

No visible signs of physical trauma on dead dugong: NParks

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There were no visible signs on the carcass of the young dugong found dead in Singapore waters last Saturday to indicate that it died from physical trauma.

But the National Parks Board (NParks) said it is continuing to work with the National University of Singapore's (NUS) Lee Kong Chian Natural History Museum and the NUS Department of Biological Sciences to investigate the cause of the marine mammal's death.

The critically endangered crea-

ture had been found dead and floating in the waters by a group of recreational divers off Pulau Hantu, one of Singapore's southern islands, on Saturday morning.

Dr Karenne Tun, director of NParks' coastal and marine branch, said a post-mortem conducted on Saturday by NParks' Animal and Veterinary Service found no visible signs to indicate that the death of the young dugong was caused by physical trauma. But she added: "As young dugongs are known to stay close to their mothers until they reach maturity, the calf may have been separated from the mother before its demise."

Mr Marcus Chua, a mammal re-

searcher at the museum, said the dugong was male and measured about 1.4 m. Adult dugongs can usually reach lengths of between 2.4m and 4m.

Mr Chua told *The Straits Times* dugongs usually receive care from their mothers for a long time. "If the dugong had been separated from its mother, it might not have been able to survive."

This is because dugong calves need a combination of sea grass, which is their natural diet, and their mother's milk for nutrition.

Their mother's care is also crucial in teaching them how to survive in the wild independently.

As maternal dugongs do not



The dugong calf was found dead and floating in waters off Pulau Hantu last Saturday by a group of recreational divers. PHOTO: MARCUS CHUA

abandon their children, the pair were likely separated due to challenging conditions, Mr Chua said, citing possibilities such as poor

tidal conditions or the premature death of its mother from other causes.

During the post-mortem, which

Mr Chua assisted in, the researchers found that the dugong's stomach was full, suggesting that it had been feeding before its death.

Further investigation done on the contents in the calf's stomach will help ascertain the cause of death.

"Although this event is sad, finding the carcass of this calf is evidence that dugongs are breeding in Singaporean waters," said Mr Chua.

"Hopefully the findings of this investigation can better contribute to protecting dugongs in our waters."

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