



**SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE
EIGHTEENTH REGULAR SESSION**

Electronic Meeting
10-18 August 2022

Graphics for Best Practices for the Safe Handling and Release of Cetaceans

WCPFC-SC18-2022/EB-IP-12

Prepared by the Secretariat (Consultancy)

In December 2021, at its 18th Regular Session of the Commission, the WCPFC adopted *Best Practices for the Safe Handling and Release of Cetaceans*. SC17 had previously reviewed the guidelines and recommended that they be forwarded to the Commission for adoption. SC17 also put forward the following recommendation with relation to the guidelines (SC17 Summary Report, para. 389):

389. SC17 further recommends that the Commission develop graphics to be included with the Best Practices for the Safe Handling and Release of Cetaceans for consideration at WCPFC19.

This document presents a set of draft graphics produced to illustrate the guidelines adopted by WCPFC18, as recommended by SC17.

SC18 is invited to consider the graphics and provide a recommendation for adoption by WCPFC19.

BEST PRACTICES FOR THE SAFE HANDLING AND RELEASE OF CETACEANS

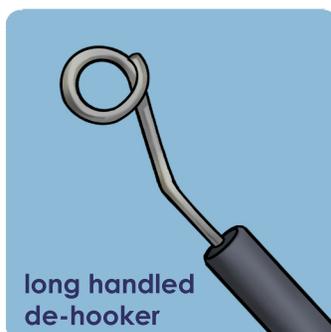
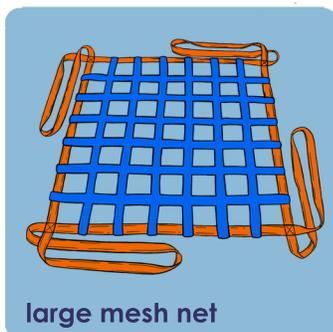
ANNEX I: GUIDELINES FOR THE SAFE HANDLING AND RELEASE OF CETACEANS PURSE SEINE GEAR:

The following are guidelines for best handling practices of marine mammals, specifically cetaceans, for purse seine and longline vessels fishing for tuna and tuna-like species in the western and central Pacific Ocean:

GENERAL PROVISIONS:

Safety First: These guidelines should be considered in light of safety and practicability for crew. Crew safety should always come first. Cetaceans can be very powerful and hooked or entangled cetaceans can be unpredictable, therefore it is not safe to enter the water in order to release an animal.

Suggested Equipment: Vessels should have equipment on board to facilitate the release of cetaceans. For purse seine vessels, suggested equipment includes: canvas or net slings or stretchers for carrying or lifting, large mesh net or grid to cover hatches/hoppers, and tools for cutting/removing net. For longline vessels, suggested equipment includes long handled cutters and de-hookers. Long handled cutters should be safety cutters or have a safety blade to avoid injuring the animal.



BEST PRACTICES FOR THE SAFE HANDLING AND RELEASE OF CETACEANS

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GENERAL PROVISIONS:

Training: Crew should be provided with training on best practices for the safe handling and release of cetaceans, including the use of appropriate equipment carried on board for such purposes.

Notifications: Once a cetacean is observed inside a purse seine net or hooked or entangled on longline gear, immediately notify the captain or fishing master and ensure the crew knows what to do.

General Guidelines: For all gear types, keep animals in the water whenever possible. Removing a cetacean from the water is extremely stressful for the animal and can cause injury, so they should be released while in the water, wherever possible. However, cetaceans can be very powerful and hooked or entangled cetaceans can be unpredictable, therefore it is not safe to enter the water in order to release an animal. If it is necessary to land small cetaceans on deck in purse seine fisheries, always minimize time on deck and release cetaceans back to the water as soon as possible. When handling cetaceans, it is always best to handle with two or more people.



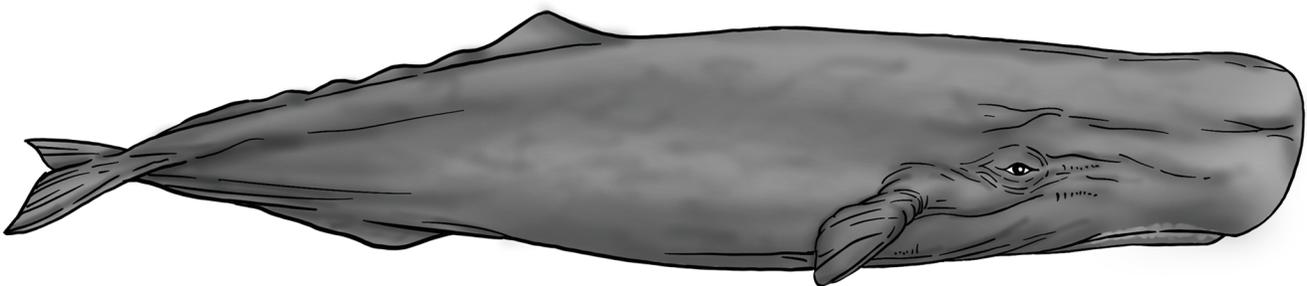
BEST PRACTICES FOR THE SAFE HANDLING AND RELEASE OF CETACEANS

ANNEX I: GUIDELINES FOR THE SAFE HANDLING AND RELEASE OF CETACEANS PURSE SEINE GEAR:

