

Department of Planning and Environment

# Marine Mammal Rehabilitation Training Standards

for the Volunteer Wildlife Rehabilitation Sector



© 2022 State of NSW and Department of Planning and Environment

With the exception of photographs, the State of NSW and Department of Planning and Environment are pleased to allow this material to be reproduced in whole or in part for educational and non-commercial use, provided the meaning is unchanged and its source, publisher and authorship are acknowledged. Specific permission is required for the reproduction of photographs.

The Department of Planning and Environment (DPE) has compiled this report in good faith, exercising all due care and attention. No representation is made about the accuracy, completeness or suitability of the information in this publication for any particular purpose. DPE shall not be liable for any damage which may occur to any person or organisation taking action or not on the basis of this publication. Readers should seek appropriate advice when applying the information to their specific needs.

All content in this publication is owned by DPE and is protected by Crown Copyright, unless credited otherwise. It is licensed under the [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International \(CC BY 4.0\)](#), subject to the exemptions contained in the licence. The legal code for the licence is available at [Creative Commons](#).

DPE asserts the right to be attributed as author of the original material in the following manner: © State of New South Wales and Department of Planning and Environment 2022.

Acknowledgments : These training standards have been prepared by Shona Lorigan for the Department of Planning and Environment. We thank the following rehabilitation providers for their contribution to these standards: Dolphin Marine Conservation Park, the Organisation for the Rescue and Research of Cetaceans in Australia (ORRCA), Taronga Conservation Society and Sea World.

Cover photo: Dugong (*Dugong dugon*), Shona Lorigan /DPE

Published by:

Environment and Heritage Group  
Department of Planning and Environment  
Locked Bag 5022, Parramatta NSW 2124  
Phone: +61 2 9995 5000 (switchboard)  
Phone: 1300 361 967 (Environment and Heritage enquiries)  
TTY users: phone 133 677, then ask for 1300 361 967  
Speak and listen users: phone 1300 555 727, then ask for 1300 361 967  
Email: [info@environment.nsw.gov.au](mailto:info@environment.nsw.gov.au)  
Website: [www.environment.nsw.gov.au](http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au)

Report pollution and environmental incidents  
Environment Line: 131 555 (NSW only) or [info@environment.nsw.gov.au](mailto:info@environment.nsw.gov.au)  
See also [www.environment.nsw.gov.au](http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au)

ISBN 978-1-922840-96-7  
EHG 2022/0351  
September 2022

Find out more about your environment at:

**[www.environment.nsw.gov.au](http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au)**

# Contents

Introduction	1
Structure of the standards	2
Prerequisites	2
Definitions	2
Marine mammal rehabilitation standards: Core areas of training	3
Foundations of marine mammal rehabilitation	4
Standard 1: The framework for marine mammal rehabilitation in New South Wales	4
Standard 2: Work health and safety requirements of marine mammal rehabilitation	4
Standard 3: Record keeping	5
Standard 4: Biology and behaviour of marine mammals	5
Standard 5: Stress management in marine mammals	6
Rescue of marine mammals	7
Standard 6: Rescue of marine mammals	7
Standard 7: Transport of marine mammals	7
Standard 8: Assessment of marine mammals	8
Rehabilitation and release of marine mammals	9
Standard 9: Rehabilitation of whales, dolphins and dugongs	9
Standard 10: Rehabilitation of seals	10
Standard 11: Release of marine mammals	10
More information	11

# Introduction

Wildlife rehabilitation organisations and their volunteers play a critical role in the rescue and rehabilitation of sick, injured and orphaned marine mammals in New South Wales. Each year there are over 150 events involving marine mammals. Volunteers participating in their care are trained to ensure the marine mammals are managed humanely and have the best chance of rehabilitation and release back into the wild.

The Department of Planning and Environment, NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS), has collaborated with leading marine mammal rehabilitation providers to prepare these *Marine Mammal Rehabilitation Training Standards* for use by trainers in the NSW wildlife rehabilitation sector. These training standards build on the high level of expertise that already exists within the sector and have been designed as a guide to evaluate, develop and support new and existing training. The intended outcome is to ensure minimum training standards are in place for volunteers across the sector, as recommended in the *NSW Volunteer Wildlife Rehabilitation Sector Strategy* (DPIE 2020). This will give greater certainty about the quality of care afforded to marine mammals in rehabilitation.

