



Marine Mammal Commission

An independent agency of the U.S. Government

Performance and Accountability Report

Fiscal Year 2016



November 2016



November 15, 2016

Message from the Chairman

With this letter, I submit the Commission's Fiscal Year 2016 (FY 2016) Performance and Accountability Report, including financial and program performance results. The performance data in this report are complete and reliable. Prior to preparation of the report, the Commission evaluated its management controls and financial management system pursuant to the Federal Managers' Financial Integrity Act of 1982. No material weaknesses were identified and the financial management system conforms to government financial system requirements. In accordance with OMB Circular 123, Appendix C, no improper payments were made. An independent, certified public accountant audited the Commission's financial statements, internal controls, and management systems and verified that they conform to generally accepted accounting principles, laws, regulations, and requirements.

Given continued budgetary uncertainty and increasing needs for marine mammal research and conservation, FY 2016 was a challenge not just for the Commission, but also for the federal agencies that conduct science and bear responsibility for the conservation of marine mammals. The Commission's budget has not kept up with the significant essential cost increases experienced since FY 2015, resulting in a decrease in discretionary funds. This has led us to cut our research grants program significantly, restrict our research focus to the highest priority needs, increase efficiency in proposal budgets and expect matching funds from applicants, and explore public-private partnerships.

The Commission centers all its work around its Strategic Plan, to help maintain our focus on the most pressing issues surrounding marine mammals and their environments. The Arctic received particular attention in FY 2016. Driven by the readily apparent and accelerating impacts of climate change on the Arctic, we held a series of listening sessions in Alaska to gain a better understanding of how climate change is affecting Alaska Native communities and the marine mammals upon which they depend. What we saw there, and more importantly what we heard from those communities, shaped much of our work during this past fiscal year.

On behalf of the Marine Mammal Commission, I am pleased to submit this FY 2016 Performance and Accountability Report to the Office of Management and Budget.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Daryl J. Boness". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of the first and last names being capitalized and prominent.

Daryl J. Boness, Ph.D.
Chairman

Background

Title II of the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) created the Marine Mammal Commission as an independent agency of the Executive Branch. The Commission consists of three members appointed by the President with the advice and consent of the Senate. The Commission is assisted by a nine-member Committee of Scientific Advisors on Marine Mammals, a special advisor on Alaskan Native affairs and 14 full-time permanent staff (Figure 1).

Section 202 of the MMPA assigned the Commission seven duties which include regular review of domestic and international actions to implement the MMPA, such as marine mammal stock assessments, regulations, management plans, policy guidance documents, and scientific research activities. The Commission is charged with making recommendations to other agencies on measures it deems necessary or desirable to further the policies of the MMPA, including provisions for protecting the interests of Indians, Aleuts, and Eskimos residing in Alaska whose livelihoods may be adversely affected by actions taken under the Act.

To fulfill its duties, the Commission reviews and makes recommendations on the domestic and international policies and actions of federal agencies to ensure that they are consistent with the MMPA. Marine mammals are subject to multiple human-related risk factors including direct and indirect fishery interactions, vessel strikes, noise, disease, contaminants, marine debris, harmful algal blooms, dead zones, coastal development, and climate change. To characterize risk factors and minimize harm to marine mammals from human activities, the Commission consults with other federal agencies, such as the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA, especially its National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS)), the Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), the Navy (USN) and the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM), state agencies (e.g., various departments of fish, game, or wildlife), and tribal organizations (e.g., the Indigenous People's Council on Marine Mammals and species/region-specific Alaska Native Organizations and the Makah Tribal Council). The Commission reviews numerous environmental analyses and applications for the incidental taking of marine mammals during military, oil and gas, geophysical, construction, and research activities. The Commission also helps develop and coordinate multi-agency and international research and management initiatives to facilitate marine mammal protection and conservation. In all its work, the Commission seeks to be a source of science based policy, to catalyze critical marine mammal research and management, and to provide independent and objective oversight for domestic and international actions that impact marine mammals and their environment.

