiologe" to "Diplom-Biologe" after questions arose—University of Kiel confirms no "Marine Biology" degree exists, only as a specialization within Biology. Also notes Lehmann's claim as "National Geographic Photographer of the Year 2015" is misleading: he won a smaller Germany-only contest, not the international

main prize (awarded to Australian James Smart). National Geographic Deutschland editor Claudia Eilers calls the claim "at least misleading." The article acknowledges Lehmann's legitimate environmental work, including 75,384 donations for rainforest protection through Wilderness International. Source:

<https://www.watson.ch/international/deutschland/974733423-buckelwal-timmy-zweifel-ueber-angaben-von-robert-marc-lehmann> . (Cited in Part IV)

[Stern, 25.03.2026] – Stern article, "Ein Wal hat sich nach Niendorf verirrt – Tag drei der Rettungsversuche," 25 March 2026. Contains the Joseph Schnitzler (ITAW) quotation "outwardly, the whale still appears well-nourished."

(<https://www.stern.de/panorama/weltgeschehen/ein-wal-hat-sich-nach-niendorf-verirrt---tag-drei-der-rettungsversuche-37255586.html>)

▪ **[Stern catamaran liveblog 05.04.2026]** – Backhaus "showing initial success" and "this is a unique tragedy. But it is one he chose for himself." Source: [screenshot-stern.de/panorama-weltgeschehen-wal-liveblog-minister-will-wal-mit-katamaran-bergen-37250004.html-2026-04-05-22_15_38.pdf](https://www.screenshot-stern.de/panorama-weltgeschehen-wal-liveblog-minister-will-wal-mit-katamaran-bergen-37250004.html-2026-04-05-22_15_38.pdf). (Cited in Parts I, III, VIII, XI)

▪ **[B.Z., 03.01.2010]** – B.Z. Redaktion, "Herz des Berliner Wals wird ausgestellt," B.Z. – Die Stimme Berlins, 03.01.2010. Reports: "Der fast 17 Meter lange und 20 Tonnen schwere Meeressäuger war am 14. Januar 2006 an der Ostsee bei Wismar gestrandet und konnte nicht mehr gerettet werden. ... Die Obduktion ergab, dass der Wal lebend auf einer Sandbank gestrandet war und dann an Herzversagen starb." (The 17-meter, 20-ton marine mammal stranded on 14 January 2006 near Wismar and could not be saved. ... The necropsy revealed that the whale stranded alive on a sandbank and then died of heart failure.) Source: <https://www.bz-berlin.de/archiv-artikel/herz-des-berliner-wals-wird-ausgestellt> (Cited in Part IV)

▪ **[SAT.1 Regional, 09.04.2024]** – "Buckelwal erneut gestrandet." (cited in Part VIII) Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jM9cezIgrDM> (cited in Part IV).

▪ **[Comicschau, 29.03.2026]** – On-site aid worker "driver_bibi" public contradiction: "I've never heard so much crap. Everything was being covered up at the press conference. We know better, we were there." Source: [screenshot-comicschau.de/news-robert-marc-lehmann-wal-geisternetz-708464-2026-03-29-13_13_41](https://www.screenshot-comicschau.de/news-robert-marc-lehmann-wal-geisternetz-708464-2026-03-29-13_13_41). (Cited Parts I, II, VIII, XI)

▪ **[Focus Online, Wallace interview, 21.04.2026]** – Dr. Jenna Wallace's revelations about ministry obstruction: medication prohibited, straps prohibited, bureaucratic approval required for all contact. [screenshot-focus.de/panorama-ostsee-walrettung-vom-timmendorfer-strand-im-live-ticker-eff82439-8934-467c-bff1-9d2001b85dc4.html-2026-04-21-08_19_24.pdf](https://www.screenshot-focus.de/panorama-ostsee-walrettung-vom-timmendorfer-strand-im-live-ticker-eff82439-8934-467c-bff1-9d2001b85dc4.html-2026-04-21-08_19_24.pdf) (quoted in Parts I, II, V, XI)

▪ **[Focus Online, 'Leitende Tierärztin im Koma,' ~22.04.2026]** – Bahr-van Gemmert hospitalisation after collapse during failed herding. Source file: [screenshot-focus.de/panorama-ostsee-walrettung-...-2026-04-21-08_19_24.pdf](https://www.screenshot-focus.de/panorama-ostsee-walrettung-...-2026-04-21-08_19_24.pdf). (cited in Parts XI, XII, XXVI)

▪ **[Der Westen, 16.04.2026]** – Der Westen reporter video interview with Minister Backhaus confirming Dr. Jenna Wallace does not hold a European veterinary licence. Source: [screenshot-derwesten.de/aktuelles-wal-timmy-expertin-jenna-wallace-hawaii-lizenz-europatierarzt-id302041898.html-2026-04-16-13_03_40.pdf](https://www.screenshot-derwesten.de/aktuelles-wal-timmy-expertin-jenna-wallace-hawaii-lizenz-europatierarzt-id302041898.html-2026-04-16-13_03_40.pdf) (cited in Parts V, XII)

▪ **[Der Spiegel, Stock, "Bei einer Explosion fliegen kiloschwere Fleischbrocken durch die Luft, die können dich toten," 27.05.2026, archived at archive.is/OmiAF]** Interview with Peter Teglbjerg Madsen on upcoming necropsy. Madsen confirms participation, states preconceptions (empty stomach, nets, drowning/suffocation), describes whale as "doomed to die," calls rescue "animal cruelty," uses deathbed-wheelbarrow analogy. (quoted in Part I, XII)

