



MARINE MAMMAL COMMISSION

Fiscal Year (FY) 2023

CONGRESSIONAL JUSTIFICATION

MARINE MAMMAL COMMISSION

March 28, 2022

Budget Request Summary

The Marine Mammal Commission (Commission) is an independent federal agency established by the Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972 (MMPA) to further the conservation of marine mammals and their environment. The Commission’s work is directed at restoring and maintaining global marine mammal populations as significant functioning elements of healthy marine ecosystems for future generations, with human activities managed to minimize impacts on those populations and systems. The Commission provides independent, science-based oversight of domestic and international policies and actions, thereby promoting effective implementation of the MMPA and its goals of protecting and conserving marine mammals and their habitat. For additional background about the MMPA and the Commission, please refer to the “About the Commission and the MMPA” section on page 11. We also provide examples of actions the Commission has taken and will continue to take to address the President’s priorities (please refer to the “Supporting Administration Priorities” section on page 10).

In FY 2023, **the Commission requests \$4.5 million** to continue to meet its statutory responsibilities under the MMPA and to further mission critical objectives and support priority projects. This request is a \$300,000 (7.1 percent) increase over the Commission’s FY 2022 enacted appropriation level. The majority (85 percent) of the Commission’s FY 2023 budget request would be used to maintain its office and the staff necessary to carry out the Commission’s responsibilities. The remaining amount (15 percent) would be used to support the Commission’s marine mammal research grant program and essential Commission representation at meetings and other events.

FY 2023 Budget Overview

Summary (\$ thousands)

	FY 2021	FY 2022	FY 2023
President’s Budget	2,449	4,200	4,500
Appropriations	3,769	4,200	

Budget by Category (\$ thousands)

Identification code 95-2200-0-1-302	FY 2021	FY 2022	FY 2023 estimated	Change from FY22
Program and Financing (\$ thousands)				
Budget Authority	3,769	4,200	4,500	300
Total Budgetary Resources	3,769	4,200	4,500	300
Spending (\$ thousands)				
Personnel	2,385	2,489	2,750	261
Research, Contracts, and Special Projects	996	1,158	1,161	3
Rent, Communications, and Utilities	309	320	325	5
Other (supplies, equipment, travel)	79	233	264	31

Priority Topics

Priority topics to be addressed in carrying out the five strategic goals of the Commission's FY 2022-2026 Strategic Plan are established annually under the leadership of the three Commissioners in consultation with the Committee of Scientific Advisors. Specifically, in FY 2023 the Commission will use the requested funds to focus on the following:

- Climate Change: Engaging management agencies to take action on research needs and funding priorities identified in the Commission's assessment of climate change impacts on marine mammals, especially those occurring as a consequence of direct human interactions and those linked to unusual mortality events.
- Offshore Wind Energy: Identifying research, monitoring, and mitigation priorities and assessing impacts of proposed and ongoing wind energy projects to minimize adverse effects on North Atlantic right whales and other marine mammals.
- Fisheries Interactions: Analyzing and recommending management actions and policies designed to reduce fisheries interactions with marine mammals, particularly bycatch and entanglements in gear, both domestically and internationally.
- Vessel Speed Management: Integrating local actions and policies to develop national-level recommendations on speed zone, routing measures, and other approaches to reduce vessel strikes of large whales and other marine mammals.
- Arctic Marine Mammals and Ecosystems: Promoting partnerships in the Arctic to identify and address needed research and monitoring and to further the conservation of marine mammals and their Arctic ecosystems during times of accelerating climate-related ecosystem changes and increased human activity, which will also help secure the availability of marine mammals for Alaska Native subsistence and cultural purposes.
- Stock Assessment and Health Monitoring: Supporting the development and utilization of robust stock assessment methods and their implementation to ensure that marine mammal health and stranding programs help build our understanding of the impacts of infectious diseases, harmful algal blooms, and indirect consequences of climate change on marine mammal populations.

