



2019 ANNUAL REPORT

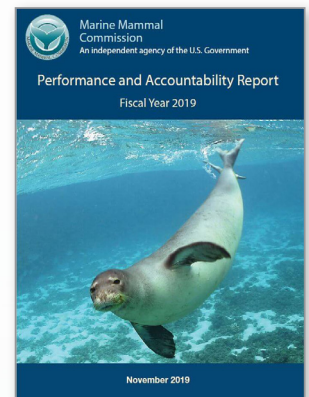
About Us

The Marine Mammal Commission is a federal agency charged under the [Marine Mammal Protection Act \(MMPA\)](#) to provide comprehensive oversight of government science, policy, and management actions affecting marine mammals and their ecosystems. Marine mammals are essential to the health and productivity of the world's oceans and some freshwater habitats.

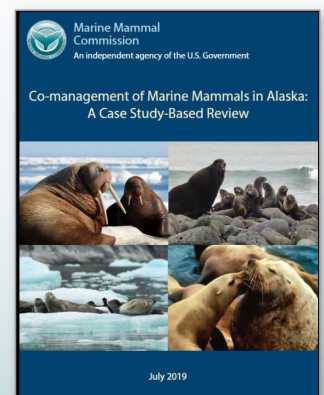
Legal and Policy Oversight: As an independent U.S. government agency with oversight responsibilities, we provide timely, science-based reviews of proposed actions by federal agencies and other entities and recommend measures to minimize human impacts on marine mammals and their habitats. We seek to promote and develop practical, cost-effective means for advancing science-based conservation and resolving management issues pertinent to marine mammals. In 2019, the Commission submitted [over one hundred letters](#) to other federal agencies and action proponents, providing specific comments and recommendations promoting adherence to the MMPA and [other applicable laws](#).

Community & Stakeholder Engagement: We encourage and facilitate cooperation and communication among marine mammal scientists, conservation advocates, and ocean resource users. Our [2019 Annual Meeting in Kona, Hawaii](#) enabled federal and state agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), Congressional staff, members of academia, industry, Native Hawaiians, and the public to engage in discussions about marine mammal issues important to Hawaii and the wider Pacific region. Our report, "[Co-management of Marine Mammals in Alaska: A Case Study-Based Review](#)," presented findings and recommendations intended to serve as a toolbox for partners working to improve the effectiveness of co-management relationships in Alaska under the MMPA. Throughout 2019, we provided briefings for Congressional offices, federal agencies, and NGOs to discuss complex marine mammal conservation challenges, including issues affecting [Southern Resident killer whales](#), [North Atlantic right whales](#), and Alaskan and Hawaiian marine mammals, as well as [health and stranding response](#).

Reports



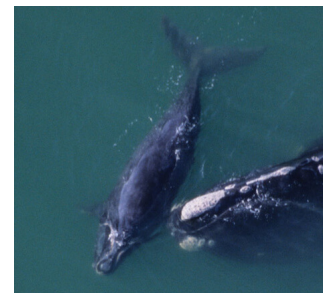
Review our FY2019 [Performance and Accountability Report](#) for an overview of our accomplishments.



Read our report, "[Co-management of Marine Mammals in Alaska: A Case Study-Based Review](#)."

HIGHLIGHTS FROM 2019

Reducing Marine Mammal Bycatch Globally: [Bycatch](#) in fisheries is recognized as the leading source of marine mammal deaths worldwide, with hundreds of thousands killed each year. We address global marine mammal bycatch at multiple levels through our [policy work](#), [grants program](#), and participation in efforts to protect marine mammals such as [North Atlantic right whales](#), [vaquitas](#), and [false killer whales](#). In 2019, we worked with stakeholders addressing entanglement of endangered North Atlantic right and humpback whales in lobster and crab pot fisheries, participated on [Take Reduction Teams \(TRTs\)](#), and helped organize a workshop focused on the economic impacts of bycatch. We also were part of a [working group](#) tasked with developing tools for estimating marine mammal bycatch in foreign fisheries to assess compliance with comparability requirements for imports of seafood products under the MMPA.



Learn more about our work on [North Atlantic right whales](#).



Learn more about our [2019 Grant Awards](#).

Supporting Marine Mammal Research and Collaboration: Our small [Grants and Research Program](#) targets a unique niche in promoting marine mammal research. We generally fund novel, low-cost, small-scale projects designed to leverage available funding and catalyze further work. In 2019, we funded [projects directed at understanding and minimizing impacts of a changing ocean on marine mammals of importance to Alaska Natives](#). Our funding of research and outreach projects in Alaska will help integrate indigenous knowledge and perspectives into decision-making that affects marine mammals of importance to Alaska Natives. We also supported the participation of an expert in cetacean bycatch in an International Whaling Commission (IWC) workshop focused on reducing bycatch in the Indian Ocean and supported capacity building by funding travel for international students to present their research findings at the 2nd World Marine Mammal Conference in Barcelona, Spain.

International Conservation: The Commission supports and participates in many international marine mammal conservation efforts to further the goals of the MMPA. Commissioner Gulland co-led a workshop in Barcelona to develop a global network of marine mammal stranding responders, Commissioner Tillman continued his engagement with IWC aboriginal subsistence whaling issues, and Commissioner Boness continued serving on the U.S. Delegation to the U.S.-Russia Bilateral Polar Bear Agreement. The Commission continues to play a key role in international efforts to conserve the nearly extinct [vaquita](#) and to address threats to Asian freshwater cetaceans. We also facilitated the formation of the [Rare Pinniped Conservation Network](#) and provided leadership and organizational support for its inaugural meeting at the World Marine Mammal Conference. The network aims to foster organization and sustained collaboration among individuals working to conserve rare pinniped populations globally.



Learn more about our work on [vaquitas](#).

Emphasizing Science-Based Decision Making: The Commission promotes the use of sound science in making decisions implementing the MMPA and related statutes. To track marine mammal research and help ensure that decision-making is based on the best available science, the Commission conducts a [Survey of Federally Funded Marine Mammal Research](#). The Survey collects information from all federal agencies about support for marine mammal research, including type, species, location, and cost. In 2019 the Commission undertook a redesign of the survey that will improve the accuracy of information collected, reduce the burden on respondents, and increase the utility of the data. In 2019, we also promoted studies of the potential effects of oil and gas activities on marine mammals and facilitated efforts to address information needs related to [energy development](#). The Commission helped organize a workshop to review impacts of a growing sea otter population in Southeast Alaska on ecosystem health, fisheries, and tourism and to identify possible management actions.