- **[Die Zeit, 19.05.2026]** — Die Zeit Redaktion / dpa, "Dänemark will toten Ostsee-Wal bergen und obduzieren lassen," Die Zeit, 19.05.2026, 18:15. Reports that Denmark plans to recover and perform an autopsy on the dead Baltic whale. Jane Hansen of the Danish Environmental Protection Agency (Miljøstyrelsen) stated: "We are currently working on a solution that will allow us to simultaneously perform an autopsy and secure valuable scientific samples for research purposes." The decision was driven in part by practical concerns: beachgoers had been climbing on the carcass and posing for photographs. Source file: <https://www.zeit.de/wissenschaft/2026-05/timmy-wal-daenemark-obduzieren-gxe> (Cited in Part XVIII-B)
- **[dpa, 30.03.2026]** — dpa correspondents, "Stranded Baltic humpback whale off Germany's coast resumes swimming," dpa-international.com, 30.03.2026, 23:07 GMT (published 31.03.2026 01:07 local). Reports that under the sole authority of Minister Till Backhaus and the expert team, officials attempted to rouse the whale using targeted noise from boats. The whale initially swam in the wrong direction toward Wismar harbor, but then turned seaward and dove into the open Baltic Sea. Critically, the report states: "A remnant of the fishing net remained in its mouth" and "the whale has submerged and is no longer visible, a water police spokesman said. The police boat monitoring the animal has returned to port, he added, saying it made little sense to search for the whale in the dark." The article confirms that no sustained escort convoy was deployed after the whale dove — the water police ceased tracking when the whale was no longer visible, and this decision was made by the authorities, not by any outside actor. Source: <https://www.dpa-international.com/general-news/urn:newsml:dpa.com:20090101:260331-99-992797/> (Cited in Part 4).
- **[FAZ, Staib interview with Madsen, 29.04.2026]** — "Tierquälerei und Geldverschwendung." Madsen: "It will die one way or another, I'm sure of it." (quoted in Part I, XII)
- **[FAZ, Staib, 02.06.2026]** — Julian Staib, "Walforscher Madsen: 'Kollegen in Amerika fragen mich, ob die Deutschen verrückt geworden sind'," Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (FAZ), 02.06.2026, 17:34. Interview with Peter Teglberg Madsen, humpback whale researcher at Aarhus University, Denmark. Madsen describes the handling of the whale as a "total disaster" (totales Desaster). He states that the whale was emaciated and sick, "had probably more or less starved to death before it drowned." He criticises the barge transport as "clearly animal cruelty" and the release as a "complete shitshow" and "complete farce." He notes that the whale was "thrown from the barge with a rope attached to its tail," calling this mistreatment. Madsen reports receiving hate mail and a letter from the activists' lawyers. He states that colleagues from the US have asked him: "What the hell happened? Have the Germans gone crazy?" He advises German politicians not to ignore experts and suggests that wealthy donors should instead invest in removing ghost nets from the Baltic Sea. Source file: [screenshot-faz-net-aktuell-gesellschaft-tiere-walforscher-kollegen-in-amerika-fragen-mich-ob-die-deutschen-verrueckt-geworden-sind-200890831.html-2026-06-03-08_18_07.pdf](https://www.faz.net/aktuell/gesellschaft/tiere/walforscher-kollegen-in-amerika-fragen-mich-ob-die-deutschen-verrueckt-geworden-sind-200890831.html-2026-06-03-08_18_07.pdf) (Pages 1–4). (Cited in Part XX)
- **[Ostsee-Zeitung insider account, archive.is/nNd4I, 07.05.2026]** — "Augenzeuge lüftet Geheimnis: So lief die Freilassung des Wals in der Nordsee tatsächlich ab." By Hannes Ewert. Anonymous insider: mouth wound "so groß wie ein Gullydeckel" (as big as a manhole cover); whale slid backwards when Fortuna B changed draft; skin improved in higher salinity; whale "frisch und gut" during transit. Source file: [screenshot-archive-is-nNd4I-2026-05-07-13_51_22.pdf](https://www.ostseezeitung.de/aktuell/13_51_22.pdf). (cited in Parts XII, XVI, XXVI)
- **[News5 Live, aerial drone footage, 23.03.2026]** — First stranding footage. Source <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TF25XgC3Hhc&t=3360s> (cited in Parts IV, VII)
- **[News5 Facebook, necropsy preparation Stralsund, 08.04.2026]** — DMM necropsy prep on Day 3 while whale was still alive. One of the most damning procedural details. (Source:

<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=975958248723103> (cited in Parts I, IV, VII, XVII, XVIII-B, XIX, XXV)

