



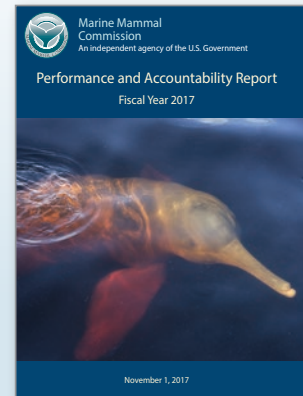
2017 ANNUAL REPORT

About Us

We are a federal agency charged under the Marine Mammal Protection Act to provide comprehensive oversight of science, policy, and management actions affecting marine mammals. Marine mammals such as whales, dolphins, seals and manatees are beloved creatures—essential to the health and productivity of the world’s oceans and even some freshwater habitats. As an independent U.S. government agency with oversight authority, we facilitate cooperation among a wide range of stakeholders involved in marine mammal science, conservation, and ocean resource use. We provide timely, science-based reviews of proposed actions by federal agencies and other entities and recommend measures to minimize human impacts on marine mammals and their habitats. We seek to promote and develop practical, cost-effective ways to approach scientific problems and address management issues. In 2017, we ranked number one among all U.S. government agencies surveyed for employee engagement and satisfaction for the second year in a row, a reflection of our dedicated, passionate, and motivated team. Please learn more about our reports, letters, and priority topics on [our website](#).

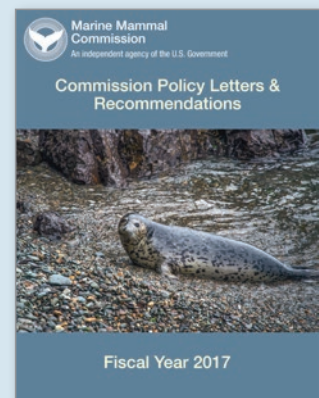


Reports



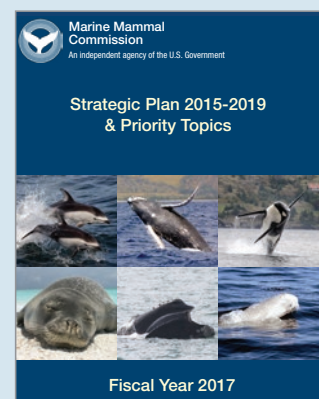
Review our FY2017 [Performance and Accountability Report](#) for an overview of our accomplishments.

Letters



Read our [science & policy recommendations](#) in this year’s 129 oversight letters.

Priority Topics



Learn more about our [strategic plan and priority topics](#).

HIGHLIGHTS FROM 2017

Reducing Marine Mammal Bycatch Globally:

Hundreds of thousands of marine mammals die from accidental fisheries capture every year, making [bycatch](#) the leading threat to these animals worldwide. We address global marine mammal bycatch at multiple levels through our [policy work](#), our [grants program](#), and our contributions to the protection of [particularly threatened marine mammals](#) such as [North Atlantic right whales](#), [vaquitas](#), and [river dolphins](#). In 2017, we contributed to NOAA's efforts to implement the Marine Mammal Protection Act Import Provisions, which can level the playing field for U.S. fishermen. We also participated in all seven [Take Reduction Teams](#) (TRTs) established by NOAA Fisheries, engaged with stakeholders addressing bycatch of large whales in the California Dungeness crab fishery, catalyzed the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission's first steps in reducing marine mammal bycatch, and organized multiple [workshops](#) on bycatch reduction through [creative approaches](#).

Marine Mammal Research and Collaboration:

Our [Grants and Research program](#), though small, fills an important niche in marine mammal research. We fund novel, low-cost, small-scale projects designed to achieve a large impact. In FY17 we were able to fund [ten projects](#) directed at populations of marine mammals at extreme risk, including the endangered Antillean manatee, Taiwanese humpback dolphin, and [North Atlantic right whale](#). We also provided funding to allow early career researchers and key scientists from the U.S. as well as developing countries to participate in critical meetings or workshops focused on science-based management and policy. It is our hope that these contributions will help reverse or slow declines toward the extinction of marine mammals globally.

Vaquita Conservation:

The Commission continued to play a key role in the international mission to conserve the [vaquita](#), a small porpoise in the northern Gulf of California, Mexico. The vaquita is the world's most endangered marine mammal as entanglement in gillnets is rapidly driving the species toward extinction. In 2017, following the recommendations of the International Recovery Team for the Vaquita (CIRVA), the initial two-year ban on the use of gillnets in the vaquita range was made permanent, but, unfortunately, the

population continues to decline. CIRVA concluded that to prevent their extinction an attempt should be made to capture vaquitas and bring them into human care for protection from gillnets. In response, the Commission joined international partners in development of the Vaquita Conservation Protection and Recovery Program ([VaquitaCPR](#)), which conducted field work in October 2017. Unfortunately, this attempt at capture did not prove to be a viable conservation option to protect vaquitas from the immediate scourge of illegal totoaba fishing. The foremost priority is strengthened enforcement and elimination of gillnets in the range of the vaquita. In this light, the Commission also continued its long-term investment in the development of alternative artisanal fishing gear that does not entangle vaquitas, sponsored a study of markets for legally caught and vaquita-safe seafood from the region, and continued to support acoustic monitoring of the vaquita population to determine the efficacy of conservation actions.

Community & Stakeholder Engagement:

The Commission seeks to include a diverse set of partners in decisions impacting marine mammals and the communities that rely on them. Our [Annual Meeting](#) in Falmouth, Massachusetts provided a forum for fishermen, scientists, and policy-makers to meet during a year when North Atlantic right whale entanglements and rebounding gray seal populations have emerged as serious concerns. In Alaska, we initiated a project funded by the North Pacific Research Board that aims to identify the essential components and key impediments to the effective co-management of culturally important marine mammals – a critical step in aligning the goals of Alaska Native Organizations and federal and state agencies. In 2017, we also participated on an expert panel led by the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management to develop best practices to guide the construction and operations of [offshore infrastructure for renewable energy](#) in the interest of ensuring that sustainable economic development for states on the Eastern seaboard does not result in unintended consequences for marine mammals. We are proud to be part of these efforts to bring different viewpoints to the table to solve complicated and pressing issues.