FOR LARGE CETACEANS (baleen whales and sperm whales) :
(examples)



Sei Whale
(*Balaenoptera borealis*)

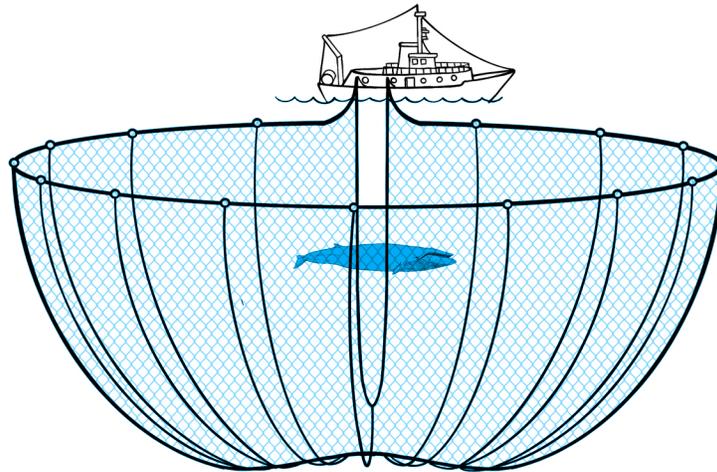


Sperm Whale
(*Physeter macrocephalus*)

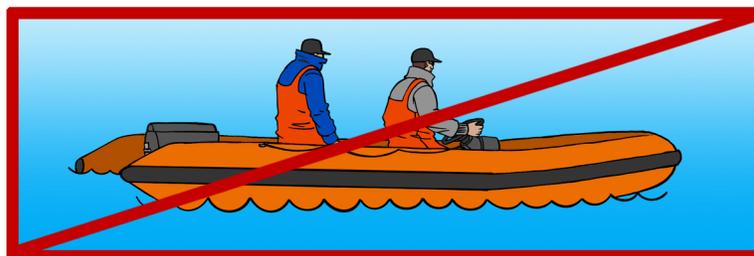
BEST PRACTICES FOR THE SAFE HANDLING AND RELEASE OF CETACEANS

ANNEX I: GUIDELINES FOR THE SAFE HANDLING AND RELEASE OF CETACEANS PURSE SEINE GEAR:

1. Large cetaceans should remain in the water



2. Do not attempt to release large cetaceans by having crew in the water, to the extent possible



3. Release the animal as quickly as possible, without jeopardizing the safety of the crew





BEST PRACTICES FOR THE SAFE HANDLING AND RELEASE OF CETACEANS

ANNEX I: GUIDELINES FOR THE SAFE HANDLING AND RELEASE OF CETACEANS PURSE SEINE GEAR:

FOR SMALL CETACEANS
(all toothed whales other than sperm whales):
(example)

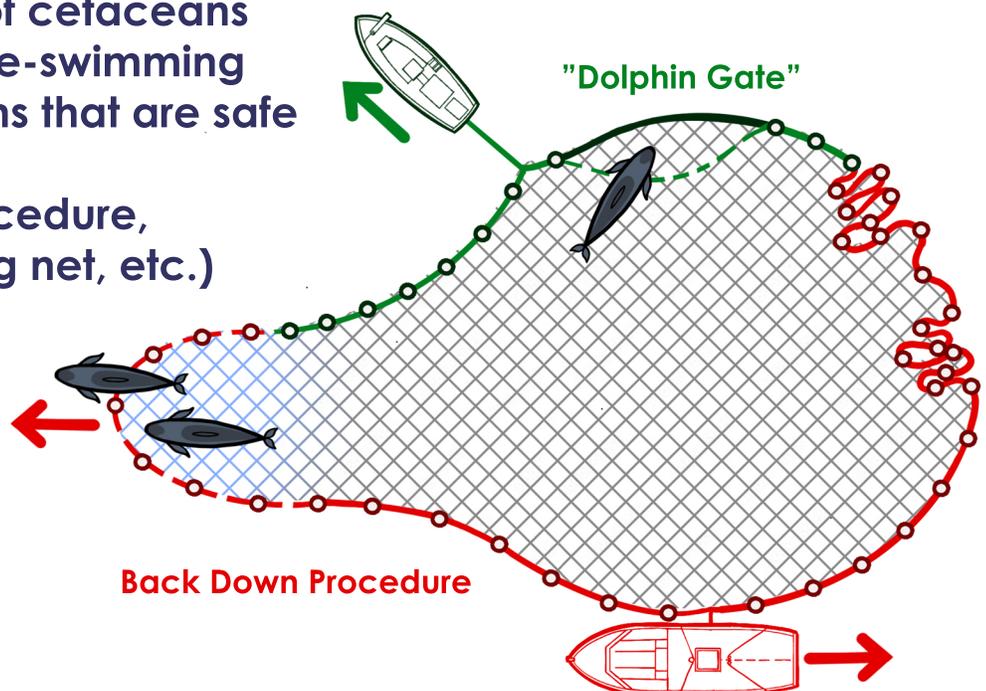


False Killer Whale
(*Pseudorca crassidens*)