These standards must be used for delivering introductory training for marine mammal rehabilitation. They describe the skills and knowledge that such training must include to ensure volunteers meet the requirements of the *NSW Code of Practice for Injured, Sick and Orphaned Marine Mammals* (the Marine Mammal Code) (DPE 2022). Any person with an authority to rescue and rehabilitate marine mammals in New South Wales must be trained to these standards and be assessed as competent.

These training standards have been ordered into 3 suggested core areas of training. Training programs can be structured in their entirety to replicate the standards, or can be broken down to cover individual or multiple standards, or can be based on certain roles within marine mammal rehabilitation. Irrespective of the structure used, all training must include the standards relevant to a role and must cover the duties this role would be expected to perform upon completion of the training.

All training must be compliant with the Marine Mammal Code. It must have a written assessment component, be competency-based, and be accompanied by ongoing in-field support from experienced wildlife rehabilitators.

Once a person is trained to these standards, they can undertake advanced refresher training and professional development opportunities as determined by their licensed wildlife rehabilitation organisation.

Additional information on training to these standards can be found in the companion *Marine Mammal Rehabilitation Training Standards for the Volunteer Wildlife Rehabilitation Sector: Trainers' Guide* (DPE 2022). The trainers' guide has been designed to help the sector develop training in line with these standards.

## Structure of the standards

There are 11 marine mammal rehabilitation training standards, organised into the following structure:

- **Objective** is the aim of each standard.
- **Learning outcomes** are the knowledge and skills a learner will have obtained and be able to demonstrate upon completion of training.
- **Sections in the code** identify sections in the *Code of Practice for Injured, Sick and Orphaned Marine Mammals* that are applicable to each standard.

## Prerequisites

As required by the Marine Mammal Code, new wildlife rehabilitators must undertake an introductory training course. For generalist groups this could be in their induction training. For marine-mammal-specific groups this can be completed as separate induction training or incorporated into Standard 1: The framework for marine mammal rehabilitation in New South Wales.

## Definitions

**Advanced refresher training:** a standard in each code of practice requires wildlife rehabilitators to complete additional training every 3 or 4 years depending on the species. In the *Code of Practice for Injured, Sick and Orphaned Marine Mammals* refresher training must be completed every 3 years.

**Code of practice:** specifies the minimum standards of care needed to protect the welfare of animals in rehabilitation. There is a general code and species-specific codes. The *Code of Practice for Injured, Sick and Orphaned Marine Mammals* is the relevant code for marine mammals.

**Competency:** is defined by the Australian Skills Quality Authority as the consistent application of knowledge and skill to the standard of performance required in the workplace. It embodies the ability to transfer and apply skills and knowledge to new situations and environments.

**Learning outcomes:** a clear statement of what a learner is expected to be able to do, know about and value at the completion of a unit of study, and how well they should be expected to achieve those outcomes.

**Marine mammals:** means any whale, dolphin, dugong or seal that is native to Australia or periodically or occasionally migrates to Australia.

**Objective:** the aim of each standard.

**Prerequisites:** something that requires something to happen or be completed before the other; for example, some advanced courses require a prior subject or course to be completed before a learner can enrol in them.

**Professional development:** activities that develop or maintain skills or knowledge. Examples could include workshops, conferences, mentoring, independent research and courses.

**Standards:** are a level of accepted quality.

# Marine mammal rehabilitation standards: Core areas of training

There are 11 marine mammal rehabilitation standards organised into 3 core training areas.

Core training area	Relevant standard
<b>Foundations of marine mammal rehabilitation</b>	Standard 1: The framework for marine mammal rehabilitation in New South Wales
	Standard 2: Work health and safety requirements of marine mammal rehabilitation
	Standard 3: Record keeping
	Standard 4: Biology and behaviour of marine mammals
	Standard 5: Stress management in marine mammals
<b>Rescue of marine mammals</b>	Standard 6: Rescue of marine mammals
	Standard 7: Transport of marine mammals
	Standard 8: Assessment of marine mammals
<b>Rehabilitation and release of marine mammals</b>	Standard 9: Rehabilitation of whales, dolphins and dugongs
	Standard 10: Rehabilitation of seals
	Standard 11: Release of marine mammals

# Foundations of marine mammal rehabilitation

## Standard 1: The framework for marine mammal rehabilitation in New South Wales

**Objective:** To familiarise learners with the relevant policies and procedures of marine mammal rehabilitation and provide them with an understanding of the framework that exists to support and regulate marine mammal rehabilitation in New South Wales. Learners must be aware of and understand the *NSW Code of Practice for Injured, Sick and Orphaned Marine Mammals* (the Marine Mammal Code).

