

To: Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (DBCA)

Email: enquiries@dbca.wa.gov.au

**Re: Request for Information and Justification — Stranding Response, Humpback Whale
Dolly/Stormy, Port Kennedy, 26 August 2026**

Dear Director General,

Stranded No More (SNM), an international initiative of stranding professionals, writes regarding the Department's response to the live stranding of a juvenile humpback whale (*Megaptera novaeangliae*) at Long Point, Port Kennedy, on 26 August 2026. The animal was designated Dolly by the community and given the ceremonial name Stormy by Aboriginal elders.

SNM has published a Critical Brief on this case documenting significant concerns about the response. This letter requests specific information and justification from the Department on the following matters.

1. Diagnostic assessment

DBCA's public statement of 5pm on 26 August described the whale as having "compromised health" but did not specify a diagnosis. Incident Controller Benson Todd subsequently stated in a video posted on the Parks and Wildlife Service's own Facebook page on 27 August: "At this stage we are unsure as to why the whale came ashore... maybe to understand IF it was unwell. But at this stage, we really unsure, yeah, one of the world's many mysteries."

This statement indicates that the Department did not establish a definitive diagnosis before the decision to sedate was made. SNM requests:

- a) What specific diagnostic tests were performed on the whale prior to the sedation decision? Specifically: was a blood sample drawn and analysed? Was a blow sample collected? Was a biopsy taken of the visible growth on the whale's body? Was a neurological assessment conducted?
- b) If diagnostic tests were performed, what were the results, and what specific diagnosis was established?
- c) If diagnostic tests were not performed, what was the clinical basis for the assessment of "compromised health"?
- d) Was the pre-stranding drone footage captured by a citizen at approximately 9:30am, showing the whale with balance problems and listing prior to the stranding, reviewed by the veterinary team? If so, was it incorporated into the clinical assessment? If not, why not?

2. The sedative administered

DBCA's statement of 5pm on 26 August stated that "the whale has been administered a sedative to hopefully lessen its pain and suffering." The whale died overnight. SNM requests:

- a) What drug was administered?
- b) What was the dosage, in milligrams per kilogram of estimated body weight?
- c) What was the route of administration (intramuscular, intravenous, or other)?
- d) What was the intended clinical effect? Was the dosage calibrated for anxiolysis and analgesia, or for deep sedation?
- e) Was the dosage consistent with published cetacean pharmacological guidelines for sedation, or did it exceed the published range?
- f) In the veterinary team's assessment, did the sedative contribute to the whale's death by suppressing respiratory function in an animal already under physiological stress from stranding? Without full disclosure of the drug and dosage, this possibility cannot be excluded.

3. Refloating

DBCA stated that it was "not possible to refloat the whale in the condition and location it was in." However, citizens at the scene reported successfully moving the whale off the sandbar toward open water on multiple occasions before being instructed to leave the water by authorities. SNM requests:

- a) What specific assessment of refloating feasibility was conducted?
- b) Was a structured refloating attempt using the strap method or equivalent technique considered by DBCA? If not, why not?
- c) Was any specialist cetacean rescue organisation or individual consulted? If not, why not?
- d) On what basis was the citizens' partial success in moving the whale deemed insufficient to warrant a professional refloating attempt?

4. Necropsy

Based on DBCA's public communications, no full necropsy (internal examination) was performed on the whale. Perth Zoo veterinarians collected samples, but the body was hauled from the beach by machinery and transported inland for disposal without being opened for a comprehensive post-mortem examination.

SNM notes that without a full necropsy, the cause of death cannot be established, the claim of "compromised health" cannot be verified, and the possibility that the whale drowned as a result of sedative-induced respiratory depression cannot be ruled out. A sedated whale on a sandbar with tidal fluctuation is at risk of drowning if the sedative reduces respiratory drive and muscle tone to the point where the animal cannot keep its blowhole clear of water. Only a full necropsy, including examination of the lungs for aspirated water and assessment of the cause and mechanism of death, could determine whether the whale died of an underlying condition or of pharmacologically mediated drowning.

SNM understands that the stated reason for not performing a full necropsy on the beach was the risk of attracting sharks. This concern, while legitimate in the immediate beachside context, could have been easily mitigated by transporting the carcass to an alternative location away from the shore for examination. The whale was in fact transported inland by machinery, meaning the

logistical capacity to move the carcass existed and was used. The decision was made to transport the body for disposal rather than for examination. SNM requests:

- a) Why was a full necropsy not performed?
- b) Was the option of transporting the carcass to a suitable inland or port facility for full necropsy considered? If not, why not?
- c) Will the results of the sample analysis conducted by Perth Zoo be published in full?
- d) If the sample results prove inconclusive, will DBCA acknowledge publicly that the cause of death was not established?

5. Conflict of interest

The Perth Zoo veterinarians who advised DBCA to sedate the whale are the same veterinarians who collected the post-mortem samples and whose analysis will produce the only account of whether the whale was ill. This is a structural conflict of interest. The team that made the decision not to rescue is the team evaluating whether the decision was justified. SNM requests:

- a) Will DBCA commission an independent veterinary review of the stranding response and the sedation decision?
- b) Will the sample analysis results be reviewed by a veterinary pathologist independent of Perth Zoo and DBCA?

6. Veterinary records

SNM requests that DBCA release the complete veterinary case file for this stranding event, including all assessment notes, diagnostic test results (if any), the sedation decision rationale, the drug administration record, the overnight monitoring notes, and the post-mortem sample collection record. This information is necessary for any independent evaluation of the response.

SNM intends to publish the Department's response, or the absence of a response, alongside the Critical Brief on the Dolly/Stormy case at strandednomore.org. A substantive response would serve the Department's interest in demonstrating that the response was adequate. The absence of a response will be noted publicly.