Strategic Plan

The Commission continues to strive for increased effectiveness and efficiency in meeting its responsibilities under the MMPA. Personnel and financial resources are dedicated to the highest priority work as mandated by Congress and as identified through agency strategic planning. The Commission has recently revised and published its [FY 2022-2026 Strategic Plan](#) under the leadership of its three Commissioners and with significant contributions by the staff and its Committee of Scientific Advisors.

The Commission's five strategic goals for FY 2022-2026 are:

- (1) **Provide Policy and Legal Oversight**: Our goal is to ensure the faithful implementation of the Marine Mammal Protection Act's mandates by providing oversight of actions and policies.
- (2) **Improve Marine Mammal Population Assessment and Health Surveillance**: Our goal is to improve the availability and quality of data, scientific assessments, and information necessary for marine mammal conservation and management programs, especially in the face of climate change.

- (3) **Assess and Address Anthropogenic Threats Facing Marine Mammals:** Our goal is to assess and address the impacts of human activities on marine mammals and their ecosystems and to determine ways to eliminate or reduce those impacts.
- (4) **Improve Marine Mammal and Ecosystem Research:** Our goal is to support research on priority topics in marine mammal and ecosystem science, assess proposed studies directed at understanding and reducing impacts on marine mammals and their ecosystems, and track and encourage multi-agency research and management to avoid unwarranted duplication of effort.
- (5) **Engage with Marine Mammal Protection Act Stakeholders:** Our goal is to engage with Congress, federal and state agencies, scientists, Alaska Native communities, tribal governments, non-governmental and international organizations, industry, and the public and serve as an independent, science-based resource for identifying, understanding, and assisting others to address the Commission's Priority Topics.

These strategic goals guide the Commission's work, which includes overseeing federal agency activities, facilitating interagency and public-private collaboration, funding research, and identifying and developing priority topics for discussion at the Commission's annual meetings, Capitol Hill briefings, and other Commission events.

As reflected in the priority topics for FY2023 above, the FY 2022-2026 Strategic Plan identifies the following priority marine mammal conservation topics as the focus for the coming years: impacts of fisheries, climate change, anthropogenic sound, Alaska Native subsistence, habitat degradation and marine debris, disease and contaminants, vessel strikes and disturbance, and conflicts between human activities and recovering marine mammal populations.

Recent Accomplishments

In FY 2022 the Commission's appropriation was \$4.2 million. We increase our reach by leveraging resources and expertise from other federal and state agencies, academia, industry, non-governmental organizations and other partners. Examples of recent accomplishments include:

- *Marine Mammal Unusual Mortality Events (UMEs):* The Commission continued to serve with other federal partners on the Working Group for Marine Mammal Unusual Mortality Events, and supports an informational website for responders to unusual mortality events, the Global Stranding Network website (www.globalstrandingnetwork.com). Investigations of six UMEs declared in recent years, including the North Atlantic right whale and gray whale UMEs, remain open. Commission scientists continued to lead components of the gray whale UME investigation in FY 2022. Beginning in December 2020, dead manatees were observed along Florida's central and south Atlantic coast in much higher numbers than normal. This prompted the declaration of a new UME for Florida manatees in spring 2021. More than 1,000 dead manatees have been documented to date since December 2020. The Commission has provided information on this situation to other agencies and Congressional offices and continues to monitor it closely.
- *Restoring the Gulf of Mexico:* The Commission has engaged with several other agencies to further restoration efforts directed at marine mammal populations impacted by the Deepwater Horizon oil spill. Following two workshops and webinars organized by the Commission in 2021, the Commission provided input to the Deepwater Horizon Trustees

on region-wide marine mammal restoration projects and on large-scale habitat restoration projects for coastal waters of Louisiana that could significantly impact bottlenose dolphins. The Commission also continued to work with the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) to develop marine mammal-specific restoration projects for Gulf of Mexico coastal and offshore waters, including the Compilation of Environmental, Threats and Animal Data for Cetacean Population Health Analyses project. The Commission served as a technical advisor for a project to evaluate trophic relationships and critical habitat features for the critically endangered Rice's whale (formerly classified as a stock of Bryde's whale) that occurs off the coast of western Florida. It also served on the steering committee for a series of workshops to engage stakeholders in developing a recovery plan for this species.

