

Climate change causing whale of a problem – USM research director

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KOTA KINABALU: Climate change may be causing a whale of a problem in the global arena.

Such change may cause ocean acidification which in turn, results in whale stranding, notes Universiti Malaysia Sabah's (UMS) Borneo Marine Research Institute director Prof Dr Saleem Mustafa.

Stressing the need for more empirical data to establish it, he said: "There are compelling reasons that ocean acidification, directly and indirectly, will affect whales.

"Altered oceanographic conditions too, will adversely affect them. Collectively, the climate change effects will put stress on the whales, threaten their resilience, drive them to unfamiliar geographical areas and affect their navigational

ability. "Obviously, we might, unfortunately, see more cases of whale stranding around the world," he told Bernama here yesterday.

Saleem was commenting on the death of a whale on Thursday night, after it was stranded in the shallow coastal waters of Hujung Sungai near Kuala Penyu.

Narrating the story of the baleen whale which beached in Kuala Penyu on Aug 2, only to die within 12 hours, he said efforts were made to help the mammal move to deeper waters.

However, the rescuers noticed from the beginning that the whale was not responding in the manner which suggested it was ready to swim to deeper waters.

"The behaviour suggested it was unable to support its 16-metre long and 10-tonne body.

The topography of the area was easy for escape for the pelagic animal to deeper waters.

"Healthy and strong whales that get stranded in shallow waters respond by actively moving off to deep waters, quickly taking advantage of the efforts that rescuers make to help them survive," noted Saleem.

He said there were also no unusual oceanographic conditions in the sea on that day that could have caused the shoreward movement and stranding.

"Also, there is no report of poisonous red tides in the area on that day. Probably, the natural causes, including weakness, sickness and disorientation due to physiological dysfunction brought the whale to its final resting place in Kuala Penyu," he added. - Bernama