

Oceanographic Student participates in Necropsy of Rare Sei Whale



NSUOC student Samara Parker carries a rib removed during a Sei whale necropsy.
Photo by Joseph Hall

Earlier this month, Oceanographic Center student Samara Parker, working with New England Aquarium's Rescue and Rehabilitation Department, was one of several marine biologists to assist with the necropsy of a stranded Sei Whale.

The whale washed up on a private beach in the coastal town of Manchester by The Sea, north of Boston. Parker and the other NEAQ scientists were able to collect tissue samples from all the major organs for toxicology, histology and DNA analysis. This data is used to document any internal infections as well as the type and amount of parasites that may be present. It was found that a number of vertebrae and front flipper bones were fractured premortum. While the parasite load was considered heavy the consensus is that the whale was killed by a large vessel strike.

The Sei whale, *Balaenoptera borealis*, is the third largest species of the Rorqual or baleen whales. At a maximum length of 60 - 65 feet and weighing 17 to 20 tons only the Fin and Blue whales are larger (American Cetacean Society 2007). This whale was determined to be a juvenile female approximately 45 feet long. Marine biologists from a number of organizations including Woods Hole, NOAA and the New England Whale Center were present to gather much needed data. Little is known about *B. borealis* because their migration patterns keep them in deep ocean waters and rarely if ever come in to coastal waters.