- *Supporting Conservation of Critically Endangered Small Cetaceans:* The Commission staff, Commissioners, and Committee members continued longstanding collaborations with international scientific and conservation teams and initiatives. These efforts included involvement with the Government of Mexico and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) vaquita science team, the international team working to address threats to Mekong River Irrawaddy dolphins in Cambodia, and the Arabian Sea Whale Network. The Commission, in cooperation with the International Whaling Commission (IWC), the International Union for Conservation of Nature's Cetacean Specialist Group, and other international and national bodies, is striving to build awareness of and design responses to these issues and to supply technical assistance. In 2021, the Commission funded a grant request to assess the conservation status of two species of small cetaceans in a biodiversity hotspot off India.
- *Protecting the North Atlantic Right Whale:* The Commission remains committed to conserving this critically endangered species which faces continued risk from entanglement in lobster/crab fishing gear and vessel strikes. The ongoing North Atlantic Right Whale UME remains active with 34 confirmed human-caused deaths since 2017, and an additional 16 seriously injured animals that are likely to die from those injuries. Recent science indicates that the actual number of right whales dying from these causes could be three times greater than the number of confirmed cases. The 2021 calving season ended with 17 births, giving hope for improved calving rates in the future, yet the most recent population estimate is between 325 and 350 individuals. The Commission continued to participate on the Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Team, provide recommendations on take reduction regulations, support a transition to "ropeless" fishing gear that is less likely to entangle whales, and provide advice to Congress on needed measures and funding priorities. We also provided recommendations and maintained dialogues with relevant agencies on the issue of reducing vessel speeds and risk of vessel strikes.
- *Marine Mammals in the Arctic and Alaska Natives:* 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 understanding of how best to manage Arctic vessel traffic and avoid adverse impacts on marine mammals and their availability to Alaska Native communities. Through its membership in the Interagency Arctic Research Policy Committee (IARPC), the Commission supported the development of systematic monitoring to document the effects of environmental change on Arctic marine mammals and ecosystems and participated in development and implementation of the 2022-2026 IARPC 5-year plan for Arctic research. With the cessation of a 40-year aerial survey program that monitored the distribution, movements, and behavior of bowhead and other

whales in the Beaufort and Chukchi Seas, the Commission has continued to work with the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM), NMFS, the U.S. Coast Guard (USCG), and Alaska Native hunters to identify critical information needed for monitoring marine mammal abundance and movements systematically to support Alaska Native communities and document the impacts of climate change on the animals and their prey.

- *Survey of Federal Research Efforts and Expenditures:* The Survey of Federally Funded Marine Mammal Research (the Survey) is an online survey and data repository managed by the Commission that collects and collates information on federal funding of marine mammal research by agency, species, objective, and location. The Survey aids the Commission in fulfilling its duties under the MMPA by helping identify gaps in research effort or funding, illuminating areas of strength in federal research investment, and informing recommendations on needed agency actions and budget priorities. In 2021, the Commission completed the third year of data collection with this platform and released the results of the FY 2021 survey, which will be available on our website¹ soon.
- *Impacts of Climate Change on Marine Mammals:* In FY 2022, the Commission led a peer-reviewed scientific assessment of current knowledge about the impacts of climate change on marine mammals in U. S. waters and in areas around North America and the Pacific Islands, including species and stocks shared with Canada and Mexico. In addition, the Commission's FY 2022 grant program was explicitly designed to support projects addressing or assessing impacts of climate change on marine mammals and the funded projects will be ongoing in FY 2023.

