

MMC is an independent federal agency created under MMPA to provide oversight and advice to federal agencies regarding the primary objective of the MMPA – i.e., ensuring the conservation of marine mammals and maintenance of healthy ecosystems of which they are a part.

Among the guiding principles by which the MMC operates are that policies and management actions pertaining to mm should be based on sound science, but when limited information is at hand the best available science should be used and policies and actions should be precautionary.

One of the issues important to the Commission that you will hear about today concerns marine mammal strandings and their implications for health of individuals, the population and the environment.

The issue is complex.

1. Strandings may be of single individuals or multiple individuals – simultaneously or over brief or long periods of time
2. They may be a single species or multiple species – they occur among all taxa at some point
3. The causes – may be natural or they may be related to human activity
 - a. They could be something acute – navy sonar, ship strike, entanglement
 - b. They could be more subtle
 - c. It is often not easy to ascertain causes, especially when they are not acute or direct

The MMC has been a long-standing supporter of the marine mammal health and stranding program coordinated by the NMFS for several reasons:

1. It provides critical data of several types, including in some cases indicators of environmental degradation, but also basic life history information – MMS editor hat
2. It creates partnerships between government and private enterprises toward a common goal of marine conservation, leveraging some government funding with substantial private funding
3. It provides a mechanism for dealing with the impacts of catastrophic events such as the oil spill in the GoMx – we saw how critically important the stranding network was but we also saw the downside of insufficient network staff and centers to cover the whole affected area
4. It provides an important avenue for broad outreach about marine mammals and potential human impacts

I would end my comments by saying that the MMC is pleased to be able to collaborate with NMFS and the stranding network to provide this briefing.