

# Moko the dolphin swims to the rescue of stranded whales

by Jack Malvern, Times Online, 12 March 2008 (slightly adapted)

A pair of whales facing almost certain death after becoming stranded on a New Zealand beach have been led to safety by a compassionate° dolphin.

*showing sympathy for sb who is suffering*



Moko the dolphin rescued a pair of stranded whales

Human attempts to guide two pygmy sperm whales through a narrow escape route from the beach had consistently° failed and all seemed lost until a friendly bottlenose dolphin intervened. Moko, a regular visitor to Mahia Beach on the east side of New Zealand's North Island, appeared to communicate with the whales before acting as a navigator to open water.

*repeatedly*

Malcolm Smith, a field worker for New Zealand's department of conservation, said that he had almost given up and was contemplating° killing the whales to prevent further distress when Moko arrived. "It was amazing," he said. "It was like she grabbed them by the flipper and led them to safety. We worked for over an hour to try to get them back out to sea ... but they kept getting disorientated and stranding again." The whales – a three-metre female and her 1.5-metre male calf – had been unable to negotiate° a sand bar blocking their way to deeper water.

*to think about sth*

Mr Smith had been alerted to the whales' plight early on Monday morning by a neighbour. "Over the next hour and a half I pushed them back out to sea two or three times and they were very reluctant° to move offshore," he said. "I was reaching the stage where I was thinking it's about time to give up here, I've done as much as I can. The whales were getting tired and I was getting cold when Moko turned up. She just came straight for us and escorted° the two whales along the beach and out through the channel."

*to successfully get over a difficult part on a path*

*unwilling*

He heard Moko and the whales making noises before they departed together, he said. "The whales were sitting on the surface of the water quite distressed. They had arched° their backs and were calling to one another, but as soon as the dolphin turned up they submerged° into the water and followed her." Once the group reached the end of the sand bar, Moko turned a right angle through a narrow channel and led the whales to safety.

*to accompany*

*to form a curve to go under the surface of water*

Rescued whales often return to the site of their stranding, but Moko's actions appear to have had long-term success. "She obviously gave them enough guidance to leave the area because we haven't seen them since," Mr Smith said.

"What the communication was I do not know, and I was not aware dolphins could communicate with pygmy sperm whales, but something happened that allowed Moko to guide those two whales to safety."

Moko has become famous for her antics at Mahia, which include playing in the surf with swimmers, approaching boats to be patted and pushing kayaks through the water with her snout. Once she had assisted the whales she immediately returned to the beach to play with local residents. Such close interaction with humans is rare among dolphins but not unknown. "She's become isolated from her pod° obviously for one reason or another, but obviously made Mahia home just at the moment."

*a small herd of marine animals*

Up to 30 whales become stranded on Mahia Beach every year, most of which end with the whales having to be put down°. "I don't know if next time we have a whale stranding we can get her to come in again. She certainly saved the day for us and the whales this time."

*killed*

## Useful vocabulary

<b>to face (death)</b>	<i>to have to deal with death</i>
<b>(to become) strand(ed)</b>	<i>to make a boat, fish, whale, etc. be left on the shore and unable to return to the water</i>
<b>safety</b> to be led to safety	<i>the state of being safe and protected from danger or harm</i>
<b>to intervene (in sth)</b>	<i>to become involved in a situation in order to improve or help it</i>
<b>to appear to do sth</b>	<i>it seems that ...</i>
<b>navigator</b>	<i>a person who navigates, for example on a ship or an aircraft</i>
<b>to prevent</b> to prevent sb from doing sth	<i>to stop sb from doing sth; to stop sth from happening</i>
<b>flipper</b>	<i>a flat limb that is part of the body of some sea animals</i>
<b>calf</b>	<i>a young animal of some other type such as a young elephant or whale</i>
<b>plight</b>	<i>a difficult and sad situation</i>
<b>antics</b>	<i>behaviour which is silly and funny in a way that people usually like</i>

## Some questions for discussion

Have you ever heard of a similar incident?

What do you think, did the dolphin really communicate with the whales?