To comply with this standard, a rehabilitation organisation must:

- 1.1 Discuss the Marine Mammal Code.
- 1.2 Ensure NPWS policies and procedures applicable to marine mammal rehabilitation are defined and understood by learners.
- 1.3 Ensure organisational policies and procedures applicable to marine mammal rehabilitation are defined and understood by learners.
- 1.4 Ensure objectives of marine mammal rehabilitation are understood by learners.

Learning outcomes	Sections in the code
Upon completion of this module, learners will be able to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• identify and demonstrate understanding of the Marine Mammal Code</li> <li>• demonstrate understanding of NPWS notifications and approvals for marine mammal rehabilitation</li> <li>• identify organisational policies and procedures for marine mammal rehabilitation</li> <li>• recognise the objectives of marine mammal rehabilitation.</li> </ul>	All

## Standard 2: Work health and safety requirements of marine mammal rehabilitation

**Objective:** To ensure learners are able to prioritise their safety and that of the people around them when undertaking marine mammal rescue and rehabilitation.

To comply with this standard, a rehabilitation organisation must:

- 2.1 Explain the work health and safety (WHS) risks associated with the site, equipment or activity and how they can be minimised.
- 2.2 Explain the WHS risks associated with approaching, handling and restraining marine mammals and how they can be minimised.
- 2.3 Discuss the WHS risks associated with zoonotic diseases relevant to marine mammals and how they can be minimised.
- 2.4 Discuss rehabilitator wellbeing and the potential mental health impacts of wildlife rehabilitation.

Learning outcomes	Sections in the code
<p>Upon completion of this module, learners will be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• identify WHS risks associated with marine mammal rehabilitation</li> <li>• employ techniques to minimise the WHS risks to themselves and other people.</li> </ul>	<p>3. Rescue 4. Transport 6. Care procedures 7. Husbandry 8. Housing 10. Release considerations</p>

## Standard 3: Record keeping

**Objective:** To explain the record keeping requirements for marine mammal rehabilitation.

To comply with this standard, rehabilitation organisations must:

- 3.1 Explain the NPWS reporting requirements.
- 3.2 Explain organisational reporting requirements.

Learning outcomes	Sections in the code
<p>Upon completion of this module, learners will be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• keep records in accordance with NPWS and organisational requirements.</li> </ul>	<p>12. Record keeping</p>

## Standard 4: Biology and behaviour of marine mammals

**Objective:** To ensure detailed knowledge of marine mammals is taught to learners. This is done by providing learners with the foundational tools to understand marine mammal biology and behaviour and how these aspects inform interactions with marine mammals undergoing rehabilitation.

To comply with this standard, a rehabilitation organisation must:

- 4.1 Explain features of marine mammal biology including anatomy, physiology, social structure, stages of development, and habitat, and relate them to marine mammal rehabilitation.
- 4.2 Provide a basic understanding of marine mammal ecology including population dynamics, habitat selection, migratory behaviour, competition and predator–prey interactions.
- 4.3 Provide the tools and understanding required to identify different species of marine mammals recorded in New South Wales.
- 4.4. Provide the tools and understanding required to identify normal behaviour in marine mammals.
- 4.5 Provide the tools and understanding required to recognise signs of abnormal behaviour in marine mammals.



Learning outcomes	Sections in the code
Upon completion of this module, learners will be able to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• relate marine mammal biology, ecology and behaviour to marine mammal rehabilitation</li> <li>• understand how to use the different tools to identify different species of marine mammals</li> <li>• recognise signs of normal behaviour in marine mammals</li> <li>• recognise signs of abnormal behaviour in marine mammals.</li> </ul>	All

## Standard 5: Stress management in marine mammals

**Objective:** To communicate the importance of managing stress in marine mammals and to provide mechanisms for minimising this stress.

To comply with this standard, rehabilitation organisations must:

- 5.1 Explain the effects of stress on a marine mammal at various stages of rescue and rehabilitation.
- 5.2 Provide the tools and understanding required to recognise signs of stress in a marine mammal.
- 5.3 Discuss methods for minimising stress on a marine mammal at various stages of rescue and rehabilitation.