DO'S:

If in purse seine net:

1. Facilitate release of cetaceans while they are still free-swimming using whatever means that are safe and practical (e.g. back down procedure, 'dolphin gate', cutting net, etc.)



BEST PRACTICES FOR THE SAFE HANDLING AND RELEASE OF CETACEANS

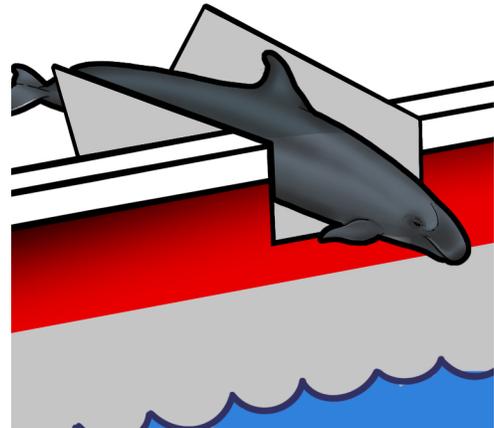
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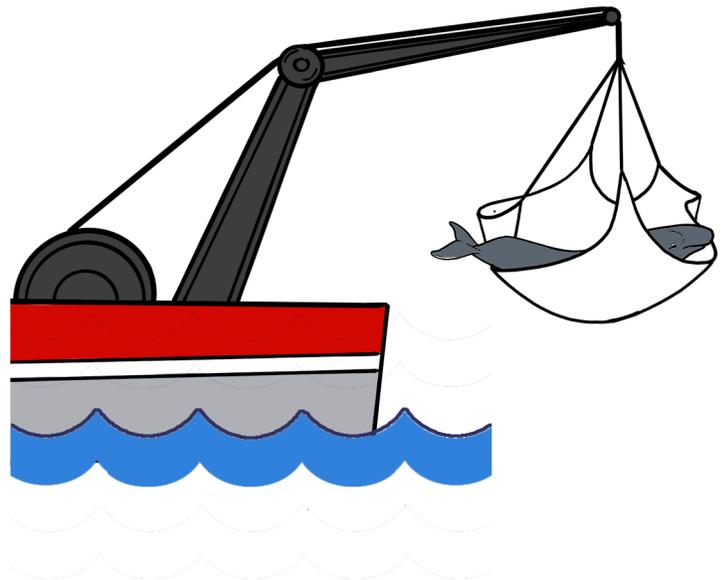
DO'S:

If in brail or on deck:

1. Cetaceans that cannot be released in the water without compromising the safety of the crew or the cetacean itself should be returned to the water as soon as possible, either utilizing a ramp from the deck connecting to an opening on the side of the vessel, or through escape hatches.



If ramps or escape hatches are not available, cetaceans should be lowered with a sling or cargo net, using a crane or similar equipment, if available.



BEST PRACTICES FOR THE SAFE HANDLING AND RELEASE OF CETACEANS

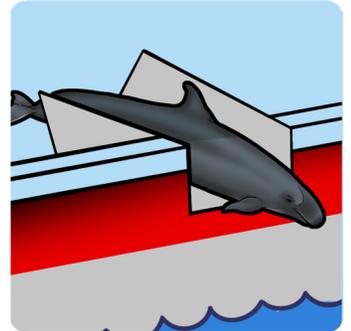
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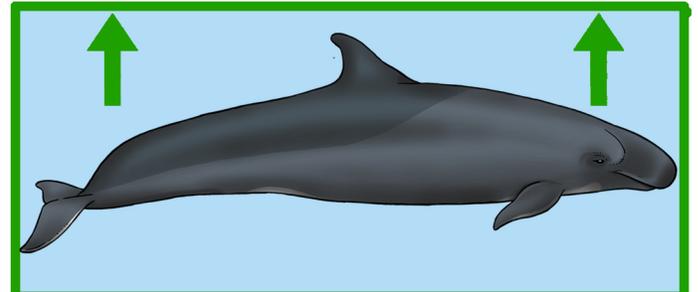
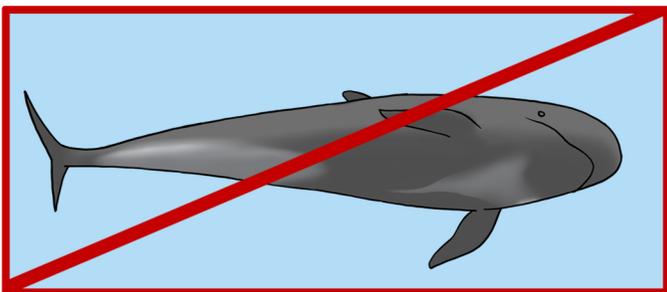
DO'S:

If in brail or on deck:

2. If entangled in netting, carefully cut the net away from the animal and release it to sea as quickly as possible with minimal or no netting attached to the animal.