Yours sincerely,

Stranded No More

strandednomore.org

To: Perth Zoo

Email: email@perthzoo.wa.gov.au

**Re: Request for Veterinary Transparency — Sedation and Assessment of Humpback Whale
Dolly/Stormy, Port Kennedy, 26 August 2026**

Dear Director,

Stranded No More (SNM), an international initiative of stranding professionals, writes regarding the role of Perth Zoo veterinarians in the assessment and sedation of a juvenile humpback whale at Port Kennedy on 26 August 2026. The animal was designated Dolly by the community and given the ceremonial name Stormy by Aboriginal elders.

Perth Zoo veterinarians were the primary clinical advisors on this stranding response. Their assessment informed the determination of "compromised health" and their recommendation led to the administration of a sedative. The whale died overnight. SNM has published a Critical Brief on this case and writes to request specific veterinary information that only Perth Zoo can provide.

1. The assessment

DBCA's public statement attributed the assessment of "compromised health" to consultation with Perth Zoo veterinarians. DBCA Incident Controller Benson Todd subsequently stated on 27 August, in a video posted on the Parks and Wildlife Service's own Facebook page, that the Department was "unsure" why the whale had come ashore and would need samples to understand "IF it was unwell."

This statement raises fundamental questions about the clinical basis for the assessment. SNM requests:

- a) What clinical findings led to the assessment of "compromised health"? Please provide the specific observations, measurements, and test results on which this assessment was based.
- b) What diagnostic tests did the Perth Zoo veterinary team perform? Specifically: blood draw, blow sample, biopsy of the visible growth, neurological assessment, body condition scoring?
- c) If the assessment was based solely on visual observation, does Perth Zoo consider visual observation alone to be an adequate diagnostic standard for a sedation decision on a strictly protected species?
- d) Was the visible growth on the whale's body examined or sampled? If not, on what basis was it treated as evidence of compromised health?
- e) Were the Perth Zoo veterinarians aware of the pre-stranding drone footage showing the whale with balance problems approximately ninety minutes before the stranding? Was this footage reviewed as part of the clinical assessment?

2. The sedative

Perth Zoo veterinarians recommended and presumably administered the sedative. The whale died overnight. This is the central transparency issue in the Dolly/Stormy case. SNM requests:

- a) What drug was administered? Please provide the generic pharmaceutical name.
- b) What was the dosage in milligrams per kilogram of estimated body weight?
- c) What was the route of administration?
- d) What was the intended clinical endpoint? Was the goal anxiolysis (reducing distress while maintaining consciousness and respiratory function), analgesia (pain relief), or deep sedation (suppression of consciousness)?
- e) Was the dosage within the published pharmacological range for cetacean sedation, or did it exceed published guidelines?
- f) What monitoring was conducted overnight to assess the whale's respiratory function, heart rate, and level of consciousness following sedation?
- g) In the Perth Zoo veterinary team's clinical judgment, did the sedative contribute to the whale's death? Specifically, did the sedative suppress respiratory drive or muscle tone to a degree that may have caused or contributed to drowning, aspiration, or respiratory failure in an animal already under physiological stress from stranding and gravitational loading?

SNM notes that without a full necropsy including lung examination for aspirated water, the possibility that the whale drowned as a direct or indirect consequence of the sedative cannot be excluded. A sedated whale on a tidal sandbar with reduced respiratory drive and reduced muscle tone is at heightened risk of drowning if water covers the blowhole. This is not a theoretical concern. It is a foreseeable pharmacological consequence of sedating a stranded cetacean in a tidal environment.

3. The necropsy that was not performed

Perth Zoo veterinarians collected samples from the carcass but the whale was not opened for a full internal examination. The body was hauled away for disposal. SNM notes that the carcass was moved inland by machinery, demonstrating that the logistical capacity to transport it existed. The stated concern about sharks attracting to the beach during a necropsy could have been addressed by performing the examination at an alternative location away from the shore. SNM requests:

- a) Did the Perth Zoo veterinary team recommend a full necropsy? If so, why was it not performed? If not, why not?
- b) What samples were collected, and what analyses are being conducted?
- c) When will the results be available, and will they be published in full?
- d) Does Perth Zoo acknowledge that without a full necropsy, the cause of death cannot be definitively established, and the possibility of sedative-related death cannot be excluded?

4. Conflict of interest

The Perth Zoo veterinary team that recommended sedation is the same team whose sample analysis will produce the only scientific account of whether the whale was genuinely ill. SNM raises this not as an accusation of bad faith but as a structural concern. In standard veterinary practice, a lethal

outcome is reviewed by an independent party, not by the same clinicians who made the decision.
SNM requests:

- a) Will Perth Zoo support an independent veterinary review of its role in the stranding response?
- b) Will the sample analysis be reviewed by a pathologist independent of Perth Zoo?

5. Veterinary case file

SNM requests that Perth Zoo release the complete veterinary case file for this stranding event, including all assessment notes, the sedation decision rationale, the drug name and dosage, the route of administration, the monitoring notes from the overnight period, and the post-mortem sample collection record.

Perth Zoo is a publicly funded institution. The whale was a protected species under Australian law. The public has a right to know what was done to the animal, what drugs were administered, and whether the clinical decisions were evidence-based. Transparency will either vindicate the response or reveal its shortcomings. In either case, the public and the next stranded whale are better served by disclosure than by silence.

SNM intends to publish Perth Zoo's response, or the absence of a response, alongside the Critical Brief on the Dolly/Stormy case at strandednomore.org.

Yours sincerely,

Stranded No More

strandednomore.org