- **[News5 Live, 21.04.2026]** – News5 live broadcast. Source: Jenna_Statement_672433647_1245569760979981_6619351746554230416_n.jpg(Cited in Parts V, XII)
- **[Lehmann YouTube, 'EXPERTEN verwechseln Buckelwal mit Finnwal?!' 14.03.2026]** – Robert Marc Lehmann YouTube video. Correction of DMM/Sea Shepherd fin whale misidentification. YouTube video. (cited in Parts I, VII,)
- **[Lehmann, "Die Wahrheit über Wal Hope," YouTube documentary, 20.04.2026]** Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=apSjwShd6so&t=2s>, (cited in Parts IV)
- **[tierschutzpartei_sh Instagram, 17.04.2026]** – Tierschutzpartei Schleswig-Holstein (Animal Protection Party SH) Instagram post, 17 April 2026. Referenced in v7 in a compound citation alongside the SNM Mouth-Opening Rebuttal Letter of 16.04.2026. Source: Rescue update_666472915_1308214277871702_7101926937495957031_n.jpeg (cited in Part XII)
- **[Walter-Mommert, NDR 1 Radio MV interview, 06.05.2026]** – Karin Walter-Mommert interview, NDR 1 Radio MV, 6 May 2026. Tracker data: 23 dives, depths to 150m. No GPS location yet. Location data "can take up to three weeks." Source file: Walter-Mommert Interview Broadcast.docx. (cited in Parts I, XII, XVII, XXVI)
- **[Ostsee-Zeitung, 'Wal vor Ahrenshoop gesichtet,' 09.05.2025]** – Ostsee-Zeitung Redaktion, "Wal vor Ahrenshoop gesichtet," Ostsee-Zeitung, 08.05.2025, 16:00. Reports that firefighters on a training exercise sighted a humpback whale off the coast of Ahrenshoop. Experts from the German Oceanographic Museum in Stralsund confirmed the sighting. The article notes this is the second whale sighting in the area within a few days, following a recent sighting near Hiddensee. Fire crew members reportedly observed barnacles on the whale's back. Source: www.ostsee-zeitung.de/lokales/vorpommern-ruegen/ribnitz-damgarten/wal-vor-ahrenshoop-gesichtet-5346c738-189b-40bb-9e73-aecb972ebc2a.html. (cited in Part IV)
- **[Bietigheimer Zeitung/dpa, 31.03.2026]** – Bietigheimer Zeitung Redaktion / dpa, "Wal vor Wismar: Greenpeace-Boot soll Buckelwal von Flachwasser fernhalten," Bietigheimer Zeitung, 31.03.2026, 11:42. Reports that Greenpeace is using an inflatable boat in Wismar Bay to keep the humpback whale away from shallow waters. Thilo Maack (Greenpeace) states: "We are optimistic that the whale will continue to choose to stay in open water." The water police are on site with the coastal patrol boat "Hoben." The priority is to prevent the whale from swimming into the shallow, narrow channel at the entrance to the harbor of Poel Island. Maack expresses hope that the whale will reverse its route back to the Atlantic. Source file: *screenshot-bietigheimerzeitung-de-inhalt-wal-vor-wismar-greenpeace-boot-soll-buckelwal-von-flachwasser-fernhalten-b842ce16-e1c6-44b8-a270-12f48b992207-html-2026-06-10-10_53_15.pdf*. (Cited for the water police's concern about the Poel Island channel and Greenpeace's single inflatable boat intervention.)
- **[Tagesspiegel/dpa, 31.03.2026]** – Tagesspiegel Redaktion / dpa, "Wal vor Wismar: Greenpeace-Boot soll Buckelwal von Flachwasser fernhalten," Der Tagesspiegel, 31.03.2026. Reports that Greenpeace is using an inflatable boat in Wismar Bay to keep the humpback whale away from shallow waters. Thilo Maack (Greenpeace) states: "We are optimistic that the whale will continue to choose to stay in open water." The water police are on site with the coastal patrol boat "Hoben." The priority is to prevent the whale from swimming into the shallow, narrow channel at the entrance to the harbor of Poel Island. Maack expresses hope that the whale will reverse its route back through Danish waters to the North Sea and Atlantic. Source: <https://www.tagesspiegel.de/wissen/wal-vor-wismar-greenpeace-boot-soll-buckelwal-von-flachwasser-fernhalten-15418648.html>(Cited in Part VIII).

