

Key words: blue whale, dead whales, Woody Point, Trout River, ROM, Royal Ontario Museum, whale salvage, whale decomposition, whale preservation, Newfoundland whales, Newfoundland, Department of Fisheries and Oceans

## Dissecting what remains... a Newfoundland town's disposal of a blue whale carcass

**Not for the faint of heart – navigating decomposition for a greater cause.**

**By: Colleen Burghardt**

The journey isn't over for a blue whale that washed ashore in a western Newfoundland shore town two weeks ago. In fact, it's the beginning of its trek to the Royal Ontario Museum (ROM). A team from the ROM is embarking on a rather gruesome mission to get the whale ready for travel. Along with contractors from Researching Casting International and a group of locals from Trout River and Woody Point, ROM staff members are using knives and meat hooks to dismantle the carcass.

Representatives from the ROM showed up in Trout River on Thursday to begin the painstaking process of removing the blue whale carcass from its skeleton. Museum staff towed the whale from Trout River to Winterhouse Brook in Bonne Bay where they'd have more space to work.



Once enough sections of the skeletal structure can be separated from the carcass, they will be transported to the ROM in Toronto for analysis and display preparation.

*Courtesy of Jeremy Eaton/CBC* Crew members say the blubber that's being sliced off the carcass will be buried in the local Trout River dump.

## Decaying Communication



*Courtesy of Jeremy Eaton/CBC*

River Mayor, Paul Matthews, said that he's disappointed with the obvious breakdown in communication with the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO). Matthews acknowledged the ROM is well-equipped to display the blue whale skeleton, but the DFO's involvement thwarted the possibility for a local display.

Matthews admonished both government branches for what he called "a missed opportunity" to promote Trout River as an "eco-tourism destination" with the whale display.

Ever since the whale washed ashore, Trout River municipal officials grappled with the logistics of how to handle the large decaying marine mammal. Even though Matthews said his town supports the ROM salvage, he laments about how the government dealt with the issue. He said the government wasn't open to answering residents' questions.

As crew members hack into the decomposing whale carcass, the odour of decay isn't the only thing that smells. Not everyone is happy to put the dead whale to rest, and especially not at the ROM. Local residents and town politicians say the stench of the rotting whale is a reminder of a greater demise. In a statement he released about the issue, Trout

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## It's a municipal problem



*Courtesy of Jeremy Crocker*

Mayor Paul Matthews said his town learned the responsibility to handle the whale carcass was a municipal one but permission was needed from the Department of Fisheries and Oceans before moving it.

"We initially contacted the provincial departments that are related to this and tried to work with them in terms of how to best deal with the situation of the whale itself — the presence of the decomposing carcass," he said.

"From that point on, the response was basically that it was our problem, they had no interest or responsibility in the matter and it was a municipal responsibility to deal with it as we saw best."

Matthews said the town was weighing its options when Fisheries Minister Gail Shea announced the decision to have a Canadian museum assume ownership of the blue whale.

"They [DFO] didn't provide assistance — or positive response, for that matter — up until the point that the initial announcement was made concerning their attempts to partner with the Royal Ontario Museum," he said.

## The future for the blue whale...

Blue whales are rare and scientists say there may be less than 250 mature adults in the entire Northwest Atlantic.

There's another blue whale carcass that washed up in Rocky Harbour. It may take a few weeks for crews to finish the salvage operation for both sets of remains.

The Royal Ontario Museum will house both blue whale skeletons.



*Courtesy of firstworldfacts.com*

It's believed the whales died several weeks ago when they were either trapped or crushed by heavy ice off Newfoundland's west coast. For a video clip of the salvage efforts, view CBC's [A whale of a project](#).