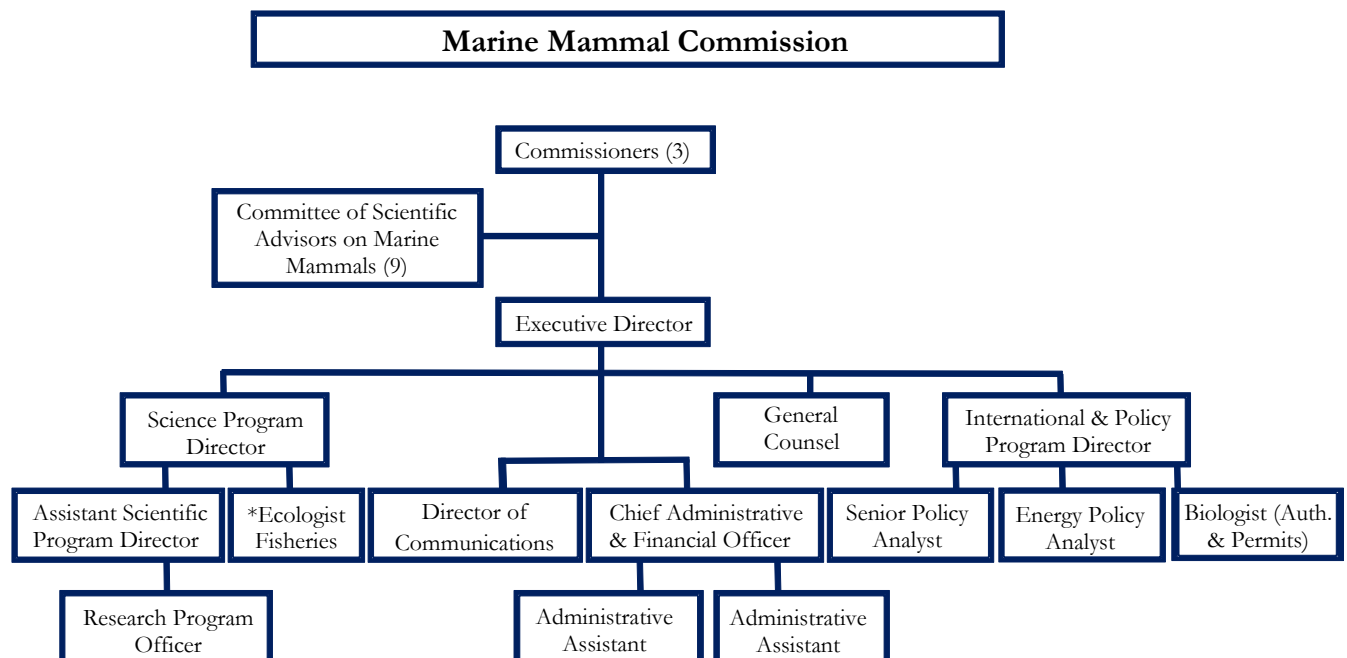
Statutory Duties

The Commission is charged with fulfilling basic statutory duties as set forth in section 202 and other sections of the MMPA, which include the following:

- (1) Reviewing all marine mammal stock assessment reports and related documents prepared by NMFS and the FWS;
- (2) Reviewing all applications for authorization to take marine mammals incidental to activities other than commercial fisheries (e.g., oil and gas development, seismic studies, military exercises, coastal development projects), as required under section 101(a)(5) of the MMPA;

- (3) Reviewing all scientific research and other permit applications involving the taking of marine mammals, as required under section 104 of the MMPA, and supporting key research projects focused on matters critical to marine mammal conservation and management;
- (4) Consulting with the Department of State, NOAA, and FWS regarding research and management measures needed to promote marine mammal conservation in foreign jurisdictions and in international waters;
- (5) Reviewing all proposals for listing, or changing the listing status, of marine mammals under the Endangered Species Act (ESA);
- (6) Enhancing and monitoring the effectiveness of recovery programs for endangered, threatened, and depleted species such as the Hawaiian monk seal, Cook Inlet beluga whale, southern resident killer whale, western Steller sea lion, North Atlantic right whale, North Pacific right whale, southern sea otter, polar bear, bearded and ringed seals, and Florida manatee;
- (7) Promoting co-management of marine mammals taken for subsistence purposes by Alaska Natives pursuant to section 119 of the MMPA, as well as effective implementation of the tribal consultation process under Executive Order 13175; and
- (8) Facilitating development of research and management capacity in foreign countries with endangered marine mammal species and stocks (e.g., vaquitas, freshwater dolphins, and Arabian Sea humpback whales).