Learning outcomes	Sections in the code
Upon completion of this module, learners will be able to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• recognise signs of stress in marine mammals and its impact</li> <li>• apply methods for minimising stress on a marine mammal.</li> </ul>	3. Rescue 4. Transport 5. Euthanasia 6. Care procedures 7. Husbandry 8. Housing 10. Release considerations

# Rescue of marine mammals

## Standard 6: Rescue of marine mammals

**Objective:** To ensure learners have the skills to safely, efficiently and humanely rescue a marine mammal.

To comply with this standard, a rehabilitation organisation must:

- 6.1 Outline common reasons for marine mammal rescue.
- 6.2 Detail how to perform a situational assessment, including the use of the decision tree in the Marine Mammal Code, to establish the appropriate course of action.
- 6.3 Detail the correct method and equipment required to capture, handle and rescue a marine mammal, as suitable to common rescue situations, conditions and stages of development of a marine mammal.
- 6.4 Detail how to rescue a marine mammal to humanely minimise pain, stress and potential injury.

Learning outcomes	Sections in the code
Upon completion of this module, learners will be able to:	2. Case assessment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• list the common reasons why marine mammals require rescue</li> <li>• assess a rescue situation and plan the rescue of a marine mammal</li> <li>• safely rescue a marine mammal using correct equipment</li> <li>• determine the type of intervention required at a rescue site.</li> </ul>	3. Rescue 4. Transport 5. Euthanasia

## Standard 7: Transport of marine mammals

**Objective:** To ensure learners have the skills to safely, efficiently and humanely transport a marine mammal.

To comply with this standard, a rehabilitation organisation must:

- 7.1 Demonstrate how to appropriately contain a marine mammal for transport based on different sizes, stages of development and animal condition.
- 7.2 Outline how to secure the transport container to prevent escape and further injury.
- 7.3 Detail suitable transport conditions, including ambient temperature, to safely transport a marine mammal.
- 7.4 Discuss the most suitable person or location that a marine mammal should be transported to, based on different stages of development, animal condition and organisational policies.

Learning outcomes	Sections in the code
Upon completion of this module, learners will be able to:	2. Case assessment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• prepare a carrier for transport</li> <li>• outline the transport conditions required to safely transport a marine mammal</li> <li>• understand the appropriate person or location to transport a marine mammal to, based on different stages of development, animal condition and organisational policies.</li> </ul>	3. Rescue 4. Transport 5. Euthanasia 10. Release considerations

## Standard 8: Assessment of marine mammals

**Objective:** To equip learners with the skills necessary to assess the health status of a marine mammal.

To comply with this standard, a rehabilitation organisation must:

- 8.1 Explain how to conduct an initial assessment of a marine mammal from a distance.
- 8.2 Explain the requirements of a thorough physical assessment of a marine mammal.
- 8.3 Emphasise the need to seek prompt advice and assistance for a marine mammal from NPWS or a veterinarian, as appropriate to its condition.
- 8.4 Distinguish signs of and ways to determine common diseases and injuries affecting marine mammals.
- 8.5 Explain how to manage an injured or diseased marine mammal based on the severity of its condition.
- 8.6 Outline criteria and approved methods for humane euthanasia.

Learning outcomes	Sections in the code
<p>Upon completion of this module, learners will be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• conduct an initial assessment of a marine mammal from a distance</li> <li>• assess the health status of a marine mammal and recognise stages, symptoms and severity of common diseases and injuries</li> <li>• determine the appropriate course of action for a marine mammal based on its condition</li> <li>• outline criteria for and approved methods of euthanasia.</li> </ul>	<p>5. Euthanasia 6. Care procedures 7. Husbandry 8. Housing</p>

# Rehabilitation and release of marine mammals

## Standard 9: Rehabilitation of whales, dolphins and dugongs

**Objective:** To provide learners with an understanding of the requirements for the rehabilitation of whales, dolphins and dugongs, and equip learners with the skills to provide quality rehabilitative care at the relevant stages of rehabilitation.