- **[WEB.DE, Köhn/Scheiner, 18.04.2026]** – Malina Köhn & Philipp Scheiner, "Initiatorin wirft Behörden vor, Aktion zu behindern" (live blog), WEB.DE / News > Wissen > Tiere, updated 18.04.2026, 22:48. Covers Day 3 of rescue: veterinarian Bahr-van Gemmert press conference, Ethics Council statement, Greenpeace survival prognosis, rescue plan with air cushions/pontoons, Walter Gunz & Karin Walter-Mommert initiative, authority obstruction accusations, whale measurements (12.35 m × 3.20 m × 1.60 m), DLRG deployment, Jenna Wallace temporary permit.
- **[NDR MV, 20.04.2026]** – NDR 1 Radio MV / Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, "Im Video: Diese Gurte wurden verboten," broadcast 20.04.2026, 14:29. Reports that straps proposed for pulling the whale were rejected as too narrow. Contains link to Wednesday live ticker noting humpback whale was by then off Denmark.
- **[Pugnalom, LabNews Media, 21.04.2026]** – LabNews Media LLC, "Timmy the whale: Backhaus refuses medication," Pugnalom.io (Environment / Nature Conservation), 21.04.2026. Details Ministry of Environment under Dr. Till Backhaus (SPD) refusing all medical treatment despite ulcerative dermatitis, osmotic stress, open subcutaneous tissue, seagull pecking risk. References criminal complaint filed 08.04.2026 by journalists Marita Vollborn & Vlad Georgescu citing §17 TierSchG (animal cruelty by omission) and §13 StGB / §323c StGB (duty of care / failure to render assistance). Whale stranded since 31.03.2026, 20 days motionless in shallow Kirchsee.
- **[ZDF heute, 18.04.2026]** – ZDF heute (Panorama), "Greenpeace: Buckelwal Timmy hat kaum Überlebenschancen," 18.04.2026, 03:50. Greenpeace spokesperson assessment: slim survival chances, whale too weak, likely to drown in North Sea. Covers net remnants in mouth, suspected water in lungs, skin diseases, multiple prior strandings. Notes Environment Minister Backhaus gave green light to private initiative on Wednesday, financial responsibility with initiators. Source: dpa.
- **[Nordkurier, Haile, 'Meeresgigant findet trauriges Ende in Ostsee-Hafen,' 01.08.2025]** – Nordkurier article on the same Świnoujście dead whale. Source files: [screenshot-nordkurier-de...-2026-05-18-11_46_08.pdf](#) and Wayback Machine capture. (cited in Part IV)
- **[Nordkurier, dpa, 12.05.2025]** – Nordkurier Redaktion / dpa, "Wie hoch ist die Chance, einen Wal an der Ostseeküste zu sehen?," Nordkurier, 12.05.2025. Reports that firefighters sighted a humpback whale approximately 800 meters off Ahrenshoop on May 8, 2025, confirmed by experts at the German Oceanographic Museum in Stralsund. The article explicitly notes that this is one of several sightings in a short period, including recent sightings near Hiddensee (Easter Monday 2025) and Travemünde, all within the same year. Source: <https://www.nordkurier.de/regional/mecklenburg-vorpommern/wie-hoch-ist-die-chance-einen-wal-an-der-ostseekueste-zu-sehen-3575743> (cited in Part IV)
- **[ZDFheute, 07.04.2026]** – ZDF heute coverage of the Gutachten press conference of 7 April 2026. Source file: [screenshot-zdfheute-de-panorama-wal-sterben-kadaver-100-html-2026-04-07-11_04_20.pdf](#). (cited in Parts VIII, XV)
- **[Sunblick, 16.07.2025]** – Sunblick (Facebook page / animal rescue service for Vorpommern-Rügen), "Sensation vor Rügen: Buckelwal bei Nonnevitz gesichtet!" Facebook video post, 16.07.2025. Reports that on July 15 or 16, 2025, a young humpback whale appeared off Nonnevitz/Bakenberg on the northern tip of Rügen for approximately 15 minutes, witnessed by numerous tourists. The animal rescue service (Sunblick) states

they were contacted by excited holidaymakers who experienced the event, immediately exchanged information with the German Oceanographic Museum in Stralsund, and forwarded all videos and information to the experts so they could form a comprehensive picture of the "unusual and very impressive situation." The post expresses hope that the young humpback whale found its way back to deeper waters unharmed, noting that such a visit is an "extraordinary sign for our marine nature." Source:

<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=791533069866894>. (Cited fin Part IV)

▪ **[boote-magazin.de, 17.07.2025]** – Pascal Schürmann, "Animal spectacle off the coast of Rügen," BOOTE Das Motorboote Magazin (English edition), 17.07.2025. Reports that a young male humpback whale was spotted off Nonnevitze at the northern tip of Rügen, with images and videos showing the animal striking the water surface with its tail fin. Judith Denkinger from the German Oceanographic Museum in Stralsund confirmed via a museum spokeswoman that the footage clearly shows a humpback whale, suspected to be a male juvenile. Denkinger states that tail-slapping is typical behavior for male humpbacks (used to attract females), notes that humpback whales do not normally occur in the Baltic Sea, and describes the sighting as a "false migration" (Fehlwanderung), expressing hope that the whale will find its way back to the North Sea. The article notes that excited holidaymakers sent their photos and videos to the Vorpommern-Rügen animal rescue service (Sunblick), who then contacted the German Oceanographic Museum, enabling scientists to quickly assess the "unusual and very impressive situation." The article also lists other 2025 Baltic Sea humpback sightings: off Ahrenshoop in May, off Hiddensee on Easter Monday, and off Travemünde in spring. Maria Schmidt (marine biologist, University of Rostock) is quoted stating that repeated humpback sightings could be an "indicator of major ecological changes in our seas." Source: <https://www.boote-magazin.de/en/travel-and-charter/territories/whale-sighting-animal-spectacle-off-the-coast-of-ruegen/#24r19> (Cited fin Part IV)

