



NMFS Northeast Fisheries Science Center

N E W S

Sighting Reports Put Beluga Whale Near Delaware Bay Entrance

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Gloucester, Mass. – Late yesterday afternoon, a tug boat reported it had sighted Helis the beluga whale near Cross Ledge Shoals, about 20 miles north of the Delaware Bay entrance, and headed south. Helis is the beluga whale recently found swimming in the upper reaches of the Delaware River.

This news came on the heels of several sighting reports during the day on Monday, each made further south than the last. “The tugboat sighting is confirmed, and it’s great news that Helis has made his move back toward the open ocean,” said Mendy Garron, who is coordinating the response effort for NOAA’s National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS). The tugboat report was made to the U.S. Coast Guard at about 4:30 PM.

NOAA’s NMFS is the federal agency charged with recovering and protecting marine mammals in U.S. waters. It operates the National Marine Mammal Health and Stranding Response Network, comprising numerous partner institutions and organizations that provide first response, rehabilitation, and monitoring for marine mammals around the coast.

“We’re continuing to prepare for contingencies in the event Helis strands, but so far we’re getting the best possible outcome. The whale seems to be headed to sea without any assistance from us,” said Garron. “Our big asset right now is people who see Helis and let us know his position,” she said. “Call 609-266-0538; or, if you are a mariner, report the sighting to the U.S. Coast Guard

on VHF Channel 16. If you get a photo, we'd love to have a copy, just remember to stay at least 150 feet away from the whale while you're getting it or watching him."

Helis was first reported near Trenton, New Jersey about a week ago. He stayed in the upper Delaware River through the weekend, before making a move south on Sunday afternoon. He was photographed at Penn's Landing in Philadelphia early Sunday evening, and reported shortly thereafter near the U.S.S. New Jersey. Monday morning, a sighting was reported near the Walt Whitman Bridge. Monday afternoon a report came in placing the whale south of Wilmington, Delaware.

A monitoring team kept tabs on Helis last weekend. Law enforcement agents from the State of New Jersey and NOAA Fisheries Office of Law Enforcement patrolled the river around Burlington to ensure safe distance was kept from Helis. Volunteers from the Marine Mammal Stranding Center in Brigantine, New Jersey, and NMFS' onsite response coordinator Jamison Smith assisted enforcement officials with monitoring.

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NOAA is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through the prediction and research of weather and climate-related events and providing environmental stewardship of our nation's coastal and marine resources.

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