3. If on deck, keep the animal in an upright position, with dorsal side up.



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FOR SMALL CETACEANS (all toothed whales other than sperm whales):

DO'S:

If in brail or on deck:

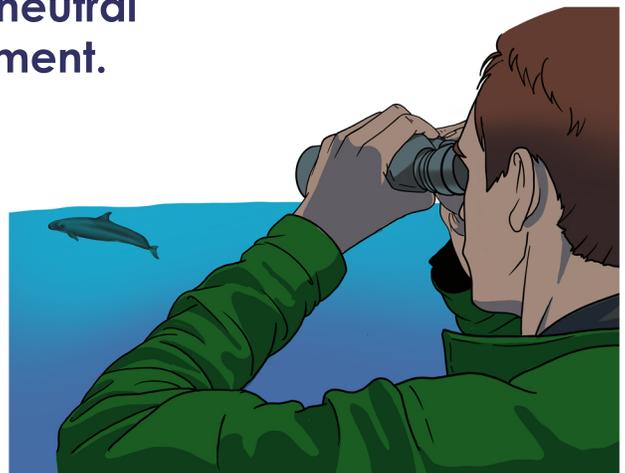
4. Be cautious of the tail, which is powerful and can cause injury. Lift from the mid-section of the cetacean when possible, and never from the tail.



5. Cease hauling until cetacean is released, release cetacean as soon as possible.



6. Release cetaceans away from fishing operations, when main engines are in neutral to minimize the risk of further entanglement. Maintain observation of released animals until they have disappeared from sight or are sufficiently distant from the vessel to ensure no further interaction before resuming fishing operations.



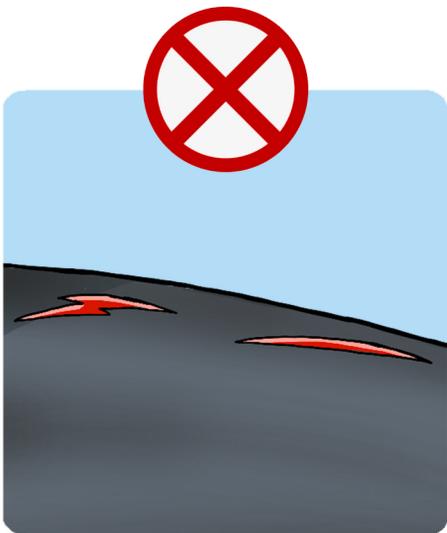
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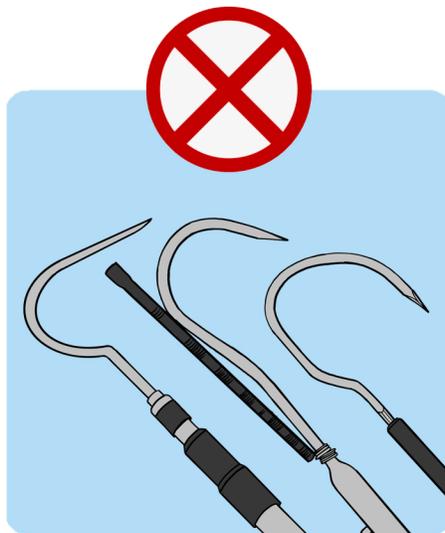
FOR SMALL CETACEANS (all toothed whales other than sperm whales):

DON'TS:

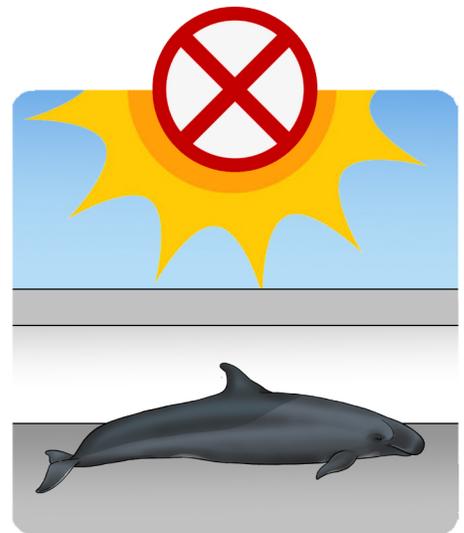
1. Do not handle the animal in any way that could cause harm, including:



a. Do not cut or punch holes through the animal's body



b. Do not use gaffs or sharp objects to grab, move, or hold the animal



c. Do not leave the animal exposed to sunlight for extended periods on deck

BEST PRACTICES FOR THE SAFE HANDLING AND RELEASE OF CETACEANS

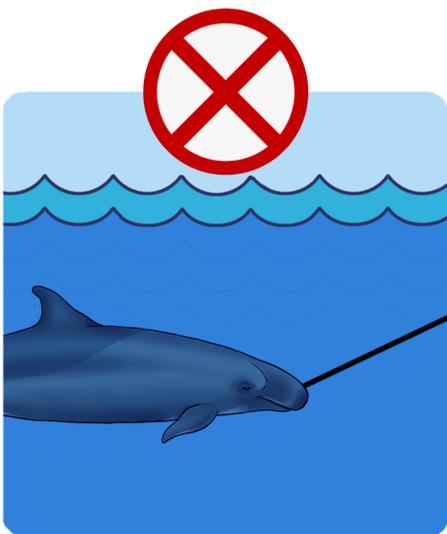
ANNEX I: GUIDELINES FOR THE SAFE HANDLING AND RELEASE OF CETACEANS PURSE SEINE GEAR:

FOR SMALL CETACEANS (all toothed whales other than sperm whales):

DON'TS:

1. Do not handle the animal in any way that could cause harm, including:

d. Cetaceans breathe through their blowhole.



Do not drag or pull the cetacean underwater in a manner that prevents it from surfacing to breathe.

Do not cover or block the blowhole, or spray water in or near it, or allow water or other material to flow into the blowhole.

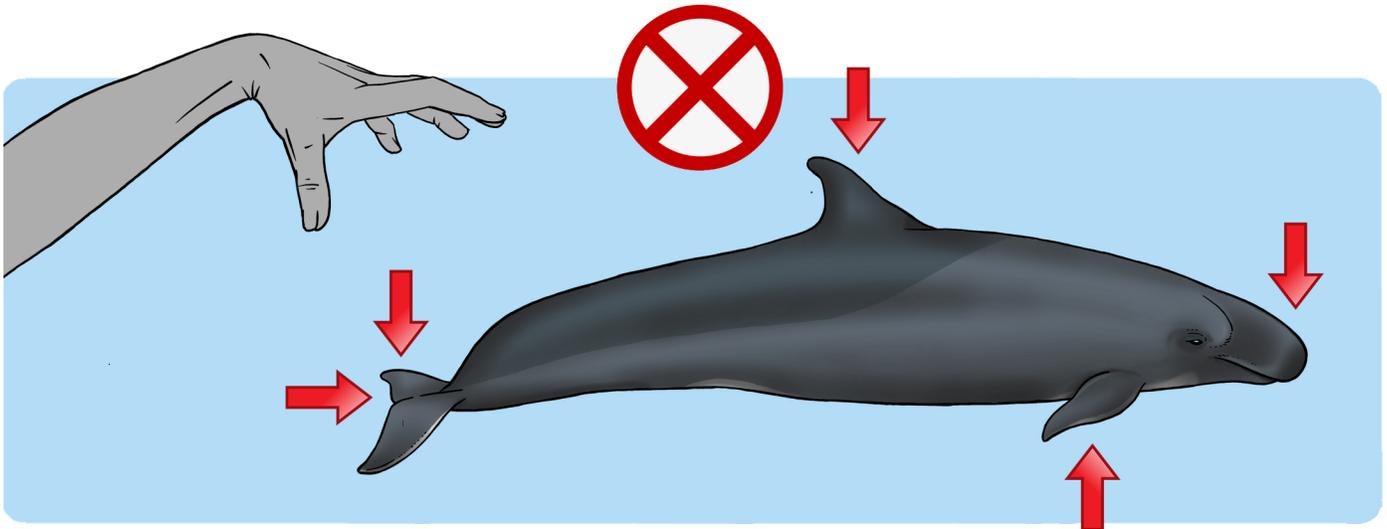
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FOR SMALL CETACEANS (all toothed whales other than sperm whales):

DON'TS:

e. Do not push, pull, bend, or lift by tail, flippers, fins, flukes or beaks



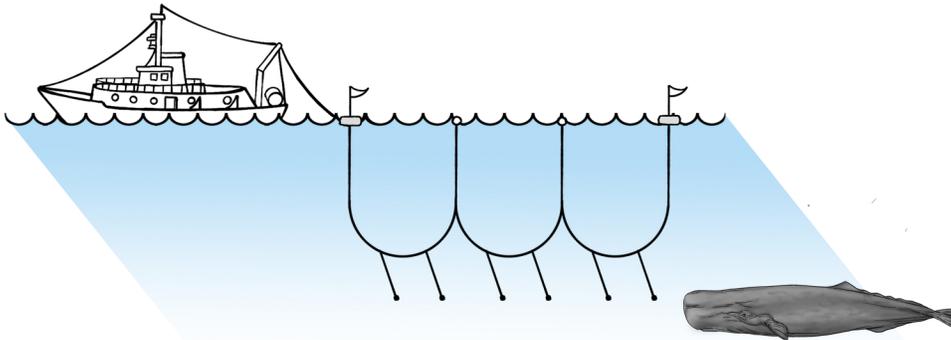
f. Do not rest the cetacean on sharp or rough surfaces.