Section F. International media and academic commentary

- **[ABC News/AP, 24.03.2026]** — AP wire by Kirsten Grieshaber. Biertümpfel "every passing hour means a deterioration" and Mannheimer "the animal is still alive, breathing, making sounds." Source: <https://apnews.com/article/germany-humpback-whale-stranded-rescue-d561dd4685297fac46a7c45397791b5c>. (Cited in Parts I, VIII, XV)
- **[AP News, 31.03.2026]** — Geir Moulson, "Rescuers lose hope for the humpback whale stranded in the Baltic Sea," Associated Press, 31.03.2026. Reports that rescuers lost hope for the humpback whale after it got stuck again near the island of Poel on Tuesday, March 31. Burkard Baschek, scientific director of the German Oceanographic Museum (Deutsches Meeresmuseum) and scientific coordinator of the rescue effort, stated at a televised news conference that the whale was breathing at very irregular intervals, drone photos showed little sign of activity in the sediment under the animal, and it barely reacted when approached. Baschek concluded: "We firmly believe that the animal will die there." The article notes the whale was first spotted on March 3, and its skin condition had deteriorated due to long exposure to the low salt concentration of the Baltic Sea. Source: <https://apnews.com/article/germany-humpback-whale-stranded-baltic-oed5f3e135ec29601897dda122339321> (cited in Part IV).
- **[CBC/Reuters, 30.03.2026]** — Reuters, "The humpback whale rescued last week in the shallow Baltic Sea? It's stuck again," CBC News, 30.03.2026. Reports that the young humpback whale named Timmy got stuck again on Sunday morning after a week-long ordeal. The article quotes Daniela von Schaper, a marine expert at Greenpeace, stating: "The whale is quite weak. We're still hopeful that it will pull through." The report documents that Greenpeace and its partners observed the animal in severe stress with skin irritation and fishing gear entangled in its mouth. It notes that repeated rescue attempts have failed, and the whale is far from its natural habitat. Source: <https://www.cbc.ca/lite/story/9.7146929?feature=related-link> (cited in Part IV)
- **[Guardian 24.03.2026]** — Kate Connolly in Berlin. Groß: whale may have "simply lost its way." Source: [screenshot-the-guardian-world-2026-mar-24-humpback-whale-stranded-german-coast-2026-03-24-12_46_18](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2026-mar-24-humpback-whale-stranded-german-coast-2026-03-24-12_46_18). (Cited in Parts I, II, V, XI.)
- **[The Guardian, Carroll, 29.03.2026]** — Rory Carroll, "Hope running low for humpback whale stranded off German coast," The Guardian, 29.03.2026. Reports on the deteriorating condition of a young male humpback whale (nicknamed "Timmy" after Timmendorfer Strand beach) stranded off Germany's Baltic coast. The approximately 10-meter (33ft) mammal appeared weakened and sick, struggling to find a route back to the Atlantic Ocean after freeing itself from a sandbank on March 27 only to become trapped again. A 500-meter restricted area was established around the animal. Environment Minister Till Backhaus (Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania) noted the whale is both weakened and sick, possibly injured by a fishing net. Experts quoted include Stefanie Gross from the Institute for Terrestrial and Aquatic Wildlife Research (ITAW), who noted the whale's significantly reduced respiratory rate and lack of reaction to nearby vessels, and Burkard Baschek, director of the German Maritime Museum in Stralsund, who said the whale needed to navigate about 310 miles to reach relative safety, calling chances "relatively slim." The article notes the whale was first spotted in the Baltic on March 3 and had stranded near Niendorf in Lübeck Bay, where hotel guests heard its deep moans and alerted police. Source: www.theguardian.com/world/2026/mar/29/hope-running-low-for-humpback-whale-stranded-off-german-coast. (Cited in Part IV).
- **[Guardian, Connolly, 05.05.2026]** — "Rescue of Timmy the whale 'an all-round catastrophe' after tracker failure." Source file: [screenshot-the-guardian-...-2026-05-05-18_30_00.pdf](#). Ritter: "all-round catastrophe." DMM: "highly likely dead." Madsen: "very strange and unprofessional." Danish authorities: nature should take its course. (cited in Parts XII, XVII, XX)

- **[The Telegraph, Shirreff, 06.05.2026]** – Lauren Shirreff, “How Germany lost its mind – and soul – over a stranded whale,” The Telegraph, 6 May 2026. Feature-length article. Subhead: “When a young humpback was beached, a circus of influencers and millionaires turned a natural tragedy into a national soap opera.” Paywalled; only introduction visible in screencapture. Photo credit Philip Dulian/AP shows whale in barge. Published same day as DMM “highly likely dead” statement. Source file: screencapture-telegraph-co-uk-news-2026-05-06-how-germany-lost-mind-soul-stranded-whale-2026-05-26-13_38_36.pdf. (cited in Part XXII)
- **[Scientific American 02.04.2026]** – Anna Lorenzen, "Why experts called off a major humpback whale rescue effort," Scientific American / Spektrum der Wissenschaft, 02.04.2026. Reports that all rescue efforts for Timmy the humpback whale were called off by officials including Till Backhaus, environment minister of Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania. The article quotes marine biologist Fabian Ritter, who confirms the decision was made because the animal was exhausted, breathing irregularly, and hardly moving, with pieces of fishing net remaining in its mouth preventing feeding. Source: <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/why-humpback-whale-rescue-effort-got-called-off/>(Cited in Parts II, IV, XI, XII)
- **[Science, Enserink, 04.05.2026]** – "Chaotic whale rescue shocks marine biologists." Source file: screencapture-science-org-...-2026-05-05-08_50_52.pdf Cited in Part XXI)
- **[CNN Newsroom transcript, 17.05.2026; CERG Facebook post, 17.05.2026]** – CNN Newsroom, 17 May 2026. Karen Stockin (Massey University, IWC SEP member) post-mortem interview from Auckland. Stockin: whale was "incredibly poor body condition, emaciated, almost" and "so sick and so debilitated." Characterises the rescue as a "translocation" not a rescue. States the whale was "offloaded in waters that were of high shipping density." Recommends "a detailed necropsy." Source files: CNN Stockin Interview 05172026.docx CNN Newsroom - Timmy the whale.mp4 ; screencapture-video-snapstream-net-...-2026-05-18-11_53_39.pdf . (cited in Part XX)
- **[Stockin, The Conversation, 21.04.2026]** – IWC SEP member article framing rescue as "emotional pull" that "overrides expertise." Published under academic byline. Source file: screencapture-theconversation-...-2026-05-01-11_12_53.pdf . (cited in Part V)
- **[Pirota, Vanessa, The Conversation, 19.05.2026]** – Postdoctoral researcher, Macquarie University. Advocates euthanasia as "kindest option," repeats crushed-organs doctrine, draws Keiko parallel, questions private expenditure. Does not mention any successful large-whale rescue. DOI: 10.64628/AA.4afmh56wk. (quoted in Part I, V)
- **[Messenger, TreeHugger, 2010]** – Messenger, Stephen. "Whale saved 10 years ago reunites with rescuers." TreeHugger, 18.11.2010. Covers Ubatuba, Brazil (2000) case: humpback rescued after 12-hour stranding; DNA samples confirmed same individual sighted alive and healthy eight years later, providing definitive proof of long-term post-rescue survival (cited in Part III).