Project Highlights for FY 2023

In FY 2023, the Commission will continue to meet its duties under the MMPA by, among other things, initiating, continuing, or completing a number of projects to address priority topics under the Commission's strategic goals. Highlighted below are a few examples of activities planned for FY 2023 and projects that are either underway or that the Commission plans to initiate under each strategic goal.

Strategic Goal 1: Our goal is to ensure the faithful implementation of the Marine Mammal Protection Act's mandates by providing oversight of actions and policies.

- The Commission will work proactively with regulatory agencies to address emerging or ongoing marine mammal conservation issues under the MMPA. Other federal agencies with which the Commission engages most frequently include the NMFS, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), BOEM, Department of State, and Navy, as well as state agencies (e.g., departments of Fish and Game and Environmental Conservation) and affected Native American Tribes and Organizations.
- The Commission will work with agencies to ensure faithful and effective implementation of the MMPA by fostering a science-based regulatory process that adheres to Congressional directives and considers relevant stakeholder views. For example, the Commission reviews and comments on proposed MMPA incidental take authorizations and National

¹ <https://www.mmc.gov/grants-and-research-survey/survey-of-federally-funded-research/>

Environmental Policy Act documents to assess potential impacts of human activities on marine mammals and to promote the implementation of mitigation measures that minimize those impacts.

- The Commission will work with other federal agencies to identify and support critical research to inform decision-making concerning marine mammal programs, including those designed to reduce threats from fisheries, offshore energy development, and other coastal and offshore activities. For example, the Commission is actively engaged in reviewing the growing number of offshore exploration and construction plans for wind energy development and recommending actions to minimize adverse impacts on marine mammals.

Strategic Goal 2: Our goal is to improve the availability and quality of data, scientific assessments, and information necessary for marine mammal conservation and management programs, especially in the face of climate change.

- In FY 2023, the Commission will participate in reviewing and evaluating assessments of the health and status of marine mammal stocks as required under section 117 of the MMPA. This includes reviewing annual draft stock assessment reports, participating in meetings of regional Scientific Review Groups and Take Reduction Teams, and making recommendations to improve the information used to meet section 117 requirements.
- Building on the Commission’s assessment of impacts of climate change on marine mammals, the Commission will formulate recommendations for additional research and conservation measures and engage in consultations with other agencies to strengthen assessment methods. The Commission recently summarized what is known about climate change impacts on marine mammals and intends to identify related research needs and funding priorities in a format suitable for policy-makers, managers, and non-governmental organizations.
- The Commission has engaged at many levels to further activities aimed at restoring Gulf of Mexico marine mammal populations impacted by the Deepwater Horizon oil spill. In addition to reviewing and commenting on marine mammal restoration plans, the Commission will assess impacts of proposed large-scale restoration or development projects that incidentally have the potential during implementation to harm marine mammals, including Rice’s whales; bay, sound, and estuary stocks of common bottlenose dolphins; and manatees. The Commission also advises a multiagency-funded project designed to improve assessments of coastal and offshore marine mammals in the Gulf of Mexico through the deployment of passive acoustic monitoring devices throughout the entire Gulf, including in Mexican waters.
- The Commission will co-lead the development of Health MAP, which is designed to maximize the availability and use of marine mammal health information. The platform will give the public, scientists, and resource managers the ability to evaluate and communicate potential public and animal health risks arising in our changing ocean environment and to set priorities for management and conservation efforts.

Strategic Goal 3: Our goal is to assess and address the impacts of human activities on marine mammals and their ecosystems and to determine ways to eliminate or reduce those impacts.

