

By MARRYAN RAZAN  
marrayan@newsabah-  
times.com.my

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KOTA KINABALU: One of the likely causes of death of a whale, measuring 15.80 metres long and weighing over 10 tonnes, that was found stranded on the sandy beach of Sungai Sitompok, Kuala Penyu last week, could be attributed to unknown illness.

Director of Borneo Marine Research Institute (IPMB) Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) Prof. Dr. Saleem Mustafa said, based on initial inspection by the IPMB university's research team, several healing wounds were found on the whale along with the peeling of its body skin due to past injuries and exposure to sunlight.

"The research team also found that the whale appeared emaciated and unable to swim even though there were efforts to move her to deeper waters in a bid to save her.

"We believe one of the likely causes of the death of the stranded whale could be due to unknown illness. However, other factors such as its deteriorating body condition, old age can also be a cause of death," he said during a news conference at the IPMB Board Room, here, on Monday.

He disclosed this when announcing the preliminary findings of the research team from the Institute on the whale found stranded in Kuala Penyu.

Also present, were all the IPMB UMS researchers involved in the study headed by Dr. Julian Ransangan, Dr. John Madin and Muhammad Ali Syed Hussein.

# UMS: Whale's death at Kuala Penyu could be due to unknown illness



(From left to right) Dr. John, Dr. Saleem, Dr. Julian and Muhammad at the news conference.

Dr. Saleem said UMS scientists, government agencies and local residents endeavoured to save the whale by spraying seawater on it and attempting to move it to deeper waters but was unsuccessful because the whale had become too weak to swim.

Whales would normally perish after 12 hours if it becomes stranded on the beach.

Dr. Saleem said, stranding of whales, especially Bryde whales, is not a new phenomenon in Sabah, as several such stranding had been reported in the past. In most cases, he said, the effort to save the stranded whales have not been successful.

He said, many died from internal injuries and dehydration due to the inability to support its own weight when out of the water and therefore

it drowned.

"The incidences of stranded whales increasing may be due to early climatic change. We, in Sabah, should therefore be more prepared to face such situation in the near future," he said.

Meanwhile Dr. John said, Bryde whales are generally coastal whales and not the open sea type. The whale found stranded near Kuala Penyu recently was not a predator whale, it only feeds on small fish like anchovies.

He said based on study records since 1970 until now, most of the stranded whales seen in the state whether living or dead are in coastal waters of Semporna, northern and north-western coasts of Sabah.

"When compared with other states in Malaysia, Sabah has the highest record-

ed number of stranded whales because of the three major seas surrounding it, the South China Sea, the Sulu Sea and the Celebes Sea," he said.

He said the whale that was stranded in Kuala Penyu was believed to have come by way of the South China Sea because it was found stranded close to the South China Sea.

"Initial identification indicates that the whale is a baleen whale, from the Balaeopteridae family. Although the many morphological features appears to indicate such conclusion, the evidence of other features point to it being most likely a Bryde whale. However, since it has not been conclusively identified, the researchers have taken tissue samples for analysis to determine the actual species of the whale," he said.

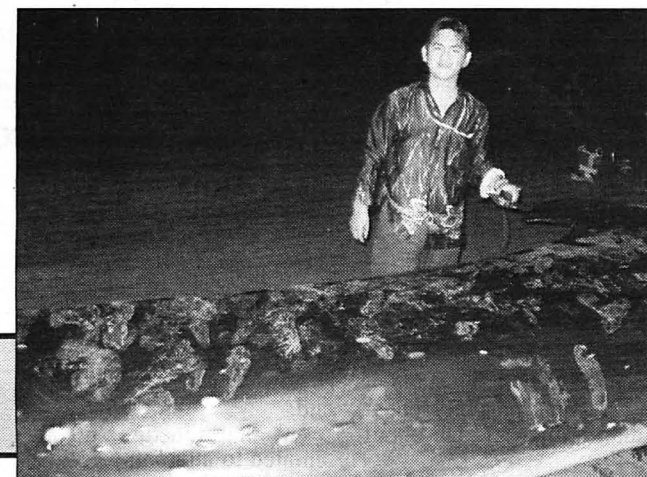
He said, based on records, the mammal appeared to have covered an area of over 350 million square kilometres, mainly along tropical and sub-tropical waters.



The stranded whale at Kuala Penyu beach.



Dr. John examining the condition of the stranded whale in New Penyu recently.



A healing old wound on the whale's body.