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MASS STRANDING  
m/s 29

# 120 pilot whales rescued by navy, volunteers in Sri Lanka

**COLOMBO:** Sri Lanka's navy and volunteers rescued 120 pilot whales stranded in the country's biggest mass beaching, but at least two injured animals were found dead, officials said.

Sailors from the navy and the coastguard along with local volunteers pushed back at least 120 whales by dawn yesterday after a gruelling overnight rescue, navy spokesman Indika de Silva said.

The school of short-finned pilot whales washed ashore at Panadura, 25km south of here, on Monday afternoon in the biggest-ever mass stranding of whales on the island.

"We used our small inshore patrol craft to pull the whales one



*People standing around a dead pilot whale on a beach in Panadura, Sri Lanka, yesterday.*

AFP PIC

by one back into deeper waters," de Silva said.

"Sadly, two whales died of the injuries they sustained when they beached."

Local authorities were bracing for mass deaths as seen in Tasmania in September when about 470 pilot whales were stranded

and only about 110 could be saved after days of rescue efforts.

Sri Lanka's Marine Environment Protection Authority (MEPA) confirmed that Panadura saw the largest single pod of whales stranded in the country.

"It is very unusual for such a large number to reach our shores,"

said MEPA chief Dharshani Lathandapura.

Pilot whales, which can grow up to 6m long and weigh a tonne, are highly social.

The causes of mass strandings remain unknown despite scientists studying the phenomenon for decades. **AFP**