- The Commission will build upon its assessment of climate change-related impacts (above) and work closely with management agencies to implement measures to understand and mitigate impacts of climate change on marine mammals, especially those impacts occurring as a consequence of direct human interactions.
- The Commission will continue to work closely with federal and state agencies, fishing communities, scientists, and conservationists to identify and implement measures designed to ensure that serious injuries and deaths of marine mammals incidental to commercial fishing activities are reduced to and remain at biologically sustainable levels as mandated by the MMPA. Further, the Commission will work to understand the importance of prey populations to marine mammals, and the impact that fishing has on those resources. The Commission participates on the seven active Take Reduction Teams administered by NMFS, provides analyses and recommendations concerning federal agency actions and policies potentially affecting fisheries interactions with marine mammals, and sponsors research and workshops designed to find innovative solutions for reducing the entanglement and hooking of marine mammals in commercial fishing gear.
- The Commission supports the Administration's efforts to develop offshore wind and other sources of renewable energy. Nevertheless, as with any emerging industrial activity proposed in U.S. coastal and offshore waters, the development of renewable energy sources should proceed in a thoughtful and deliberate manner. Primary concerns with regard to offshore renewable energy focus on potential impacts from the construction and operation of wind and wave energy facilities in coastal and offshore waters. The Commission will identify research and monitoring priorities to inform the review of ongoing and planned projects, and will continue to assess impacts of proposed offshore renewable energy projects in FY 2023.
- The Commission will continue monitoring, assessing, and providing advice concerning efforts to conserve declining, endangered, or threatened species and stocks of marine mammals, such as Cook Inlet beluga whales, North Atlantic and North Pacific right whales, Rice's whales, Hawaiian Island false killer whales, and Hawaiian monk seals. For example, the Commission will focus on seeking to understand more fully the ecological links between Southern Resident killer whales and their preferred prey, Chinook salmon, and how those links affect the declining whale population. It also will continue to promote restoration of key salmon populations, protection of the whales' critical foraging habitat, and amelioration of the impacts of vessel noise and contaminants on these endangered whales.

Strategic Goal 4: Our goal is to support research on priority topics in marine mammal and ecosystem science, assess proposed studies directed at understanding and reducing impacts on marine mammals and their ecosystems, and track and encourage multi-agency research and management to avoid unwarranted duplication of effort.

- With its relatively modest budget, the Commission's Grants and Research program has filled an important niche in marine mammal science for many years, funding novel, low-cost, small-scale projects. The Commission will continue to promote new partnerships through this program and to support research at universities and other institutions in the U.S. and around the world to inform management decisions and conservation measures intended to

protect marine mammals. In response to its FY 2021 request for proposals, the Commission received 120 proposals totaling \$3.608 million. The Commission is currently supporting 27 active research projects related to marine mammal conservation, protection, and management. Funded projects typically align with the Commission's MMPA duties or strategic objectives, and include topics such as emerging technologies (e.g., ropeless fishing, artificial intelligence), community engagement and social science, critical or emergent issues (e.g., species of conservation concern or specific geographic regions), threat reduction, filling data gaps and improving data availability, quality, and accessibility, and measuring the effectiveness of implemented actions.

- The Commission will continue to review the data and models used to assess the risk to North Atlantic right whales posed by lobster/crab fishing gear, and identify steps for improving data collection and modeling to estimate mortality and assess the effectiveness of mitigation measures. We will support additional ecosystem research, improved whale detection and mariner notification systems, and gear innovation research. The Commission's research grant program has funded several projects in recent years focused on reducing vessel strikes of right whales and other large whales on the U.S. east and west coasts and will look to build upon those efforts.
- The Commission will continue serving on a committee developing a recovery plan for Rice's whale (formerly known as Gulf of Mexico Bryde's whale), a critically endangered large whale that occurs primarily off the west coast of Florida. This is the only population of baleen whales that appears to remain in the Gulf of Mexico year-round, and that was significantly impacted by the Deepwater Horizon oil spill. NMFS estimates that around 50 individuals remain.