Organization



* Position vacant

Figure 1. Organizational schematic of the Commission

Overview of Commission Finances in FY 2016

Annual appropriations and distribution of funds

Congress is the sole source of funding for the Commission. Total annual appropriations for the Commission from FY 2009 to 2016 are listed in Table 1. In FY 2016 the Commission's appropriation was \$3,431,000. Approximately 65 percent was used for salaries and benefits (including salaries for Commissioners and non-federal Committee members), 20 percent for administration and rent, 8 percent for the Science Program and research grants, and 7 percent for travel (Figure 2). Regarding salaries, approximately 80 percent were for science and policy staff, 13 percent for administrative staff and 7 percent for Commissioners and Committee members.

The Commission used its appropriation to meet its general oversight responsibilities as mandated by the MMPA. In recent years the Commission has experienced an increase in essential non-discretionary expenses. At the same time, the Commission's funding since FY15 has not kept pace with these increased operational expenses. As a result, the Commission has had to absorb the increase in essential operational expenses from its base funds, reducing its discretionary budget by approximately 40 percent. This decrease in operational funds has had a significant impact on funding for the Commission's Grants and Research program. With a relatively modest budget, the Commission's Grants and Research program has filled an important and unique niche in marine mammal research for many years, funding novel, low-cost, small-scale projects to achieve a large impact. Examples include supporting proof-of-concept research, innovative new science, pilot projects, and surveys and conservation work in developing countries. In many cases, small investments of \$10-20K have served as seed money for new initiatives and concept projects, which often cannot find a funding source given the scale or novelty.

Management of Commission Finances

The Executive Director oversees and assumes responsibility for all financial systems and transactions. The Chief Administrative and

Table 1. Annual Appropriations for the Marine Mammal Commission, FY 2009 to 2016

Fiscal Year	Appropriation
2009	\$3,200,000
2010	\$3,250,000
2011	\$3,243,500
2012	\$3,025,000
2013	\$2,864,948*
2014	\$3,250,000
2015	\$3,340,000
2016	\$3,431,000

* Reflects sequestration of funds.

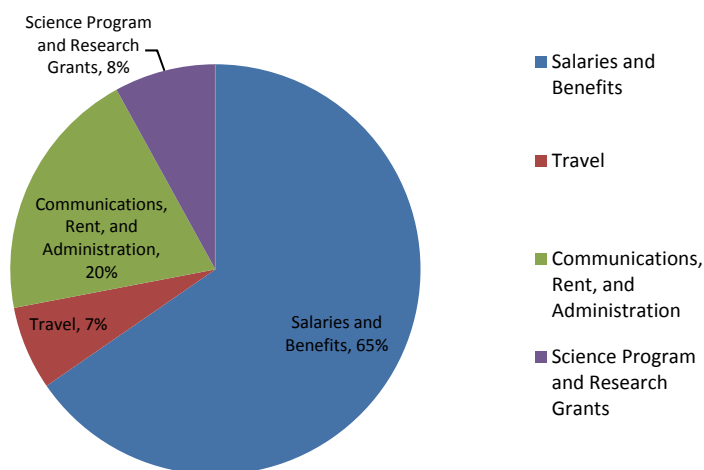


Figure 2. Distribution of Funds Appropriated to the Marine Mammal Commission for FY 2016

