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Whale Becomes Free (Though Injured) Willy

By COREY KILGANNON

A humpback whale entangled in fishing gear in New York waters, about eight miles offshore, was freed by rescuers Thursday afternoon, said officials, who released a videos of the rescue.

The whale, which is 25 to 30 feet long and perhaps 20 tons, had serious injuries from the gear but swam off, said Teri Frady, a spokeswoman for the [National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration](#).

“We don’t know if it will survive,” Ms. Frady said. “It has a curvature in its back from the weight of the gear, and it was tethered at the tail. The rope dug into its flesh, so there was a pretty serious injury there, as well. It was injured and had been under a lot of stress, but there was nothing else we could do for it. There’s no easy way to treat a whale that size.”

The whale had become tangled in rope connecting fishing traps that was snagged on the bottom and was so taut that rescuers had difficulty freeing the animal.

After a six-hour effort on Thursday, a whale disentanglement crew from Massachusetts, working out of a raft, managed to free the whale at approximately 4:30 p.m., near the approach to the Ambrose Channel off Sandy Hook, N.J.

“It was stuck in a shipping lane,” Ms. Frady said. “That’s like being stuck on a highway.”

Ms. Frady said it was not uncommon for humpback whales to be this close to New York Harbor. Humpback whales follow a food supply of small fish. The whale was probably one of about 900 whales in a group called the Gulf of Maine feeding component of the larger Western North Atlantic whale group, she said.

The authorities first approached the whale on Wednesday, and a Coast Guard Cutter guarded it Wednesday night. Rescuers did not tag the whale.

“Rather than put more line on the whale,” Ms. Frady said, “we wanted to give it its best chance at survival.”