



2021 ANNUAL REPORT

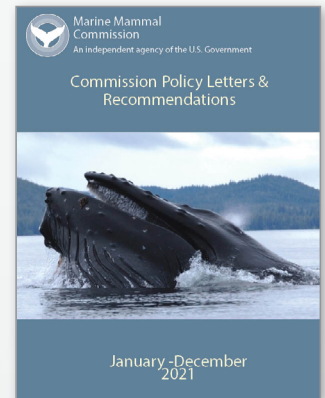
About Us

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 actions proposed by federal and state agencies and other stakeholders to further the MMPA's policies. We recommend measures to minimize adverse impacts on marine mammals and their habitats and promote science-based, practical, cost-effective, solutions to conservation and management issues related to marine mammals. In 2021, the Commission sent [over sixty letters](#) commenting on and providing recommendations concerning proposed policies and actions under the MMPA and [related laws](#). The Commission also continued to participate as a party to the formal rulemaking that would waive the MMPA's taking moratorium to allow the Makah Tribe to hunt North Pacific gray whales.

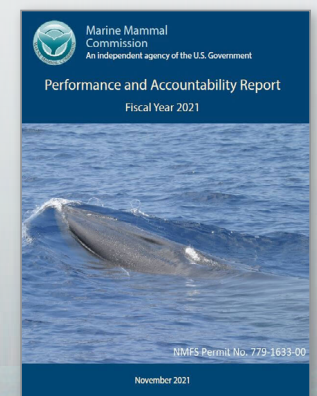
Community & Stakeholder Engagement: The Commission facilitates cooperation and communication among government agencies, marine mammal scientists, conservation advocates, and ocean resource users through meetings, webinars, briefings and other outreach. In early 2021, the Commission held two Gulf of Mexico-focused virtual meetings, a workshop on [Mississippi dolphin conservation](#) and a webinar on the [effects of exposure to low-salinity waters on bottlenose dolphins](#). Throughout 2021, 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 [Rice's whales](#), North Atlantic right whales, [Florida manatees](#), and the preparation of marine mammal stock assessments. The Commission also provided advice to the Marine Mammal Health and Stranding Response Program. The Commission advanced Administration priorities and Executive Orders by developing or updating policies on [tribal consultation](#), equity, and [COVID-19 workplace safety](#).

Letters



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

Performance and Accountability Report



Review our FY2021 [Performance and Accountability Report](#) for an overview of our accomplishments.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM 2021

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 2021, we continued to focus on preventing the extinction of [North Atlantic right whales](#), mitigating entanglement risks to humpback and blue whales, and reducing bycatch of [false killer whales](#) in the Hawaii longline fishery. We collaborated with the Atlantic Large Whale and False Killer Whale [Take Reduction Teams](#) in developing and recommending bycatch mitigation measures, advised stakeholders addressing large-whale entanglement in California, and provided input on 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 with MMPA comparability standards by countries that import seafood products into the United States.



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



Learn more about our [2021 Grant Awards](#).

Supporting Marine Mammal Research and Collaboration: The Commission's [small grants and research program](#) funds novel, low-cost, small-scale projects designed to leverage available funding and catalyze future work. In 2021, we [funded eight projects, all with outreach components](#) that further the conservation and management goals of the MMPA. These projects target conservation needs of endangered and threatened large whales in U.S. waters, and threatened Guadalupe fur seals. The Commission also partnered with the Office of Naval Research to support an internship program to increase diversity and inclusion in the field of marine mammal science. In 2021, we also engaged with federal and state agencies and Alaska Natives with regard to Arctic research and policy setting, focusing on ways to improve partnerships with Alaska Natives and long-term monitoring of [Arctic marine mammal species and ecosystems](#).

International Conservation: The Commission supports and participates in many international efforts that further the goals of the MMPA. Commissioner Gulland continued to lead the [global network of marine mammal stranding responders](#), Commissioner Tillman continued his longstanding engagement on aboriginal subsistence whaling issues, and the Executive Director continued serving on the Arctic Council Circumpolar Biodiversity Monitoring Network, contributing to the [State of Arctic Marine Biodiversity 5-year assessment of marine mammals](#). The Commission joined in continued U.S. and international efforts to persuade Mexico to enforce gillnet bans in the northern Gulf of California to avoid extinction of the critically endangered [vaquita](#). We provided ongoing support to reduce mortality of Mekong River Irrawaddy dolphins in Cambodia and leadership for the [Rare Pinniped Conservation Network](#).



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

Emphasizing Science-Based Decision Making: The Commission promotes the use of the best-available science in decision-making as mandated by the MMPA and related statutes. We track and report on relevant research funding by federal agencies through our [annual Survey of Federally Funded Marine Mammal Research](#). Following its 2020 [analysis of potential Arctic shipping routes](#), the Commission participated in meetings of the Alaska Eskimo Whaling Commission and other Alaska Native Organizations to refine its understanding of how to manage Arctic vessel traffic and its impacts on marine mammals and their availability to Alaska Native communities. The Commission also continued to participate on the Working Group for Marine Mammal Unusual Mortality Events, focusing on the California gray whale and Florida manatee unusual mortality events. The Commission commented on the approaches used to [model sound propagation from pile driving used to construct wind energy turbines](#), estimate associated marine mammal takes resulting from construction activities, and [monitor and mitigate the impacts of offshore energy development on marine mammals](#).



MARINE MAMMAL COMMISSION
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