Financial Officer manages and is responsible for all day-to-day budgetary matters, including issuing purchase orders, processing time cards, and processing invoice payments. The Chief Administrative and Financial Officer also works with the Directors of the Science Program and the International and Policy Program to oversee their expenditures. The Staff Assistant completes all paperwork related to travel expenses and assists the Chief Administrative and Financial Officer in day-to-day management of the Commission's budget. The Research Program Officer oversees all day-to-day fiscal transactions related to Commission-sponsored research. The Executive Director, General Counsel, Chief Administrative and Financial Officer, Scientific Program Director, and International and Policy Program Director comprise the Commission's Senior Leadership Team, which meets weekly. The Senior Leadership Team's responsibilities include budget planning and management of the Commission's finances. An independent, certified public accountant examined all financial systems and controls and completed a comprehensive audit for FY 2016. The audit did not find material internal weaknesses in financial systems and controls and found no areas where improvement was required.

Commission Accomplishments in FY 2016

The work performed by the Commission is centered on the five strategic objectives outlined in the Commission's [Strategic Plan for 2015-19](#)¹. Below is a summary of accomplishments for FY 2016 given under the respective strategic objective.

Strategic Objective 1: Marine mammal populations in the Arctic are maintained as viable functioning elements of their ecosystems through management measures that address direct and indirect effects of climate change and the ensuing economic, scientific, and other activities in the region.

- **2016 Alaska Listening Sessions:** On February 3-11, we held a [series of listening sessions](#)² in Alaska with the goal of gaining a better understanding of how climate change is impacting Alaska Native communities and the marine mammals they depend on for subsistence and cultural purposes. We visited and received input from communities and regional partners in Barrow, Kotzebue, and Nome. We also held a "wrap-up" public meeting in Anchorage, where we summarized what we had heard and discussed potential next steps in a meeting held in partnership with the Indigenous People's Council for Marine Mammals (IPCoMM). The focus on issues raised at the listening sessions continued throughout the year. Commissioner Michael Tillman served as Chair of an Arctic Waterways Safety Committee workshop on Standards of Care for research vessel operations near Alaskan communities. In coordination



Marine Mammal Commission Chairman Daryl Boness and Executive Director Rebecca Lent stand near the Whalebone Arch in Barrow, Alaska.

¹ http://www.mmc.gov/reports/strategic_plans/welcome.shtml

² <https://www.mmc.gov/events-meetings-and-workshops/marine-mammal-commission-annual-meetings/2016-annual-meeting/>

with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Alaskan Nanuq Commission (ANC), Kawerak, and the North Slope Borough, we [co-convoked a summit](#)³ on June 1-2, 2016 in Nome, AK. This summit addressed the co-management of polar bears for subsistence use, especially in relation to the U.S. Russia Bilateral Agreement on Polar Bears. We developed and implemented an Arctic Communications Plan to take a more coordinated and strategic approach to our Arctic work and to improve communication between the Commission, other Federal Agencies and Alaska Native partners. We contributed to the development of the Interagency Arctic Research Policy Committee's Arctic Research Plan FY2017-2021 and the evaluation of the State of Arctic Marine Biodiversity report.

- **Arctic Session at CHOW 2016:** This year's Capitol Hill Oceans Week (CHOW) featured an Arctic session titled "Local Voices and Traditional Knowledge for a Sustainable Arctic Economy". We co-sponsored this session, which included Vera Metcalf, our Special Advisor for Native Affairs, and Harry Brower, Chairman of the Alaska Eskimo Whaling Commission, as panelists. The Arctic panel brought an Alaska Native perspective to CHOW, and put a spotlight on many issues of importance to Alaska Native communities. Topics discussed included impacts of climate change on Alaska Native subsistence activities, and the importance of considering traditional knowledge to advance marine resource conservation and management. The Commission was well represented at CHOW this year, with Commissioners and staff participating in several sessions and events. CHOW took place June 7-9, 2016 at the Newseum in Washington, DC. A video recording of the Arctic session is [available here](#)⁴.



CHOW 2016 panel on "Local Voices and Traditional Knowledge for a Sustainable Arctic"

Strategic Objective 2: Scientifically robust mitigation and monitoring measures are developed, refined, and implemented to prevent, minimize, or mitigate the impacts of offshore oil and gas and renewable energy activities on marine mammals and their ecosystems.

