



2020 ANNUAL REPORT

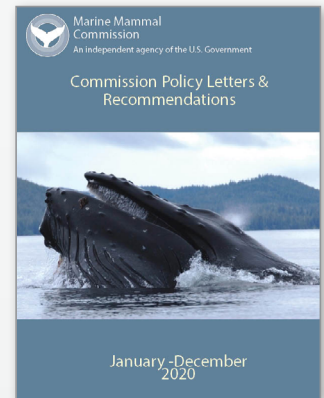
About Us

The Marine Mammal Commission is an independent federal agency charged under the [Marine Mammal Protection Act \(MMPA\)](#) with providing comprehensive oversight of federal government science, policy, and management actions affecting marine mammals and their ecosystems. Marine mammals are integral to the well-being of the world's oceans and some freshwater habitats.

Legal and Policy Oversight: The Commission reviews proposed actions by federal and state agencies and other entities to promote adherence to the MMPA's mandates. We recommend measures that minimize human impacts on marine mammals and their habitats, and seek practical, cost-effective means to advance science-based conservation and resolve management issues related to marine mammals. In 2020, the Commission wrote [over one hundred letters](#) to federal agencies and action proponents, providing feedback and recommendations on proposed policies and actions under the MMPA and [related laws](#). The Commission also continued its participation as a party to a formal rulemaking to consider waiving the MMPA's taking moratorium to allow subsistence hunting of North Pacific gray whales.

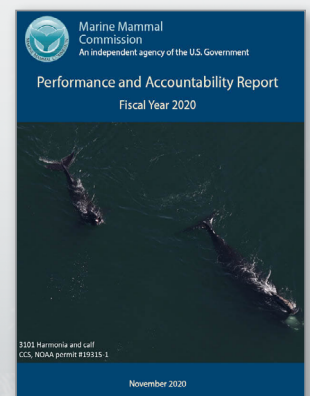
Community & Stakeholder Engagement: We facilitate cooperation and communication among marine mammal scientists, conservation advocates, and ocean resource users. Our annual meeting is one means by which we do this. However, our planned [2020 Annual Meeting](#) in New Orleans, which would have focused on Gulf of Mexico issues, was postponed due to COVID-19. As an alternative, remote discussions with Gulf of Mexico stakeholders continued and relationships were strengthened throughout 2020, with a goal of holding Gulf-focused "virtual" workshops in early 2021. Throughout 2020, we consulted with and provided briefings for Congressional offices, federal agencies, and NGOs to encourage partnerships and explore solutions to complex marine mammal conservation challenges, including those involving [Gulf of Mexico Bryde's whales](#), North Atlantic right whales, and marine mammal [health and stranding response](#).

Letters



Read our [science and policy recommendations](#) in this year's 109 oversight letters.

Performance and Accountability Report



Review our FY2020 [Performance and Accountability Report](#) for an overview of our accomplishments.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM 2020

Reducing Marine Mammal Bycatch Globally: We address global marine mammal bycatch at multiple levels through our [policy work](#), [grants program](#), and participation in efforts to protect vulnerable marine mammal species. In 2020, we continued our work to address the bycatch of [false killer whales](#) in the Hawaiian long line fishery and entanglement of endangered [North Atlantic right whales](#) in gear from lobster and crab pot fisheries and humpback and blue whales in west coast crab pot gear. We collaborated with [Take Reduction Teams](#), advised a stakeholder group addressing large-whale entanglement in California, and assisted in identifying related federal budget priorities. We also participated in a [working group](#) to develop tools for assessing marine mammal abundance, bycatch rates, and impacts on marine mammals in foreign fisheries, key factors in assessing compliance of countries that import seafood products into the United States with MMPA comparability standards.



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



Learn more about our [2020 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 2020, we [funded 11 projects](#) that further the conservation and management goals of the MMPA and assist the Commission in fulfilling its duties under the Act. Funded projects targeted the conservation of endangered and threatened large whales, Hawaiian monk seals, and manatees, and understanding recovering seal populations in conflict with human activities in the northeastern United States. In 2020, we also played a key role in ongoing discussions among federal and state agencies and Alaska Natives on how to continue essential long-term monitoring of Arctic marine mammal species and ecosystems in the face of shifting agency funding priorities and shifting environmental conditions.

International Conservation: The Commission supports and participates in many [international marine mammal conservation](#) efforts to further the goals of the MMPA. Commissioner Gulland led the development of a global network of marine mammal stranding responders, Commissioner Tillman continued his longstanding engagement on 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 maintained its decades-long investment in efforts to conserve Mexico's nearly extinct [vaquita](#) and ongoing support to reduce mortality of Mekong River Irrawaddy dolphins in Cambodia. We provided leadership and organizational support for the work of the [Rare Pinniped Conservation Network](#) and supported workshops to develop a research plan for the remaining small dugong sub-population in Japan and to address small cetacean bycatch in Korean fishing nets.



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

Emphasizing Science-Based Decision Making: The Commission promotes the use of best-available science in decision-making under the MMPA and related statutes. To track funding of marine mammal research by U.S. federal agencies, the Commission conducts an annual Survey of Federally Funded Marine Mammal Research. The Commission collected data from federal agencies with its newly re-designed survey tool, [published a summary of 2019 survey results](#), and developed additional tools to visualize and analyze the data. Also in 2020, after a comprehensive review of marine mammal distribution and movements in the Arctic, the Commission provided [comments and recommendations](#) on prospective routing measures for shipping in Arctic waters to the U.S. Coast Guard as part of its Alaskan Arctic Coast Port Access Route Study. The Commission also provided [comments and recommendations to the National Marine Fisheries Service](#) on proposed guidelines for nonlethally deterring marine mammals from harming property, damaging fishing gear and catch, and endangering personal safety.



MARINE MAMMAL COMMISSION
AN INDEPENDENT AGENCY OF THE U.S. GOVERNMENT

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