

NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE (NMFS) CRITERIA  
FOR DISENTANGLEMENT ROLES AND TRAINING LEVELS

Levels of Participation in the Disentanglement Network – Definitions

<b>Roles</b>	<b>Levels</b>
First Responder	1-5
Primary First Responders	3-5
Primary Disentanglers	4-5

**First Responder** is a general term that is used to describe anyone in the Network with any level of training who may respond to an entanglement report under Network protocols and authorization. At a minimum they will voluntarily attempt to standby with an entangled whale and, depending on training, experience, authorization and equipment available, may also assess and perhaps tag the whale. Individuals with higher Network ratings (Levels 3-5) may act as **Primary First Responders** in local areas. Primary First Responders direct efforts locally and, under certain conditions and authorization, may attempt disentanglements during first response. These individuals have rapid access to vessels and specialized equipment. Additionally, Primary First Responders are on call full-time or at least during those times when there is a high likelihood of an entanglement report in their area of responsibility.

A First Responder's anticipated range of tasks is generally dependent on their classification in the Network. Classifications to various levels are determined on an individual basis and are based on a number of factors including, but not limited to the following:

- Preexisting experience and skills
- Willingness and commitment to build experience and improve skills
- Training
- Opportunity and available resources
- Location
- Commitment to being “on-call”
- Commitment to respond as needed

**Primary Disentanglers** are individuals who can perform all of the responsibilities of a first responder, but who also meet the criteria used by NMFS for selecting individuals who may undertake the very dangerous activity of disentangling (i.e. attaching to, stopping and cutting a whale free). Primary Disentanglers must have the experience, training, support and proper equipment at the time of the event to conduct a full disentanglement with a high likelihood of success. Primary Disentanglers are those rated at Level 4-5 in the Disentanglement Network. A summary of the various levels of certification follows.

## DISENTANGLEMENT NETWORK CERTIFICATION

### LEVEL 1

**Targeted Individuals:** Professional mariners (i.e. fishermen, naturalists, Marine Patrol Officers) Boating experience and/or experience around whales is highly suggested (i.e. professional fishing, field biology, marine law enforcement, whale watching, etc.)

#### *Responsibilities*

Level 1 activities: report, standby, and assess (within experience)

- Rapidly alert Disentanglement Network of first-hand and/or second-hand knowledge of local entanglements
- Depending on experience, stand by an entangled whale until backup arrives, and/or
- Communicate with crew on the vessel that is directly standing by the entangled whale and offer to replace the stand by vessel until additional backup or the response team arrives (if needed and within experience)

#### *Criteria for certification*

- Completed Level 1 classroom training, or
- Viewed Provincetown Center for Coastal Studies (PCCS) Training Video and demonstrated equivalent knowledge and experience (submit resume)

### LEVEL 2

**Targeted Individuals:** Professional mariners (i.e. fishermen, naturalists, Marine Patrol Officers). There is a higher expectation of commitment and participation from Level 2 responders.

### ***Responsibilities***

Level 2 activities: report, stand by, and assess at a higher level (within experience)

- Provide a thorough assessment of the nature of the entanglement and the species, condition and behavior of the whale
- Provide local knowledge, transportation, and assistance to Primary First Responders, as needed, on a voluntary basis
- Be on call, as available, to assist in planned disentanglement operations on telemetry tagged whales

### ***Criteria for certification***

Level 1 certification in addition to the following:

- Completed Level 2 on-water training, or
- Viewed PCCS Training Video and demonstrated equivalent knowledge and experience (submit resume)

## **LEVEL 3**

***Targeted Individuals***: Whale researchers and naturalists, fishermen, natural resource agency personnel, Marine Patrol Officers.

### ***Responsibilities***

Level 3 activities- report, stand by, assess, document and attach a telemetry buoy. Other activities may include:

- Be on call 24 hours and should respond if conditions allow
- Initiate and maintain preparedness with local fishing industry, Coast Guard, and other resources
- Prepare local disentanglement action plan
- Provide entanglement assessment, documentation and recommendations to Primary
- Disentangle during events
- Attach telemetry equipment to entangling gear if needed and authorized
- May be asked (depending on experience) to disentangle a minor entanglement with potential to adversely affect any whale other than right whales under the supervision/authorization of

Level 4 or 5 network members. Authorization and supervision may be given over the phone or radio depending on the circumstances and level of experience.

***Criteria for certification***

Level 1 and 2 certification and experience in the following elements:

- Large whale species identification and behavior, and the ability to safely follow a free swimming, entangled whale
- Boat handling and safety including basic seamanship, driving, and close approaches to whales
- Line handling and safety including knowledge of knots, handling lines under pressure, and an understanding of how working lines behave
- Follows instructions and response plans

Note: Each candidate will be evaluated for each element and any deficiencies must be supplemented with adequate training and/or experience.

Additionally, all Level 3 responders must have:

- Basic Level 3 training, or
- Advanced Level 3 training - an apprenticeship with PCCS

**LEVEL 4**

***Targeted Individuals:*** Whale researchers and naturalists, fishermen, natural resource agency personnel, Marine Patrol Officers.

***Responsibilities***

Level 4 activities-

- Report, stand by, assess, document, attach a telemetry buoy, consult on an action plan and disentangle all large whales except right whales
- Report, stand by, assess, document and attach a telemetry buoy to right whales
- On a case by case basis and after consultation (see commitment to consult under Level 5 below), certain cuts on known entangled right whales may be permitted at level 4 ***if the proposed action is first approved by level 5 disentanglers and NMFS***

***Please Note:*** Entangled whale behavior varies considerably by species. However, Level 4 Disentanglers should routinely be able to attempt disentanglement of all large whales other than right whales.

***Criteria for certification***

Basic or Advanced Level 3 Certification and:

- Direct experience in a supervised (by PCCS/Network coordinators or NMFS) large whale disentanglement, documentation of that experience, and a positive evaluation from NMFS using information provided by PCCS/Network Coordinators and any hard documentation (*i.e.* video)
- When possible, commitment to consultation as detailed in Level 5 below

**LEVEL 5**

***Targeted Individuals:*** Level 4 Responders

***Responsibilities***

Level 5 activities - report, stand by, assess, document, attach a telemetry buoy, consult on an action plan and disentangle all large whales including right whales.

***Please Note:*** Right whales are aggressive and therefore generally the most difficult whales to disentangle. North Atlantic right whales are among the most critically endangered large whales in the world. Certification at this level is highly selective and specialized.

***Criteria for certification***

Level 4 certification and:

- Experience w/ right whale behavior and/or includes a person on the team directly involved in the whale disentanglement (in the boat with the whale) that is experienced in right whale behavior
- Documented participation in a right whale disentanglement and/or NMFS/PCCS review of video of participation in a right whale disentanglement that followed NMFS protocol
- Commitment to Consultation to include:

- Immediate Consultation: when possible, use satellite/cell phones to bring in additional ideas/experience from other level 5s and level 4s (and vets and behaviorists if appropriate) while on scene with an entangled right whale
- Action Plan Development: For a tagged right whale, consultation required with NMFS, level 5s and 4s, veterinarians, behaviorists, etc.

Rationale for consultation: First assessments and strategies almost invariably change with more discussion or information. Consultation will likely help to increase human safety and critical choices regarding risks to whale health must be made with the best available information.