

Sonar unlikely cause of whale stranding

BP 08-08-2012 A2

By Chok Sim Yee

KOTA KINABALU: There is no scientific evidence to prove that sonar emitted by ships is the cause of whale stranding here, while longer time is needed to establish links between whale stranding and ocean acidification caused by climate change.

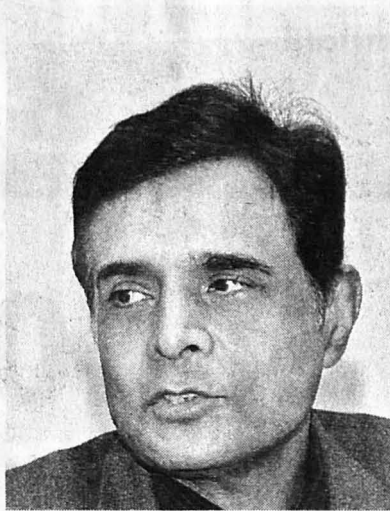
Dr John Madin, lecturer at Borneo Marine Research Institute (BMRI), Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS), said Sabah recorded the highest number of whale stranding cases as well as whale sightings compared to other states since the 1970s.

However, the reason Sabah ranked the highest in whale stranding cases in the country was not scientifically known.

Borneo Marine Research Institute director Professor Dr Saleem Mustafa said there were places with higher stranding cases than in Sabah.

On the whale stranding case at Kuala Penyu recently, Saleem said it was unlikely that sonar was a factor in driving the whale to shallow waters as there was no active sonar widely used by the Malaysian Navy here.

He said this at a press conference to disclose scientific



Saleem

studies on the stranded whale as well as to announce the setting up of a task force and the development of a standard operating manual to handle future stranding cases.

A Baleen whale was found stranded on the beach at Setompok River near Kuala Penyu on August 2, but the mammal died 12 hours later despite efforts to help it move to deeper water and keeping it cool.

The whale measured 15.8 metres in length and over 10 tonnes in weight.

The body of the stranded

whale was towed to a nearby jetty around 2pm on August 3, and was displayed to the public prior to its burial. On the impact of ocean acidification on whale stranding, Saleem said it would take a longer time to establish the link between stranding to ocean acidification caused by climate change.

He added that acidification would have direct and indirect impact on whales as it would disturb the physiology of whales, change their biogeographical distribution of the animal and their foraging grounds.

Saleem also said Baleen whales are not a resident population in Sabah as they move thousands of kilometers in the sea.

He said the Baleen whale that was stranded in Kuala Penyu was sick and old and had shown no interest to swim to deeper waters during the rescuing effort.

"This whale is sick and old; its physiological functions are shutting down; it is unlikely that its social bonding would be very strong," he explained.

He pointed out that there were many factors that could contribute to the stranding, but it is difficult to pinpoint one particular cause.