

Marine Mammal Commission 2017 Annual Meeting
April 5-7, 2017, North Falmouth, Massachusetts
Day Two: Gray Seals in the Northeast Parts I and II Session Summary

We do already know a lot about gray seals, there is a lot of information and data out there. **BUT** we still do not have all the answers, or the full story, about the role of gray seals in the ecosystem and the need for more research and data collection was identified by several speakers. In the second presentation of the morning, Kimberly laid out some of the key needs to understand the basic information about seal abundance, distribution and movements and diet.

Through those information needs there are also opportunities for engagement across the different stakeholders. For example one thing that was needed to better understand diet was a prey database for fatty acid analysis. For that prey samples are needed and of course there are fishermen that regularly collect fish so perhaps there could be some engagement here for the fisherman to help provide the prey samples – resources for analyses would still be needed of course. Also there are already discussions going on about collaborations on research across taxonomic groups (between the shark and seal biologists) – connecting the dots about some of the complex trophic interactions that Jason described in his presentation.

Also raised was the suggestion to make the most of the samples we do have. From stranded animals there are often samples collected that could be mined to understand more about the life history of seals as well as their movements or diets through stable isotope analysis in their teeth, for example.

Another opportunity mentioned was trying to provide more avenues for citizen science and what naturalists, whale or seal watchers, fishermen or residents could do to contribute to the understanding of seals and their role in the ecosystem. The Northwest Atlantic Seal Research Consortium (NASRC) does have a [Marine Animal Identification Network](#) which – as a start – allows people to report sightings. Potentially that could be expanded to do more in the future.

Another need identified was to make sure that the information about what is known is available to the stakeholders and the NASRC was again identified as a potential avenue for “clearing” some of that information and making it available to the public.

Underlying all of this was the clear need for additional resources to conduct the sample collection or data analysis and so considering creative ways of how these resources might be generated moving forward are needed.