

## **ESTABLISHING A MARINE MAMMAL STRANDING NETWORK IN THE BAHAMAS**

Atypical mass strandings of beaked whales have been correlated with international naval operations, raising concern that beaked whales are particularly vulnerable to naval sonar. The US Navy has two operating ranges in Bahamian waters, and public concern has increased about the impacts these operations may be having on local beaked whale populations. In light of this concern, there has been a growing need to train Bahamians as First Responders to quickly respond to each stranding, conduct initial examinations, assist live strandings, and facilitate a more thorough investigation to determine the cause of death.

The establishment of the Bahamas Marine Mammal Stranding Network has begun this process of training and capacity building amongst Bahamians with the longer term goal to address conservation of marine mammals in the Bahamas and potential impacts of naval operations on local populations. Two 2-day marine mammal stranding workshops were held in Nassau during May 2008 and February-March 2009 with 133 participants representing 15 Bahamian islands. Stranding kits have been distributed to Fisheries Officers throughout all the main islands. The Stranding Network includes a 24/7 hotline number, and an Google discussion group ([bahamas-marine-mammal-stranding-network@googlegroups.com](mailto:bahamas-marine-mammal-stranding-network@googlegroups.com)) which allows documents to be shared, including standardized stranding data forms, instructions on sample collection and preservation, and an up-to-date contact tree spreadsheet that network members can edit as needed. Successful response to 5 recent strandings is evidence that the Network is functioning well.