- **Gulf of Mexico Oil Spill and Ecosystem Conference:** On September 20-22, 2016 we co-organized with the National Marine Fisheries Service a workshop to bring together federal agencies to identify specific actions that could be taken to conserve and promote recovery of whales and dolphins in the northern Gulf of Mexico. This workshop was a follow-up from



Atlantic spotted dolphin. Photo obtained under NOAA research permit #779-1633.

³ <https://www.mmc.gov/wp-content/uploads/Polar-Bear-Summit-Summary.pdf>

⁴ <http://oceanslive.org/video-gallery/item/343-sustainable-arctic-economy><http://oceanslive.org/video-gallery/item/343-sustainable-arctic-economy>

the [Gulf of Mexico Marine Mammal Research and Monitoring Meeting](#)⁵ sponsored by the Commission last year to identify high priority, overarching marine mammal management and data needs for the next 5-15 years. We presented these priorities in January 2016 to the Gulf of Mexico Oil Spill and Ecosystem Conference. The presentation was intended to inform the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management and its partners as they develop the Gulf of Mexico Marine Assessment Program for Protected Species, an initiative to improve information about protected species and enable a comprehensive assessment of marine mammal, marine turtle, and seabird abundance and spatial distribution in Gulf offshore waters. We also co-organized and co-chaired a session at the oil spill conference focused on research and monitoring approaches and findings on the health and long-term resilience of large marine vertebrates in the Gulf, such as birds, marine mammals, sea turtles, sharks, and large pelagic fish.

- **Sound Field Characterization of Pile Driving Activities Associated with an Offshore Wind Farm in Taiwan:** In collaboration with the Ministry of Science and Technology and the Industrial Technology Research Institute of Taiwan, the Commission co-funded researchers at the National Taiwan University to investigate the impacts of pile driving on Taiwanese humpback dolphins. This subspecies is critically endangered, with approximately 60 individuals remaining. Results of the project should help inform not only appropriate mitigation and monitoring strategies but also various environmental impact assessments.

Strategic Objective 3: Marine mammal strandings are more thoroughly investigated and analyzed to improve understanding of the factors causing mortality and affecting the health of marine mammals, determine the efficacy of measures such as ship speed reduction to reduce mortality, and elucidate the relationships between marine mammal health and human health and ecosystem services.

- **Marine Mammal Health Monitoring and Analysis Platform (Health MAP):** During 2016 the work to develop Health MAP continued by means of four expert working groups. The Commission continues to play an overarching leadership role, and, starting in late 2016, this included our Assistant Scientific Program Director beginning a part-time detail to the NMFS Office of Protected Resources to serve as Project Manager for the platform's development over the next 6-9 months. The Commission also supported a project with partners at Texas A&M University to develop the design and architecture for an information system for Health MAP. This system will assist with strategic planning and implementation decisions over the next 3-10 years.



Tagged ringed seal pup ready to be released.
Michael Cameron (NOAA)

⁵ <https://www.mmc.gov/events-meetings-and-workshops/other-events/gulf-of-mexico-marine-mammal-research-and-monitoring-meeting/>

- **Relevant Conferences:** The Commission participated in the [2016 National Marine Animal Health and Stranding Network Conference](http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/health/Stranding%20Conference/2016%20conf.html)⁶ in Shepherdstown, WV which brought together members of the health and stranding community to share and learn from regional and national issues. Several Commission staff and Scientific Advisors made presentations at this event. Commissioner Frances Gulland delivered a plenary talk addressing “Hot Topics in the North East Pacific” over the four years since the previous gathering. The Commissioners, Scientific Advisors and staff all supported the 21st International Biennial Conference of the Society for Marine Mammalogy in San Francisco, December 2015 through presentations and sponsorship of delegates from developing countries. This was an international conference of 2,500 marine mammal scientists from all over the world that advanced the discipline of marine mammal science globally. The conference included key-note lectures and oral presentations, 800 poster presentations and workshops on hot topics in marine mammal science.