To comply with this standard, a rehabilitation organisation must:

- 9.1 Explain the importance of and process for quarantining individual whales, dolphins and dugongs entering rehabilitation.
- 9.2 Detail the techniques required to safely rehabilitate whales, dolphins and dugongs in-situ relevant to the type of incident and stage of rehabilitation.
- 9.3 Detail the facilities required to safely rehabilitate whales, dolphins and dugongs relevant to stages of housing (intensive care and pre-release).
- 9.4 Describe appropriate equipment and furniture for each stage of housing (intensive care and pre-release).
- 9.5 Describe appropriate equipment for each stage of rehabilitation in situ.
- 9.6 Illustrate disease control and hygiene practices appropriate to stages of rehabilitation.
- 9.7 Explain how to appropriately provide food and water based on the condition of a whale, dolphin or dugong.
- 9.8 Detail common conditions and diseases that affect whales, dolphins and dugongs.
- 9.9 Discuss how to monitor a whale, dolphin or dugong in accordance with its condition, type of event and stage of housing if in a facility.
- 9.10 Demonstrate how to complete a husbandry plan for whales, dolphins and dugongs in a facility.

Learning outcomes	Sections in the code
Upon completion of this module, learners will be able to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• outline the requirements for whale, dolphin and dugong rehabilitation</li> <li>• demonstrate correct techniques for rehabilitating whales, dolphins and dugongs in situ</li> <li>• demonstrate correct set-up for housing whales, dolphins and dugongs</li> <li>• provide food and water appropriate to the condition of a whale, dolphin or dugong</li> <li>• monitor a whale, dolphin or dugong undergoing rehabilitation</li> <li>• apply hygiene and disease control processes to whale, dolphin or dugong rehabilitation</li> <li>• complete a husbandry plan for a whale, dolphin or dugong in a facility.</li> </ul>	2. Case assessment 5. Euthanasia 6. Care procedures 7. Husbandry 8. Housing

## Standard 10: Rehabilitation of seals

**Objective:** To provide learners with an understanding of the requirements for the rehabilitation of seals, and equip learners with the skills to provide quality rehabilitative care at the relevant stages of rehabilitation.

To comply with this standard, a rehabilitation organisation must:

- 10.1 Explain the importance of and process for quarantining individual seals entering rehabilitation.
- 10.2 Detail the techniques required to safely rehabilitate seals in situ relevant to the type of incident and stage of rehabilitation.
- 10.3 Detail the facilities required to safely rehabilitate seals relevant to stages of housing (intensive care and pre-release).
- 10.4 Describe appropriate equipment and furniture for each stage of housing.
- 10.5 Describe appropriate equipment for each stage of rehabilitation in situ.
- 10.6 Illustrate disease control and hygiene practices appropriate to stages of rehabilitation.
- 10.7 Explain how to appropriately provide food and water based on the condition of a seal.
- 10.8 Detail common conditions and diseases that affect seals.
- 10.9 Discuss how to monitor a seal in accordance with its condition, type of event and stage of housing if in a facility.
- 10.10 Demonstrate how to complete a husbandry plan for a seal in a facility.

Learning outcomes	Sections in the code
Upon completion of this module, learners will be able to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• outline the requirements for seal rehabilitation</li> <li>• demonstrate correct techniques for rehabilitating seals in situ</li> <li>• demonstrate correct set-up for housing seals</li> <li>• provide food and water appropriate to the condition of the seal</li> <li>• monitor a seal undergoing rehabilitation</li> <li>• apply hygiene and disease control processes to seal rehabilitation</li> <li>• complete a husbandry plan for a seal in a facility.</li> </ul>	2. Case assessment 5. Euthanasia 6. Care procedures 7. Husbandry 8. Housing

## Standard 11: Release of marine mammals

**Objective:** To ensure learners understand suitability for release and criteria for releasing a marine mammal.

To comply with this standard, a rehabilitation organisation must:

- 11.1 Discuss release considerations for marine mammals including timing and site selection.
- 11.2 Explain how to determine a marine mammal's suitability for release.
- 11.3 Detail the correct techniques and equipment for releasing a marine mammal.

Learning outcomes	Sections in the code
Upon completion of this module, learners will be able to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• assess a marine mammal for release suitability</li> <li>• competently release a marine mammal.</li> </ul>	9. Suitability for release 10. Release considerations

## More information

- [Australian Skills Quality Authority](#)
- [Marine Mammal Rehabilitation Training Standards for the Volunteer Wildlife Rehabilitation Sector: Trainers' Guide](#)
- [NSW Code of Practice for Injured, Sick and Orphaned Marine Mammals](#)
- [NSW Volunteer Wildlife Rehabilitation Sector Strategy](#)