Danish media

- **[TV2 Østjylland, 'Bomber fra 2. verdenskrig sprængt i luften,' 12.05.2026]** – Danish Navy WWII bomb detonation Aarhus Bay. 45,000 tonnes ammunition. Visible and audible from Egå Marina. Source file: screencapture-tv2ostjylland-dk-syddjurs-bomber-...-2026-05-17-11_15_56.pdf. (cited in Part XVIII)
- **[TV2 Østjylland, 14–15.05.2026]** – Danish coverage of dead whale discovery off Anholt. Source files: screencapture-tv2ostjylland-dk-norrdjurs-det-er-en-ordentlig-bof-...-2026-05-14-18_32_21.pdf ; screencapture-netnatur-dk-...-2026-05-14-18_31_30.pdf ; screencapture-nyheder-tv2-dk-...-2026-05-14-18_34_10.pdf. (cited in Parts II, XVII)

- **[Danish Ministry of Environment, ‘Stranded whales should be left alone,’ 17.04.2024]** – Miljø- og Ligestillingsministeriet / Miljøstyrelsen (Danish Environmental Protection Agency), “Strandede hvaler skal være i fred” (“Stranded whales should be left alone”), published mst.dk, 17 April 2024. Updated marine mammal contingency plan: stranded animals under 4 metres can be euthanised by the Nature Agency; animals not euthanised “must be left alone”; large whales over 4 metres “should not be euthanised or rescued by pulling them back into the sea.” Nynne Elmelund Lemming (specialist, Danish Environmental Protection Agency): “Basically, whale strandings are a natural thing, and we know very little about why the large whales seek out shallow water. They usually die shortly after they are stranded, and it is our opinion that they should be left alone.” Also notes the 2022 Limfjord killer whale case: whale was pulled to deeper water, re-stranded, but a year later was seen again in good condition “without human intervention” – Denmark cited this as evidence against rescue despite it being a successful rescue outcome. Source file: [screenshot-mst-dk-nyheder-2024-april-strandede-hvaler-skal-vaere-i-fred-2026-05-26-10_56_17.pdf](#) . (cited in Part I)
- **[TAG24, Bruns, 30.05.2026]** – Tobias Bruns, "Toter Buckelwal am Strand von Anholt: So lange soll Timmy noch gelebt haben," TAG24 / Baltic Sea News, 30.05.2026, 20:45. Reports carcass washed ashore on Anholt ~75 m offshore on 14.05.2026; body pulled onto beach on Saturday, autopsy still pending. Danish authorities have held satellite tracker (Splash 10-F-296, Wildlife Computers) for over two weeks; device to be handed to MV Environment Minister Backhaus (SPD), ministry spokesman Claus Tantzen confirms data will be published. Jeffrey Foster (sole rescue-initiative witness at release) claims tracker recorded 50+ position transmissions and 30+ depth recordings over six days via CLS satellite, whale allegedly swam 240 km post-release (02.05.2026), dove once to 150 m and multiple times to ~50 m. If Foster's account is accurate, whale survived until at least 08.05.2026. Anholt lies ~300 km from release point. Verification pending ministry publication of tracker data. (cited in Part II)

