FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Fin Whale Transported from Santa Cruz Beach for Necropsy by Marine Mammal Response Partners

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(SANTA CRUZ, Calif. – November 13, 2026) — Following the stranding and subsequent death of a fin whale at Cowell Beach in Santa Cruz on Thursday, November 12, city crews successfully transported the animal off the beach overnight. This allowed marine mammal response partners to conduct a necropsy, or animal autopsy, Friday morning to gather additional information about the whale's health and potential cause of death.

The necropsy was conducted at the City of Santa Cruz's Resource Recovery Facility by a collaborative team of experts from UC Santa Cruz's Long Marine Laboratory, the California Academy of Sciences, and The Marine Mammal Center.

The animal was confirmed to be a 55 foot, 58 thousand plus pound female fin whale, likely a juvenile. A postmortem examination confirmed that the whale was severely underweight and emaciated, consistent with a prolonged period of poor nutritional condition. While the examination provides important initial information about the animal's condition, the underlying cause of death remains undetermined.

During the necropsy, experts collected a series of tissue and other biological samples for further diagnostic testing, including histopathology, to evaluate the animal's health and investigate potential contributing factors. Results from these additional analyses will help provide a more complete understanding of the whale's condition but could take weeks to months to process.

The fin whale was first reported stranded in the surf at Cowell Beach on Thursday around 8 a.m. Marine mammal experts monitored the animal before it was pronounced dead at approximately 10:15 a.m.

Following its death, City of Santa Cruz crews worked closely with marine mammal response partners to develop and carry out a safe removal operation, ultimately transporting the animal off the beach overnight so that a necropsy could be performed.

A Collaborative Response

The successful removal and examination of this large whale required significant coordination, specialized expertise, and logistical support. UC Santa Cruz's Long Marine Laboratory, the California Academy of Sciences, and The Marine Mammal Center extend their sincere appreciation to the City of Santa Cruz and its crews for their tremendous efforts in securing the beach and surrounding area and providing logistical and equipment support. Their collective efforts made it possible for experts to conduct a thorough

examination and gather valuable scientific information that can contribute to our understanding of fin whales and the challenges marine mammals face in our shared ocean.

About Fin Whales

Fin whales (*Balaenoptera physalus*) are the second-largest whale species in the world, behind only the blue whale, and can reach lengths of up to 85 feet. Known for their streamlined bodies and speed, they are found around the world, including along the California coast. Fin whales are listed as endangered under the federal Endangered Species Act and are protected under the Marine Mammal Protection Act. They primarily feed on small schooling fish, krill, and other tiny marine organisms by filtering large volumes of water through their baleen plates.

The public can play an important role in helping to protect whales by reporting sightings through The Marine Mammal Center's website or via the WhaleAlert app.

Stranded animals in Santa Cruz County can be reported to The Long Marine Lab Marine Mammal Stranding Hotline at 831-212-1272.

All marine mammal stranding activities by The Long Marine Lab Marine Mammal Stranding Network and our partners at The Marine Mammal Center and the California Academy of Sciences were conducted under authorization by the National Marine Fisheries Service through a Stranding Agreement issued to UC Santa Cruz, California Academy of Sciences (SA-WCR-2023-016) and MMPA/ESA Permit No. 24359.

Read the City of Santa Cruz's initial announcement: Fin Whale Dies After Stranding at Cowell Beach in Santa Cruz

About UC Santa Cruz's Long Marine Laboratory

Based at UC Santa Cruz, the Long Marine Lab Marine Mammal Stranding Network advances marine mammal science, ocean health, and public understanding through the response, recovery, and examination of stranded marine mammals along the central California coast. Our necropsies and health assessments reveal causes of death, emerging diseases, human impacts, and changing environmental conditions affecting marine wildlife. Over 35+ years, our long-term stranding and pathology data have supported studies of population trends, ecosystem change, and species health, informing management decisions and conservation efforts. Our program also serves as an educational resource, training students and engaging the public in stewardship of marine mammals and coastal ecosystems. Please https://lmlstrandingnetwork.ucsc.edu/ or call 831-212-1272 to report a stranding.

About the California Academy of Sciences

The California Academy of Sciences is a renowned scientific and educational institution with a mission to regenerate the natural world through science, learning, and collaboration. Based in San Francisco's Golden Gate Park, it is home to a world-class aquarium, planetarium, and natural history museum, as well as innovative programs in scientific research and environmental education—all under one living roof. Museum hours are 9:30 am – 5:00 pm Monday – Saturday, and 11:00 am – 5:00 pm on Sunday. Admission includes all exhibits, programs, and shows. For daily ticket prices, please visit www.calacademy.org or call (415) 379-8000 for more information.

About The Marine Mammal Center

The Marine Mammal Center is a global leader in marine mammal health, science and conservation, and is the largest marine mammal hospital in the world. As a leading contributor to the global body of research and knowledge about marine mammal medicine and ocean health, the Center generates research findings and scientific outputs at volumes comparable to top academic institutions and prides itself on gathering and providing open research data that is free to access, reuse, repurpose and redistribute. The Center's teaching hospital and training programs operate globally with headquarters in Sausalito, CA. The Center has rescued more than 27,000 marine mammals from 600 miles of authorized rescue area along the California coastline and the Big Island of Hawai'i. The Center's mission is to advance ocean health through marine mammal rescue and rehabilitation, scientific research, and education. For more information, please visit MarineMammalCenter.org.