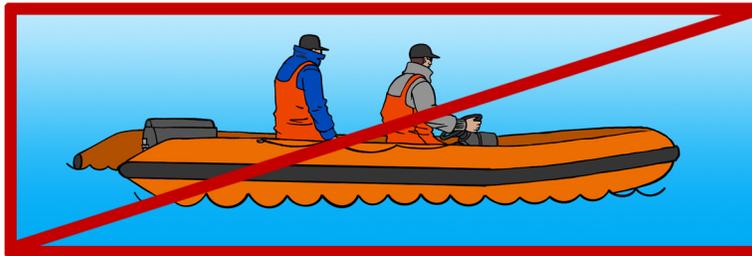
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ANNEX II: GUIDELINES FOR THE SAFE HANDLING AND RELEASE OF CETACEANS IN LONGLINE GEAR:

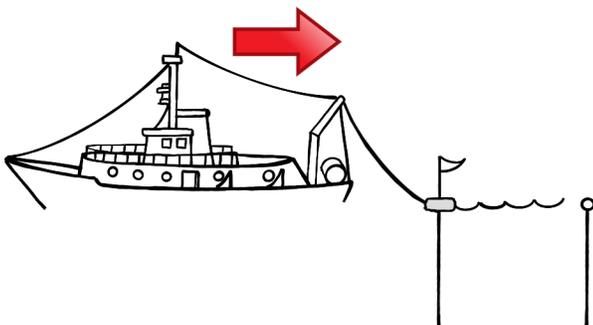
1. Large cetaceans should remain in the water



2. Do not attempt to release large cetaceans by having crew in the water, to the extent possible



3. Maneuver vessel to minimize tension on the fishing gear, to the extent possible



4. Release the animal as quickly as possible, without jeopardizing the safety of the crew



BEST PRACTICES FOR THE SAFE HANDLING AND RELEASE OF CETACEANS

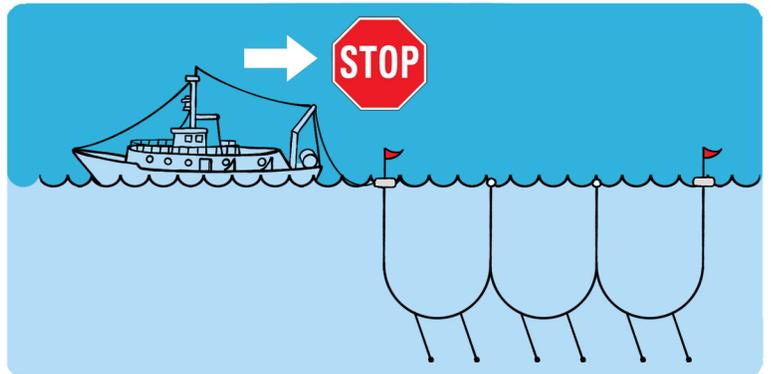
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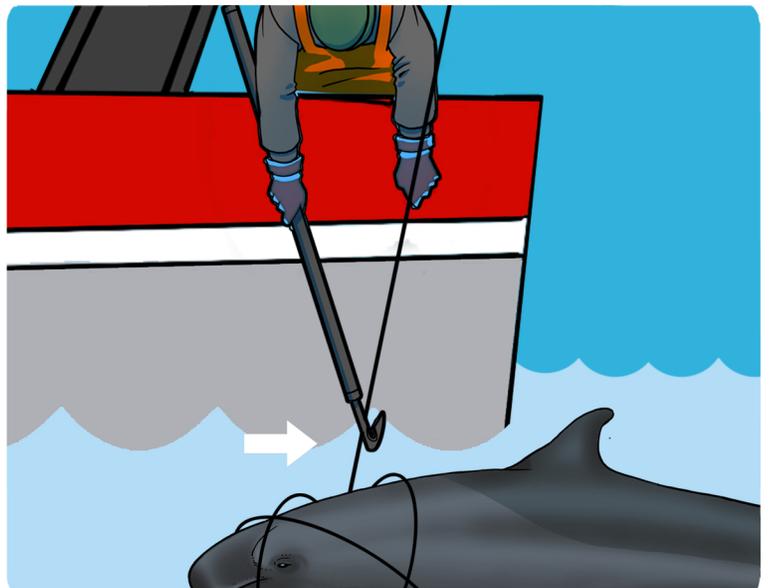
DO'S:

1. Determine if the animal is hooked or entangled and prepare to remove the line.

a. If entangled: To the extent possible, maneuver the vessel in a way that will reduce tension on the line.