Strategic Goal 5: Our goal is to engage with Congress, federal and state agencies, scientists, Alaska Native communities, non-governmental and international organizations, industry, and the public and serve as an independent, science-based resource for identifying, understanding, and assisting others to address the Commission's Priority Topics.

- The Commission provided detailed comments on a USCG Port Access Route Study of Alaska's Arctic waters. With increasing loss of sea ice in the Arctic, USCG will continue to seek input and evaluate routing measures intended to minimize the impacts of growing vessel traffic on marine mammals and the Alaska Natives who depend on them for subsistence. The Commission carried out an extensive analysis of marine mammal distribution and seasonal movements, based on aerial surveys of marine mammals conducted by NMFS with support from BOEM. The Commission worked with Alaska Native organizations and NMFS biologists to map that distribution and those movements, which show areas where key subsistence species, including bowhead, gray, and beluga whales and walrus, occur frequently, and identify areas to be avoided because Alaska Natives use them for subsistence hunting. The Commission will continue to work with the agencies and Alaska Native organizations to revise its analyses and maps as new information becomes available.
- In FY 2023, the Commission will continue to engage in Alaska Native co-management issues through participation in meetings of the Indigenous People's Council for Marine Mammals (IPCOMM), the Ice Seal Committee, the Alaska Beluga Whale Committee, the

Alaska Eskimo Whaling Commission, and other Alaska Native organizations. The Commission serves on the Bering Sea Task Force, which focuses on reducing impacts on subsistence and cultural activities within the Northern Bering Sea Climate Resilience Area. The Commission also has consulted with the Makah tribe on its request to secure authorization to hunt gray whales, and is a party in the formal rulemaking to consider that request.

- The Commission is represented on the U.S. delegation to the International Whaling Commission and serves on the inter-agency team that develops U.S. positions on whaling issues, especially those regarding Aboriginal Subsistence Whaling. The Commission serves on U.S. delegations to meetings of the polar bear Range States (the parties to the Agreement on the Conservation of Polar Bears), which review progress on implementing the Circumpolar Action Plan and discuss research and management activities of mutual interest, and to meetings of the U.S.-Russia Polar Bear Commission, which jointly manages the shared Chukchi Sea polar bear population.
- In addition to providing many formal recommendations each year to other federal agencies on implementing the MMPA and related laws, the Commission collaborates with and supports the work of those agencies in a number of other ways. For example, the Commission previously provided recommendations as NMFS developed regulations to implement the MMPA provision that prohibits the importation of seafood products that were caught by foreign fisheries in ways that do not meet U.S. standards for managing marine mammal bycatch. As those regulations now begin to take effect, the Commission will focus attention on how those regulations are applied to particular nations and fisheries. The rule is expected to provide incentives to other countries to reduce bycatch, the number one source of human-caused marine mammal mortality and serious injury worldwide, and to thereby “level the playing field” for U.S. fisheries that are subject to take reduction mandates under the MMPA.
- The Commission serves as a resource for Congress on marine mammal issues by responding to inquiries, consulting with and providing briefings for Committee staff and member offices, offering technical drafting assistance, working through the OMB legislative review process to formulate Administration testimony and views on proposed legislation, and making recommendations to further the policies of the MMPA. Celebration of the 50th Anniversary of the MMPA and related outreach to Congress began in FY 2022 and will continue into FY 2023.

Supporting Administration Priorities

Initiatives on Equity and Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility: The Commission seeks to be as inclusive as possible in carrying out its mission and, in furtherance of Executive Orders (E.O.) 13985 and 14035, undertakes equity assessments and planning, including relevant consultations with representatives of those in historically underserved and marginalized communities. The Commission advances these goals through agency-specific actions and by following the policies, practices, and requirements of the larger administrative agencies that provide administrative services to the Commission. Recently, the Commission co-funded a project with the Office of Naval Research to develop a paid internship program to expand diversity and inclusion in marine mammal science. This project will establish a network of Minority-Serving Institutions and

research organizations with well-trained mentors committed to strengthening the pipeline of minorities into marine mammal research and the Commission will continue to look for ways to support this initiative. In keeping within the limited scope of its programs, and consistent with its tribal consultation responsibilities under E.O. 13175, the Commission focuses particular attention on consultations with, and outreach to, tribal governments and Alaska Native Organizations authorized to represent those tribes on marine mammal issues, and the Commission consults more broadly with Alaska Native communities that depend on marine mammals for their livelihoods.

Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad: Pursuant to the Executive Order on Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad, the Commission, in FY 2021 and FY 2022 (as mentioned above), conducted a peer-reviewed scientific assessment of current knowledge about the impacts of climate change on marine mammals in U. S. waters and in areas around North America and the Pacific Islands, including species and stocks shared with Canada and Mexico. The Commission will formulate and implement recommendations for research and conservation measures, engage in consultations with other agencies to strengthen assessment methods and actions to address climate change impacts, and engage with the National Climate Task Force as appropriate. The Commission will continue to review and summarize what is known about climate change impacts on marine mammals and identify related research needs and funding priorities.

Strengthening Federal Hiring through Talent Teams, Effective Assessments, and Internship Improvements: As a small agency with high employee satisfaction, the Commission has very low staff turnover. The Commission regularly supports paid post-graduate fellowships (including through the Sea Grant Knauss Marine Policy Fellowship Program) and high school internships for course credit to provide experience working in the federal government. We are working to broaden opportunities for additional paid interns to assist in meeting our current workload and to provide learning experiences for college students or recent graduates, particularly those from underserved communities.

About the Commission and the MMPA

Title II of the MMPA created the Commission as an independent agency of the Executive Branch. The Commission consists of three members appointed by the President with the advice and consent of the Senate. The Commission is assisted by a nine-member Committee of Scientific Advisors on Marine Mammals (Committee) and a full-time staff of 14, which includes the Commission's Executive Director. A Special Advisor on Native Affairs serves the Commission under contract.

Section 202 of the MMPA specifies the duties of the Commission and its Committee of Scientific Advisors on Marine Mammals. The Commission, among its enumerated duties, is charged with making recommendations to other agencies on measures it deems necessary or desirable to further the policies of the MMPA, including provisions for protecting the interests of Indians, Aleuts, and Eskimos residing in Alaska whose livelihoods may be adversely affected by actions taken under the Act.

To fulfill its duties, the Commission reviews and makes recommendations on the domestic and international policies and actions of federal agencies to ensure that they are consistent with the MMPA. Marine mammals are subject to multiple human-related risk factors including fishing, climate change, anthropogenic sound, harmful algal blooms (HABs) and other habitat alterations, disease, contaminants, marine debris, vessel strikes, and vessel disturbance. Additionally, as some

marine mammal populations have recovered to near their historical levels, conflicts with human activities have increased in number and kind. To identify and characterize risk factors and minimize harm to marine mammals from human activities, the Commission consults with other federal agencies, such as NOAA, NMFS, FWS, the Navy and BOEM, state agencies (e.g., various departments of fish, game, or wildlife), and tribal organizations (e.g., IPCOMM and species- or region-specific Alaska Native Organizations). The Commission reviews numerous environmental analyses and applications seeking authorizations for the incidental taking of marine mammals during military, oil and gas, renewable energy, construction, and research activities. The Commission also helps develop and coordinate multi-agency and international research and management initiatives to facilitate marine mammal protection and conservation. In all its work, the Commission seeks to be a source of useful information, catalyze critical marine mammal research, and provide independent and objective oversight of domestic and international actions impacting marine mammals and their environment.

