

Killer whale beached at Saleens



The scene on Saleens Beach on Saturday morning last after a five-metre female killer whale beached herself. | Photos: Noel Browne

Hundreds of onlookers flocked to the Saleens beach last weekend to catch a glimpse of a five-metre female killer whale, found dead on Friday by local man Paul Flynn.

Representatives from the Irish Whale and Dolphin Group (IWDG) also visited the site and later said they believed the orca – probably an older female – may have died from malnourishment. Experts say the animal, which had washed ashore just two minutes' walk from the Saleens car park and close to the old grotto site, was in very fresh condition and all her teeth were very worn. It's thought this may have resulted in her death perhaps from malnutrition or infection.

A team from the Galway Mayo Institute of Technology (GMIT) travelled to Waterford on Sunday morning to transport the whale back to the college and carry out a post-mortem. It is hoped the skeleton will be preserved and put on display locally, according to the IDWG.

This is the 15th stranding for this species on the IWDG cetacean strandings database and the first since 4th October 2010 in Co Mayo.



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The more common fin whale generated similar public interest at the Saleens when it washed up on the beach several years ago. A pod of four or five fin whales were also spotted off the Hook lighthouse (Co Wexford) last weekend.

IDGW has reported a 'disturbingly' high number of stranded cetaceans around the Irish coast in January, double the average number of strandings recorded in the month over the previous five years. They say that "strong westerly winds are likely to be pushing dead floating animals ashore whether those animals have died from natural causes or not".