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An analysis of the approaches taken around the world to whale euthanasia

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Abstract

The stranding of cetaceans raises significant welfare and associated logistical issues. A survey of opinions on euthanasia methods based on the recommendations of an International Whaling Commission (IWC) workshop was conducted. Descriptive statistics showed that the workshop recommendations were generally supported and understood, and these included the use of specific euthanasia techniques, but important barriers to adherence were identified, including lack of governmental support, lack of resources, and lack of experienced or trained personnel. Conjoint analysis of factors identified that 'time to death' was considered the most important determinant of welfare outcome. In view of the findings of this study, it is recommended that the IWC should consider creating a training programme for responders (both veterinary and non-veterinary) to ensure that trained personnel are available who can implement timely and tailored euthanasia techniques, if required, when strandings occur. Further research on this topic is also advocated to ensure a better understanding of what is being applied in different nations.

Keywords: animal welfare, cetacea, euthanasia, IWC, stranding, whale