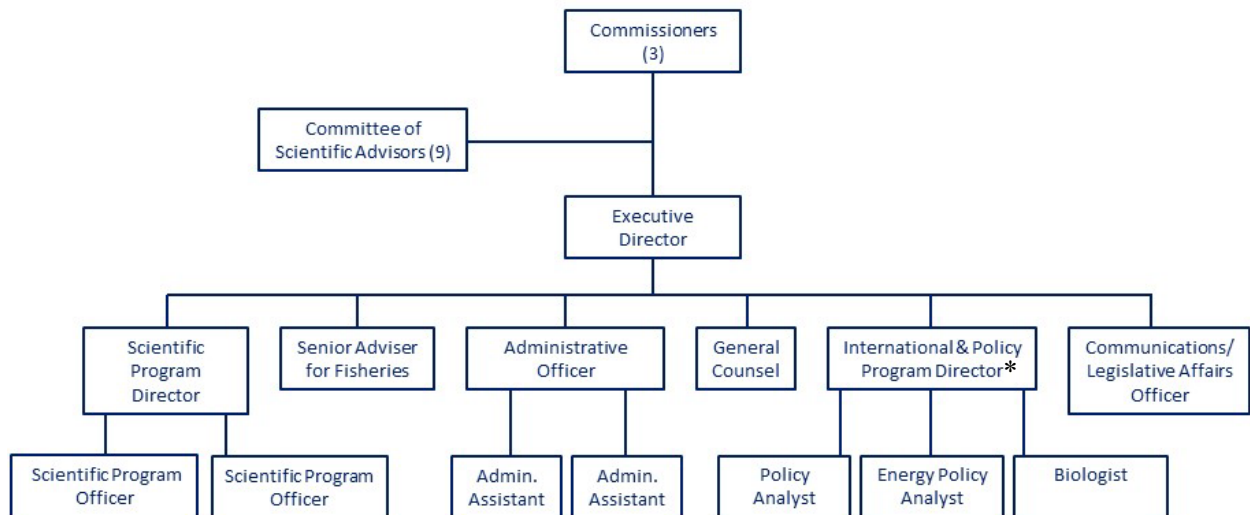
Statutory Duties

The Commission is charged with fulfilling basic statutory duties as set forth in section 202 and other sections of the MMPA, which include the following:

- Reviewing all marine mammal stock assessment reports and related documents prepared by NMFS and FWS;
- Participating in take reduction teams and taking various actions to reduce the taking of marine mammals incidental to commercial fisheries to below each stock's potential biological removal level and ultimately to achieve the MMPA's zero mortality and serious injury rate goal.
- Reviewing applications for authorizations to take marine mammals incidental to activities other than commercial fishing (e.g., oil and gas development, seismic surveys, military exercises, coastal development projects) under section 101(a)(5) of the MMPA;
- Reviewing all scientific research and other permit applications involving the taking of marine mammals, as required under section 101(a)(1) of the MMPA, and supporting research projects focused on matters critical to marine mammal conservation and management;
- Consulting with the Department of State, NOAA, and FWS regarding international agreements pertaining to marine mammals and research and management measures needed to promote marine mammal conservation in foreign jurisdictions and in international waters;
- Reviewing all proposals for listing, or changing the listing status, of marine mammals under the Endangered Species Act (ESA);
- Enhancing and monitoring the effectiveness of recovery programs for endangered, threatened, and depleted species and populations such as the Hawaiian monk seal, Cook Inlet beluga whale, southern resident killer whale, western Steller sea lion, North Atlantic right whale, North Pacific right whale, southern sea otter, polar bear, bearded seal, ringed seal, and West Indian manatee;
- Promoting co-management of marine mammals taken for subsistence purposes by Alaska Native Organizations pursuant to section 119 of the MMPA, as well as effective implementation of tribal consultation requirements established under Executive Order 13175; and

- Facilitating development of research and management capacity in foreign countries focused on endangered marine mammal species and stocks (e.g., the vaquita, freshwater dolphins, and Arabian Sea humpback whales).

Organization



* Position currently vacant



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