Strategic Objective 4: Anthropogenic threats to marine mammals, particularly those most vulnerable to extinction, are identified and reduced in the coastal and fresh waters of other nations and on the high seas worldwide through bilateral and multilateral scientific and conservation efforts and sharing of expertise.

- **Vaquita Conservation:** The Commission continued its international mission by supporting efforts to conserve the vaquita, a small porpoise in the northern Gulf of California, Mexico. Accidental drowning in gillnets is rapidly driving the vaquita toward extinction, despite a two-year ban on the use of gillnets throughout its range. A new abundance estimate of 59 animals was presented at a meeting of the [International Recovery Team for the Vaquita \(CIRVA\)](http://www.iucn-csg.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/03/CIRVA-7-Final-Report.pdf)⁷ in May 2016 co-sponsored by the Commission. This represents a population decline of more than 90 percent between 1997 and 2015. Rampant illegal gillnet fishing for an endangered fish, the totoaba, is a continuing entanglement risk to vaquitas. Totoaba swim bladders, worth thousands of dollars per kilogram, are smuggled to China in the illegal wildlife trade. CIRVA recommended that the Government of Mexico place a permanent ban on all gillnets throughout the entire range of the vaquita and consider closure of all fishing if poaching cannot be controlled. The Commission continued its investment in the development of alternative artisanal fishing gear that does not entangle vaquitas by sponsoring a workshop in Mexico with the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) that established an international expert group to advise Mexican authorities on gear testing. A Commission-sponsored study of markets for legally caught and vaquita-safe seafood from the region is expected to facilitate the commercial sale as such products become available.



Vaquita photo taken under permit (Oficio No. DR/488/08) from the Secretaria de Medio Ambiente y Recursos Naturales (SEMARNAT). (Paula Olson, NOAA)

⁶ <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/health/Stranding%20Conference/2016%20conf.html>

⁷ <http://www.iucn-csg.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/03/CIRVA-7-Final-Report.pdf>

- **Fighting Bycatch in Global Fisheries:** At the 2016 Our Ocean Conference, the United States announced that it will join with the World Wildlife Fund, Environmental Defense Fund, The Nature Conservancy, the Natural Resources Defense Council, and the International Seafood Sustainability Foundation to provide \$1.7 million to enable fishing nations to better monitor and prevent bycatch in global fisheries, supporting sustainable, ecosystem-based fisheries worldwide, with projects focused on technological, policy and legal capacity building. This bycatch initiative was spearheaded by the Commission, and includes \$375 K to address global marine mammal bycatch-the number one direct cause of human-related mortality in marine mammals.



Peter Thomas of the Marine Mammal Commission standing by a giant fish made from marine debris, at the 2016 Our Ocean Conference.

[Click here](http://ourocean2016.org/commitments/#commitments-main)⁸ for a list of all the marine conservation commitments made at the Our Ocean Conference.

- **Assessing the Status of Marine Mammals Worldwide and Identifying Conservation Priorities:** The Commission sponsored a comprehensive [review of the global status of baleen whales](http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/mms.12281/full)⁹, published in the journal Marine Mammal Science. This review identifies species and populations of concern and identifies primary threats to them. The Commission addresses international issues through its grants program (see page 11), participation in meetings of the International Whaling Commission, especially the Scientific Committee, engagement in regional efforts (such as the Arabian Sea Whale Network), and by assisting in local conservation efforts for marine mammal species or populations of concern.

Strategic Objective 5: Understanding of human impacts on marine mammals and their ecosystems, and the management of those impacts, is improved through enhanced scientific research, policy analysis, and information dissemination.

- **Take Reduction Teams:** The Commission continued to participate in NMFS's marine mammal take reduction teams and provide advice on measures needed to improve the effectiveness of take reduction plans in fisheries. Incidental mortality and serious injury due to certain commercial fisheries exceed allowable levels for at least a dozen marine mammal populations in U.S. waters and this problem continues to be a major conservation challenge. Deliberations by take reduction teams spurred several new regulatory proposals from NMFS which were reviewed by the Commission.