Use a long-handled line cutter to cut as much line off of or as close to the animal as you can.



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DO'S:

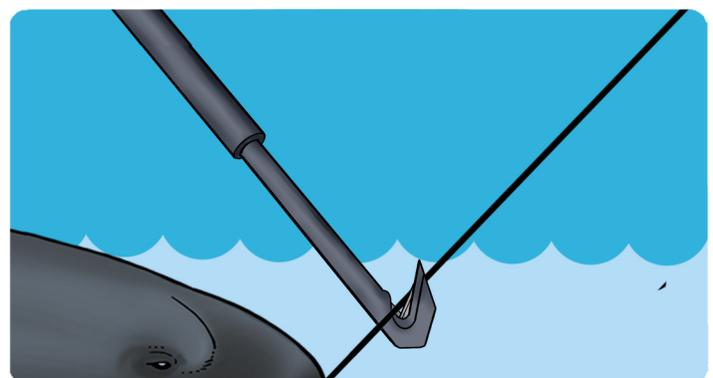
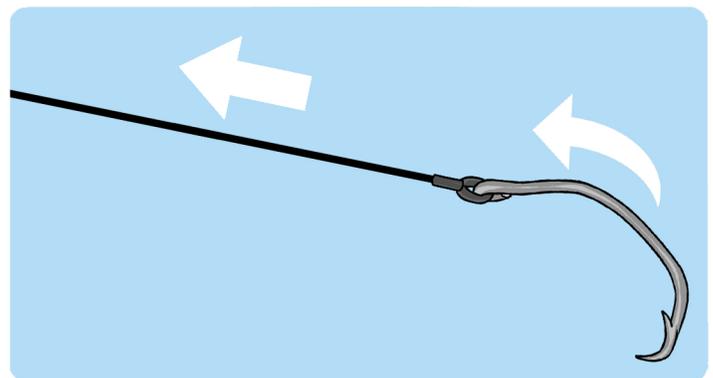
ii. *If the hook is not ingested:*

1. *If using "weak*" circle hooks:*

a. To the extent possible, maintain tension on the line, giving the hook a chance to straighten and release the animal without the hook or trailing line attached.

b. If the hook does not straighten, use a de-hooker to remove the hook and trailing line

c. If the hook is not straightened or removed, use a long-handled line cutter to cut the line as close as you can to the hook, removing as much gear as possible.



*Circle hooks with a wire diameter of 4.5 mm or less with an offset not to exceed 10 degrees

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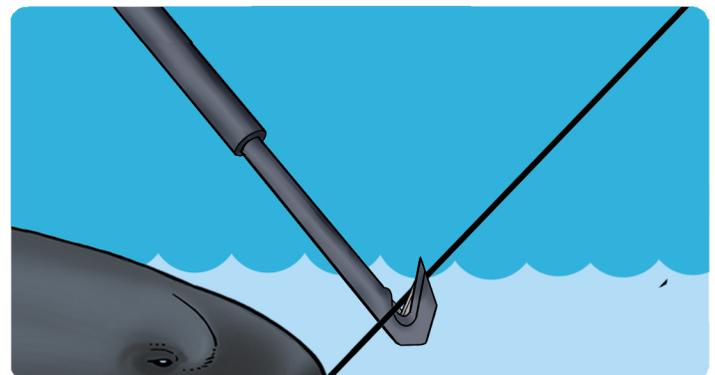
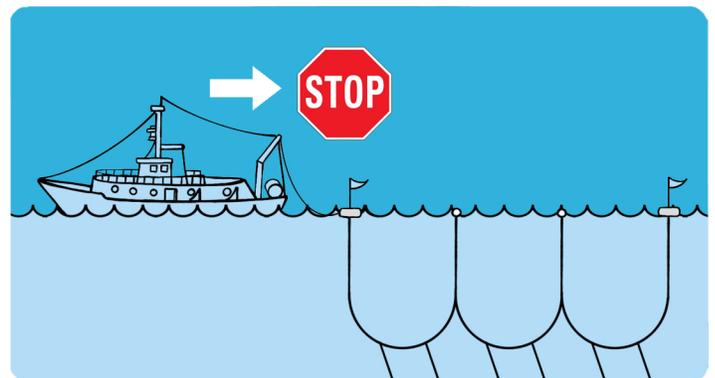
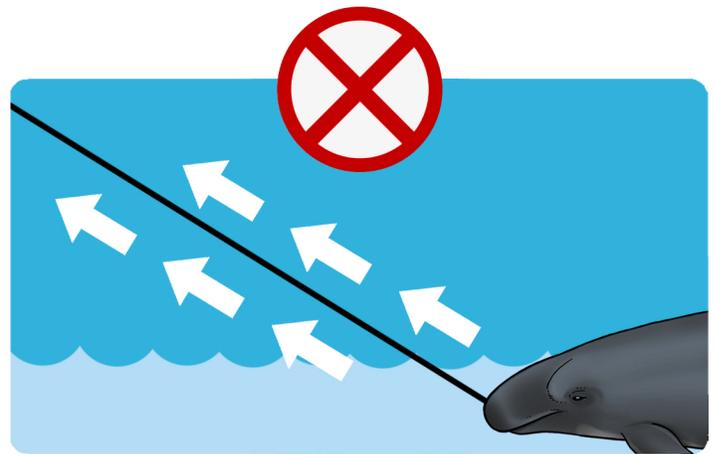
DO'S:

2. If not using weak circle hooks:

Avoid pulling sharply on the branchline.

To the extent possible,
maneuver vessel in a way that
will reduce tension on the line.

Use a long-handled line cutter
to cut the line as close to the
hook as possible, removing as
much gear as possible



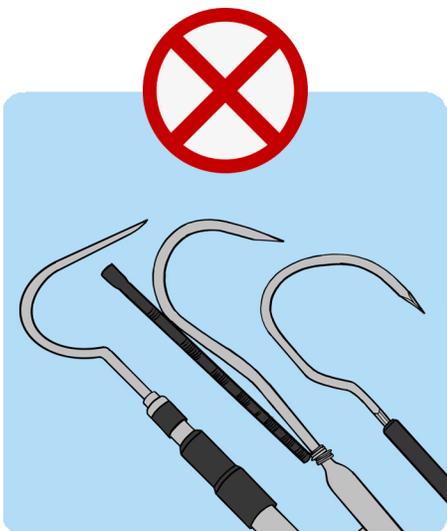
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DON'TS:

1. Do not handle the animal in any way that could cause harm
 - a. Do not use gaffs or sharp objects to grab, move, or hold an animal
 - b. Do not cover or block the blowhole, or spray water in or near it, to allow uninterrupted breathing



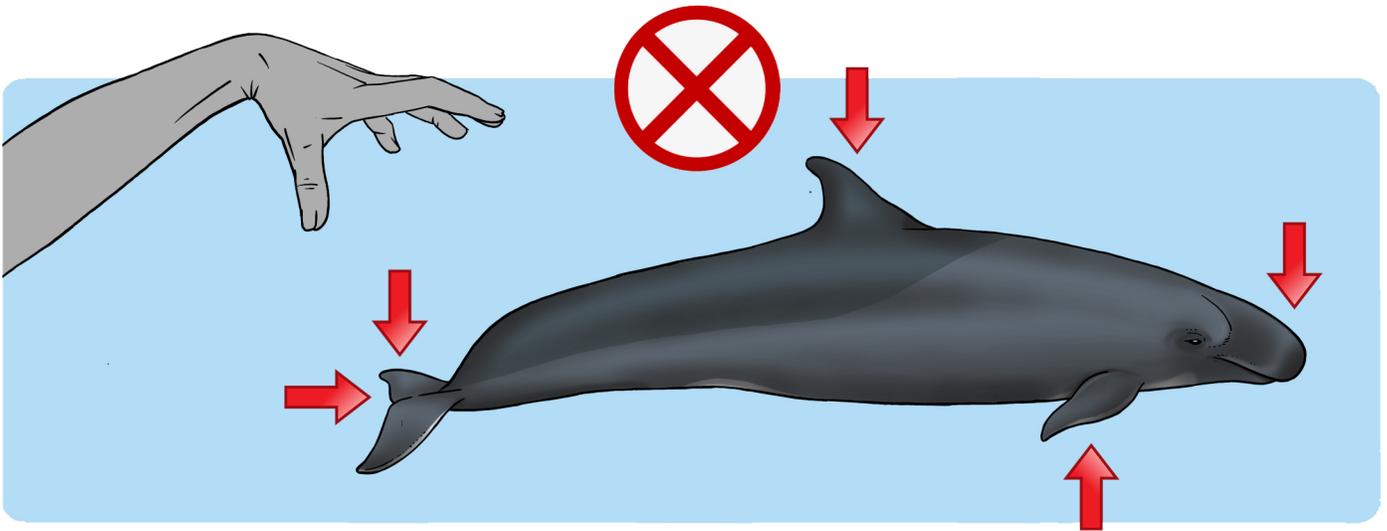
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DON'TS:

c. Do not push, pull or lift by tail, flippers, fins, flukes or beaks



d. Do not drag or pull the cetacean
underwater in a manner that prevents it
from surfacing to breathe.

