

AN ABNORMAL SERIES OF SPATIO-TEMPORAL STRANDINGS IN ADULT FEMALE HARBOUR SEALS (*PHOCA VITULINA*) IN THE GERMAN NORTH SEA

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From December 4th, 2018, to January 13th, 2019, 11 adult female harbour seals (*Phoca vitulina*) in good nutritional status stranded dead along the coastline of Büsum, Schleswig-Holstein, Germany. All animals underwent necropsies following a standardized protocol. Samples of all animals were sent for histology, microbiology and virology analysis (data of four animals are still pending). The females were either pregnant, had aborted or were suspected to have aborted recently. Six females showed up to 10 cm long lacerations in either the vagina, the uterus or both. In one case, a foetus was found in the abdomen. In another, bone and cartilage fragments indicating a macerated foetus were present in the abdomen. Analyses of virology samples, including PDV, PHV and influenza, were negative. Histology revealed moderate to severe hyperaemia in the lungs and central nervous system of all animals, as well as severe inflammatory processes associated with the genital tract lacerations. Moderate to severe infection with either one or a combination of *Escherichia coli* and beta-haemolytic streptococci, including *Streptococcus phocae*, was present in the lungs, kidneys, livers, spleens, intestines and the genital tract. Based on those findings, it is likely that the animals suffered from acute septicaemia and died due to septic shock. It is noticeable that only apparently healthy, adult females were affected. This may indicate that the gender and/or reproductive status plays a major role in these cases. The aetiology of the lacerations in the genital tract could not be determined so far.