⁸ <http://ourocean2016.org/commitments/#commitments-main>

⁹ <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/mms.12281/full>

- Hill Briefing on Marine Mammal Bycatch:**

On September 14th, in conjunction with the World Wildlife Fund, we hosted a [Congressional briefing on marine mammal bycatch](#)¹⁰. Our goal for this briefing was to increase awareness of the impacts of marine mammal bycatch among those who are in positions to address this issue on a national platform. Yolanda Kakabadse, President of WWF-International, and Senator Lisa Murkowski of Alaska delivered opening remarks to a standing-room-only crowd, emphasizing the importance of creating sustainable fisheries that ensure the conservation of protected species at the national and international levels. Our panel, moderated by Commissioner Frances Gulland, provided extensive background on marine mammal bycatch, including discussion on what is being done to address this problem in the United States and in global fisheries, and how bycatch regulations are affecting fishermen and the fishing industry. Congressman Jared Huffman of California provided closing remarks that underscored the importance of conserving ocean wildlife, especially marine mammals.



Congressman Huffman (CA) next to our event organizer and 2016 Knauss Fellow, Jenna Malek.

- 2014 Survey of Federally Funded Marine Mammal Research and Conservation:** In April 2016 we published the results of the FY14 Survey of Federally Funded Marine Mammal Research and Conservation. This report highlights the scope and nature of the marine mammal activities conducted across the various U.S. federal agencies. This information will help identify gaps in marine mammal research and reveal areas of potential synergy and collaboration within the federal government. A copy of the [report is available for download](#)¹¹ at the Commission's website.

Overarching Mission Accomplishments

A significant portion of the Commission's work is overarching, that is, it supports multiple strategic objectives. Examples of Commission overarching FY16 accomplishments are summarized below.

- Recommendations and reviews of various agency actions:** Drawing on the extensive expertise of its staff and the technical advice of its Committee of Scientific Advisors, the Commission submitted 113 letters to federal agencies and various action proponents with specific comments and recommendations aimed at enhancing protection and conservation of the affected marine mammals and promoting adherence to the MMPA and other laws. In addition, the Commission made specific recommendations on how to minimize the impacts of proposed human activities on marine mammals. Such activities included fishing, military operations, marine construction, offshore energy development (oil and gas and renewables),

¹⁰ <http://www.mmc.gov/wp-content/uploads/Invitation-Briefing-on-Marine-Mammal-Bycatch.pdf>

¹¹ <https://www.mmc.gov/grants-and-research-survey/survey-of-federally-funded-research/>

and research. The Commission consulted regularly with the agencies on the substance of its comments and recommendations and worked with them to pursue the best means of reducing and minimizing impacts.

- **Advancing Marine Mammal Research:** In FY 2016 a total of 87 proposals requesting over \$1.43 million were received by the Research Program. Competition was strong with many high-quality proposals focusing on a broad range of marine mammal topics around the world. We awarded a total of \$96,096 to the five projects listed below, directed at reduction of marine mammal bycatch in small-scale local fisheries, ice-dependent marine mammals in the Arctic, and Cook Inlet beluga whales. For more information about these five grant recipients and their research projects, please [visit our FY16 small grants](#)¹² page.
 - Towards an effective bycatch mitigation strategy for Franciscana dolphins in Argentina
 - Improving our understanding of Cook Inlet beluga foraging occurrence
 - A pilot study of alternative gears and fishing strategies that can limit Atlantic humpback dolphin (*Sousa teuszii*) bycatch in the Republic of Congo
 - Using Next Generation Sequencing technology to assess population structure in a highly abundant subspecies, the Arctic ringed seal (*Phoca hispida hispida*)
 - Rope-less fishing: Testing an innovative prototype for preventing whale entanglements
- **Review of Stock Assessment Reports:** In June 2016 we published a review of NMFS's Stock Assessment Reports. This publication reviews the efforts by NMFS to assess marine mammal stocks as required under the MMPA and provides recommendations to Congress on how stock assessment reports can be improved. Marine mammal stock assessments are critical to promoting marine mammal conservation and sustainable fisheries management. The [full report and a one-page report summary](#)¹³ are available for download at the Commission's website
- **Marine Mammals in the Global Ocean Observing System (GOOS):** The Marine Mammal Commission has been involved in identifying Essential Ocean Variables (EOVs) for the GOOS Biology and Ecosystems Panel. Through this process, marine mammal abundance and distribution has been recognized as an EOV¹⁴ and the Commission will continue to work with the panel and existing monitoring networks to make marine mammal information consistently available globally. Ultimately this will improve our ability to monitor marine mammals and understand their functional roles in the ecosystem at local, regional, national, and global scales, and better meet the purposes and intent of the MMPA.



