

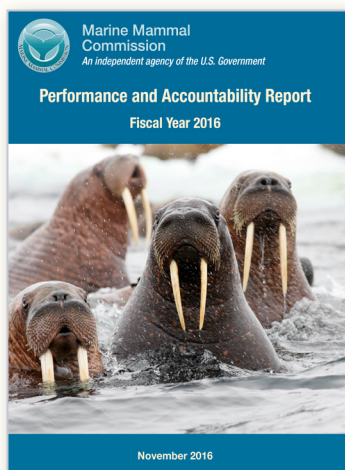
# 2016 Annual Report



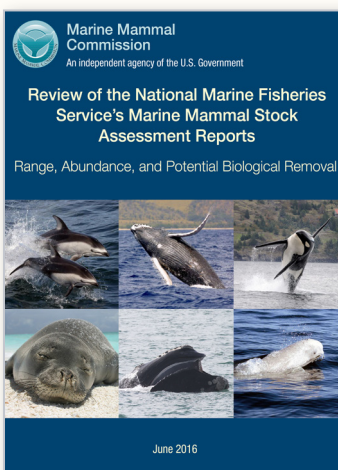
## About Us

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 wholeness of the world's oceans and some rivers and lakes. As an independent agency of the U.S. government with oversight authority, we facilitate cooperation among a wide range of players involved in marine mammal science and conservation. 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 habitat. We seek to develop and promote practical, cost-effective solutions to problems. In 2016 we ranked number one among all U.S. government agencies surveyed for overall employee engagement and satisfaction, and this reflects a dedicated, motivated group of individuals who are passionate about their work. To learn more about us, please visit [our website](#).

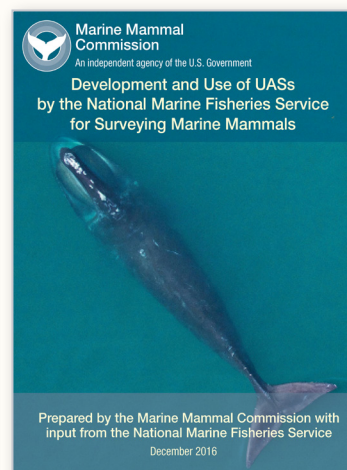
## Reports Published in 2016



Performance and Accountability Report for fiscal year 2016: an overview of the Agency's budget and accomplishments



Review of NOAA Fisheries' marine mammal stock assessment reports: range, abundance and potential biological removal



Development and use of drones by NOAA Fisheries for surveying marine mammals

## Highlights From 2016

**Reducing Bycatch in Foreign Fisheries:** Fisheries accidentally kill hundreds of thousands of marine mammals each year globally. We address global [marine mammal bycatch](#) at multiple levels through our [international policy work](#), our [grants program](#), and our work on [threatened marine mammals](#), such as vaquitas, monk seals, humpback dolphins, and river dolphins. In 2016 we spearheaded a bycatch reduction initiative, which included several federal and private partners, announced by the United States at the [2016 Our Ocean Conference](#), leveraging \$1.7 million to monitor and prevent bycatch in global fisheries. Also in 2016 we joined forces with the World Wildlife Fund to host a [Congressional briefing](#) on marine mammal bycatch to engage Congress on this subject and discuss possible ways to promote fishing practices that are marine mammal-safe.

**Reducing Bycatch in Domestic Fisheries:** We participate in all seven [Take Reduction Teams \(TRTs\)](#) established by NOAA Fisheries to reduce marine mammal bycatch in U.S. waters. These teams work closely with the fishing industry, fishermen, and other key stakeholders to identify promising technological options and fishing methods to reduce marine mammal bycatch without compromising the sustainability and long-term profitability of fisheries. Through measures encouraged by the Commission and recommended by TRTs, porpoise bycatch rates in gillnet fisheries off northeastern and mid-Atlantic states decreased in 2016 to levels approaching the “zero mortality rate goal” established by the MMPA.

**Marine Mammal Research:** Our [Grants and Research program](#), though small, fills an important and unique niche in marine mammal research, funding novel, low-cost, small-scale projects to achieve a large impact. Of the 87 high-quality proposals received in FY16, we were able to fund five projects directed at reducing marine mammal bycatch in small-scale local fisheries, increasing scientific understanding of how sea-ice changes will impact

ice-dependent marine mammals in the Arctic, and adding to conservation and recovery efforts for endangered Cook Inlet beluga whales. In response to the high demand for critically needed marine mammal research and reduced federal funding, we have reached out to private donors and foundations to form public-private partnerships to help fund a higher proportion of the highly-rated research proposals we receive.

**Vaquita Conservation:** [The vaquita](#), Mexico’s endemic porpoise, is the most endangered marine mammal species in the world—on the path to extinction unless deaths in illegal gillnets can be stopped. We have been among the steadfast leaders in the fight to save the vaquita. In response to recommendations of the vaquita international recovery team (supported by the Commission), Mexico instituted a 2-year gillnet ban, increased enforcement against illegal fishing and international trade, and began a program to remove illegal and derelict nets from vaquita habitat. We continued our long-term support for acoustic monitoring, the development and testing of alternative fishing gear, and market analyses for vaquita-safe seafood products.

**2016 Alaska Listening Sessions:** Protecting the livelihoods of Alaska Natives who harvest marine mammals for subsistence and cultural purposes is one of our core mandates. In February 2016 we held [listening sessions in Alaska](#) to gain a better understanding of how environmental changes are impacting Alaska Native communities and the marine mammals they depend on. Based on that input we developed a communications plan to enhance our work with communities and regional and federal partners in Alaska. We also engaged in several issues of importance to Alaska Natives, such as [polar bear](#) subsistence hunt management, the effectiveness of [co-management](#), [marine mammal health](#) in a [changing environment](#), the impacts of expanded shipping in the Arctic, and representing the interests of Alaska Natives at the International Whaling Commission.