Section G. NGO and organisational sources

- **[Sea Shepherd Deutschland Facebook, 24.03.2026]** – "UPDATE BEACHED WHALE." Confirms the Trave Thursday and Haffkrug Friday line-cutting operations. (Cited in Parts I, III, V)
- **[WDC statement, 01.05.2026]** – Barge transport "legally problematic." EU Habitats Directive invoked. Source file: WDC_Screen Shot 2026-05-01 at 9.25.13 AM.png. (cited in Parts I, XII)
- **[WDC social media post, ~20.05.2026]** – Post-death doctrinal statement: "The harsh reality is that, in many cases, these whales can not be saved." (cited in Parts I, XX)
- **[Whale Sanctuary Project, 'Whale Aid Team Assisting in Humpback Rescue,' 27.04.2026]** – Confirms Jeff Foster, Mike Partica, Kyra Wadsworth on site. Foster in water during barge loading. Source file: screenshot-whalesanctuaryproject-org-...-whale-aid-team-...-2026-05-09-19_14_43.pdf. (Cited in Parts XII, XVI)
- **[Whale Sanctuary Project, 'Summary of Events Surrounding Release of Timmy the Whale,' 16.05.2026]** – Jeff Foster's detailed account of the contested release of 1–2 May 2026, including the tail-pulling incident. Whale exhibited multiple visible injuries from barge contact. Tagging procedure details. Captain left Timmy unattended overnight despite objections. Communication "inconsistent and ineffective." Source file: screenshot-whalesanctuaryproject-org-summary-...-2026-05-17-21_01_40.pdf. (Cited in in Part XII, XVI.F)
- **[NABU Schleswig-Holstein, humpback sighting Flensburg, 08.04.2024]** – First 2024 sighting. Source file: screenshot-schleswig-holstein-nabu-de-...-schweinswalschutz-...-2026-05-19-14_42_24.pdf (NABU page titled "Humpback whale in the Baltic Sea" with Flensburg sighting reports from April 2024). (cited in Part IV)
- **[NABU Schleswig-Holstein, humpback sighting chronicle]** – — Dagmar Struß (Head of NABU State Office for Baltic Sea Protection), "Humpback whale in the Baltic Sea," NABU Schleswig-Holstein (Naturschutzbund Deutschland / BUND), 11.04.2024. Historical chronicle of humpback whale sightings in the Baltic Sea, compiled by the NABU Baltic Sea Protection State Office. Contains a dedicated sightings chronology page (referenced as "separate page" and "To the chronicle") documenting multiple events: the 2014 sighting of two humpback whales near Kalkgrund lighthouse recorded by customs vessel "Holnis" with a breaching photograph by Anegrethe and Søren Bomholt; the 2016 juvenile humpback whale in Greifswald Bodden that survived a collision with a sailboat near Rügen and later disappeared; and the 5 April 2024 sighting of two humpback whales in Flensburg Fjord filmed by Jan Philip Leon of the Hanseatic Yacht School. Also notes that humpback whales primarily feed on krill but also eat smaller fish including Baltic herring, and that dwindling fish stocks and overfishing exacerbate the risk of baleen whales becoming emaciated in the Baltic. Source file: <https://schleswig-holstein.nabu.de/wir-ueber-uns/organisation/landesstellen/schweinswalschutz/34800.html> (cited in Parts IV, VII)
- **[IWC website, 'About the Commission']** – Institutional reference confirming IWC's founding purpose and core mandate. (cited in Parts IX, XXV)
- **[Cronemeyer Haisch law firm) on behalf of JEB Bereederungsgesellschaft mbH & Co KG, "Pressrechtliches Informationsschreiben für die JEB Bereederungsgesellschaft mbH & Co KG und deren Crew," 16.05.2026]** States that ongoing media coverage and public discussion necessitate further clarifications for the client and crew, supplementing the press release of 9 May 2026. Notes that public statements by the private initiative, particularly Dr. Tönnies, contain "numerous undifferentiated, incomplete, and completely unjustified accusations and even knowingly false claims" that are causing the client and crew immense distress, including public hostility, threats, and hate speech. Source file: Crew statement1.jpg-Crew statement9.jpg. (Cited in Part XII.)

- **[JEB statement, via Cronemeyer Haisch, 09.05 and 16.05.2026]** – Supplementary legal statement from the shipping company, 9 pages. Covers: filming policy, access to whale, conduct of crew, "livestock" remark denial, barge inland-waterway designation, whale's head-first entry and consequences for release, chain of command dispute. Signed Dr. Patricia Cronemeyer. Source file: [screenshot-kurierverlag-de-...-presserechliches-informationsschreiben-...-2026-05-17-21_06_09.pdf](#) and updated version in [screenshot-kurierverlag-de-na-pressemitteilungen-presserechliches-informationsschreiben-fuer-die-jeb-bereederungsgesellschaft-mbh-co-kg-und-deren-crew-zr-94309381-html-2026-05-19-14_13_29.pdf](#) (Cited in Part XII, XVI.F)

Section H. Social media, interviews, and private communications

- **[Elwen, Sea Search South Africa, Facebook, ~May 2026]** – "The general policy is euthanasia asap. Dolphins too. Not a conservation issue, it's a people management and animal welfare issue." (quoted in Parts I, V)
- **[MacKay, Mithriel, MCERC, Facebook comment, ~19.05.2026]** – "That whale suffered needlessly." "Funding used to 'save' a single whale that had no chance." Post-death statement from a marine science professional. (cited in Parts I, XX)
- **[Screenshot, scientist social media post, ~April–May 2026]** – "Social media is rocket fuel." Characterising public engagement as destructive. (cited in Part XXI)
- **[Thalmann, written communication to the German citizen, 10.04.2026]** – Written communication from Thalmann (Tasmania sperm whale refloat author) confirming the German sandbank environment is "fundamentally suitable" for refloat using published methods. (cited in Parts X, XII)
- **[Ostseezeitung Facebook video, whale in Wismar Harbour, 03.03.2026]** – Video of whale in harbour basin. Source file: March 3_2026 sighting_Große Rettungsaktion im Wismarer Hafen...mp4. (cited in Part IV, VII)
- **[Bernd Zimmermann Facebook reel, whale off Hiddensee, Easter Monday ~April 2025]** – Live humpback sighting. (cited in Part IV)
- **[Backhaus, 10 April 2026 interview, video record]** – Source: 04112026 playback.mp4.(Cited in Part VIII)
- **[Jens Schulz Facebook comment, 18.04.2026]** – Rescue team coordinator comment on operational preparations. Source: Jens Schultz Statement about SNM_677292966_26656500814037443_8195911372151067114_n.jpg (cited in Parts XII, XXVI)
- **[Jeff Foster, interview with Nikita Devidar, X/Twitter Spaces, 22.05.2026]** – Foster's first-person account of the agreed tail-line plan: "tie a very soft tail line onto the tail (fluke), right at the peduncle... hand-pull him out gradually... not yank him off the boat." Confirms the tail-line procedure (albeit manual and gentle) was part of the agreed plan. (Cited in Part XII, XVI.F)
- **[Facebook comments, post-death reaction, ~16–17.05.2026]** – Multiple commenters framing critique as "science denial." Anonymised. (cited in Part XX)
- **[Ocean Conservation Namibia, YouTube]** – Ocean Conservation Namibia. "Successful Humpback Whale Rescue!" YouTube. Documents hands-on community effort to push a stranded juvenile humpback back into the ocean in Namibia using only manual guidance with incoming waves. (cited in Part III)