Northern elephant seal. Picture taken under NMFS permit #87-1743. (Samantha Simmons, MMC)

¹² <https://www.mmc.gov/grants-and-research-survey/grant-awards/2016-grant-awards/>

¹³ <https://www.mmc.gov/letters-and-reports/reports/other-reports-by-the-marine-mammal-commission/>

¹⁴ A GOOS **Essential Ocean Variable** is a sustained measurement or a group of measurements necessary to assess ocean state and change at a global level, and to increase societal benefits from the ocean.

- **New Commission Website:** In February 2016 we launched a new public website—a major redesign focused on providing accurate and up-to-date information to the public about the marine mammal science, policy and management actions that the Commission undertakes to meet its duties under the MMPA. The new website, organized by priority topics, is the most significant and direct tool at our disposal to engage with the public about our work and mission. In just over six months, we have more than doubled the number of new visitors coming to our website.
- **Commission Tops Employee Engagement and Satisfaction Rating:** The Commission ranked number one among small government agencies in the 2016 Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey, specifically under “Employee Engagement” and “Global Satisfaction.” This voluntary survey conducted annually in all U.S. federal agencies asks employees several questions to determine the overall satisfaction with their jobs and workplace. Out of the 40 small agencies that completed the survey, the Commission had the highest score.
- **2015 Annual Report:** The Commission published its 2015 Annual Report, which highlights recent accomplishments and Commission goals for 2015. The Annual Report serves as the Commission’s primary outreach document, used to provide an overview of the Commission’s activities and to communicate to external audiences the relevance and importance of its work. The [Commission’s 2015 Annual Report](#)¹⁵ is available on the Commission website.
- **Congressional Outreach:** In March 2016, the Commission met with the Senate and House Appropriation and Authorization Committees to provide an overview of the Commission’s FY 2016 President’s Budget. The Commission also met with the Alaska Congressional delegation in March to provide an overview of the 2016 Alaska listening sessions and discuss next steps. Later in June the Commission participated in Capitol Hill Oceans Week, meeting with staff from several Congressional offices and with federal agency leadership to discuss recent activities of particular importance to the Commission.

Conclusions and Outlook



Three humpback whale tails dive together.

The Commission strives to ensure that marine mammal populations are conserved globally and maintained as significant functioning elements of healthy marine ecosystems for future generations, with human activities managed to minimize impacts on those populations and ecosystems.

In FY 2017 the Commission will continue to look for ways to reduce operational costs and leverage its resources and expertise by working with partners. For example, we will continue to collaborate with industry, foundations, and NGOs to fund the participation of individuals whose attendance is critical to

¹⁵ <https://www.mmc.gov/letters-and-reports/reports/annual-reports/>

successful workshops and meetings. We will continue to host detailees, volunteers, and interns to support multiple mission-critical projects at little or no cost to the Commission. We also plan to continue to promote new partnerships through our research and grants program to enhance science developed at universities and other research institutions around the world.

In FY 2017 we will begin to evaluate the effectiveness of, and revise as needed, our 2015-19 strategic plan. Keeping the Commission's strategic plan up to date is critical to guide future funding decisions that enhance the effectiveness and reach of our everyday work. Also, we plan to hold our 2017 Annual Meeting in New England to focus on some of the biggest regional challenges facing marine mammals, which include conserving the highly endangered North Atlantic right whale and discussing issues related to recovering pinniped populations.



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4340 East-West Highway | Room 700 | Bethesda, MD 20814

www.mmc.gov