

Bryde's whale's bones now the focus

NST, 20 Dec 2006

KOTA KINABALU: The Bryde's whale which died despite valiant efforts to save it will live on in the hearts of the people here.

Efforts are under way to save its bones for the purpose of putting its skeletal frame on display, now that Chief Minister Datuk Seri Musa Aman has given the green light.

Assistant Tourism, Culture and Environment Minister Datuk Karim Bujang said the Fisheries Department, Sabah Parks, state museum and Universiti Malaysia Sabah would co-ordinate efforts.

However, the Bryde's (pronounced "Bro-dess") whale's final resting place has yet to be decided.

"But it will definitely be a place where the public, and not just researchers, will have access to it," said Karim.

"It's very exciting. It's not often that we have such a magnificent creature washed up on our shores. There were many volunteers who tried to save it. Now, we can commemorate the event in a meaningful way."

The decomposing carcass is currently at sea, some five nautical miles from Gaya island, where it was first spotted last Friday in an area called Lok Taman.

The injured whale, which had beached itself, was freed and towed out to sea following a day-long effort by numerous people. Hopes were high that it would survive, but it was found dead on Sunday at the same spot where it had been stranded.

Should it be displayed at the Labuan Marine Museum, it will have the skeletal remains of a 7.3 metre-long Indian Fin Whale for company.

The Indian Fin Whale beached in Malacca in 1892, and its skeleton



UMS Borneo Marine Research Institute's public affairs co-ordinator, Kennedy Aaron Aguol, explaining the history of the Cuvier's beaked whale, whose bones are on display at the Universiti Malaysia Sabah Aquarium and Marine Museum.

There is also a 6.1m-long Cuvier's beaked whale at the Universiti Malaysia Sabah Aquarium and Marine Museum.

Its carcass was found in Kampung Mimpi Jadi in Tuaran in 1997. Researchers buried the carcass to decompose it before putting its bones together for display.

Fisheries Department director Rayner Stuel Galid said the carcass of the Bryde's whale was still afloat and it would be a long time before the bones could be retrieved.

"We will confer with the technical experts on the best way to proceed," he said, adding that the department welcomed the government's decision to fund the salvage operation.

UMS Borneo Marine Research Institute mammal expert Dr Saifullah Jaaman said the university was looking forward to conducting research on and collecting samples from the specimen. "We are overjoyed that the state government will be financing the project and we will do our best in this collaborative effort," he said.

"It will definitely be a boon to our research efforts, and it will also generate more educational interest and environmental awareness among the public."

Dr Saifullah said that the best way to prevent the whale's bones from getting lost was to let it decompose naturally in shallower waters so that loose bones could be retrieved.

"Another option is to put netting around the carcass to keep it intact and hope the bones don't fall out, even as marine scavengers get at it."

remains are said to be worth RM500,000 because of its age and historical value.