Section I. Web sources and reference

- **[IWC staff page, image]** – Siebert listed as European representative on SEP. Source: <https://iwc.int/expert-advisory-panel-on-strandings>(cited in Parts V, IX)
- **[Sea World Foundation Facebook post, 17.04.2026; ORRCA/NSW National Parks, Forster humpback rescue]** – Australian comparator case. (cited in Parts V, X)
- **[boote-magazin.de, 25.04.2025]** – Ursula Meer, "Angler sichtet Buckelwal in der Ostsee vor Hiddensee," BOOTE Das Motorboote Magazin, 24.04.2025. Reports that on Easter Monday (April 21, 2025), hobby angler Bernd Zimmermann encountered a humpback whale approximately ten nautical miles north of Rügen near Hiddensee. The young whale accompanied his boat for about 20 minutes before swimming toward Bornholm. Prof. Dr. Judith Denking, Curator of Marine Mammals at the German Oceanographic Museum in Stralsund, confirmed from Zimmermann's video that the animal is a "very, very young whale" and noted that "the Baltic Sea is unfortunately something of a death trap for large whales." The article clarifies that this is not the same whale freed from fishing nets off Poland in February 2025, as that animal later stranded and was dissected in Denmark. The article also references other notable Baltic humpback sightings: a juvenile whale that stayed in Greifswald Bay for months in 2016 and collided with a sailboat near Rügen, whales sighted in Kiel and Glückstadt in April 2024, and two humpbacks filmed in the Flensburg Fjord in September 2024 near Glücksburg harbor. Source file from boote-magazin.de (URL: www.boote-magazin.de/angler-sichtet-buckelwal-in-der-ostsee-vor-hiddensee/). (Cited in Part IV)

Section J. Images and screenshots in the documentary file

- **[Bild, aerial photograph, 26.03.2026]** – From Bild liveticker, 26.03.2026 , Aerial of whale at Niendorf. Source: screenshot-bild-de-regional-ostsee-live-ticker-die-grosse-wal-rettung-vom-timmendorfer-strand-6Additions9c25182ffcdb2ce7075be7e-2026-03-26-09_41_18.(Cited in Parts I, VII)
- **[press release_661783327 image]** – Gutachten press invitation image. Cross-reference to Section A [MV PM 084/2026]. (cited in Parts I, VIII, XI)

Section K. Polish and citizen sources

- **[Świnoujście w sieci, Facebook post, 02.03.2025]** – Whale in Świnoujście port canals, Gulf of Szczecin. Dorsal fin comparison confirms not the subject animal. Source: <https://www.facebook.com/eswinoujscie/posts/pfbid02oELjY97ysNX3FppntjkgK9JaHCP1JFAfszci2Rw1YhrWdx4DBQAC5RivcvpgcPDcl> (cited in Part IV.B)
- **[Rejsy na foki Gdańsk – Świbno, Facebook video post, 04.04.2025]** – Whale feeding in Gulf of Gdańsk, 17 km from Wisła Śmiała. Diving 6–8 minutes, blows over 5m, depth 60m. Unable to determine if subject animal. Source: <https://www.facebook.com/namierzeje/videos/1133597785232329> (cited in Part IV.B)
- **[AP News, Scislowska, 26.02.2025]** – "A whale caught in fishing nets has been freed off Poland's Baltic coast." Konrad Wrzecionkowski (WWF Poland) account. Source file: [screenshot-apnews...whale-rescued-nets-baltic-poland-...-2026-05-19-12_06_02.pdf](#). (cited in Part IV.A)
- **[TVP World, 'Dead whale found on protected Baltic beach in northern Poland,' 10.05.2026]** – TVP World Redakction, "Dead whale found on protected Baltic beach in northern Poland," TVP World (Telewizja Polska), 10.05.2026. Reports that a dead whale approximately five metres long was found on a beach in the protected Mewia Łacha nature reserve at the mouth of the Vistula River near Mikoszewo in Poland's northern Pomeranian region. Initial theories suggest the animal may be a baleen whale, a group of whales that feed on plankton and small fish. A representative noted that such animals do not naturally live in the Baltic Sea and usually enter it by accident through the Danish straits. Due to the extent of decomposition, experts cannot determine the cause of death. The whale may have drifted in the Baltic for several weeks before washing ashore. Polish services stated the whale will be removed and sent for disposal starting Monday. Officials warned people not to enter the reserve, which is under strict protection, especially during bird breeding season Source file: [screenshot-tvpworld-93177291-dead-whale-...-2026-05-19-14_05_48.pdf](#). (cited in Part IV)
- **[Interia Zielona, Wojaczyk, 'Martwy wieloryb w Bałtyku,' 25.07.2025]** – Polish Interia Zielona article on the dead whale discovered in Świnoujście harbour on 25 July 2025, arrived on the bow of an LNG tanker. Source file: [screenshot-web-archive-org...zielona-interia-pl...-2026-05-18-11_15_50.pdf](#). (cited in Part IV)
- **[TVN24, 'Martwy wieloryb miał zostać zatopiony,' 11.08.2025]** – TVN24 article: the Świnoujście whale carcass, sunk at sea on 2 August, washed ashore decomposing at Wiselka on 10 August, beach closure forced. Source file: [screenshot-web-archive-org...tvn24-pl...-2026-05-19-11_55_58.pdf](#). RECOMMENDED SECTION: Section K. (cited in Part IV)

STRANDED NO MORE

Anonymous watchdog group of stranding professionals