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MMPA 50th Anniversary: Overview and Successes

February 9, 2022

- **Kim Damon-Randall**, *Director of NOAA Fisheries Office of Protected Resources*
- **Gary Frazer**, *Assistant Director of Ecological Services U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service*
- **Peter Thomas**, *Executive Director of Marine Mammal Commission*



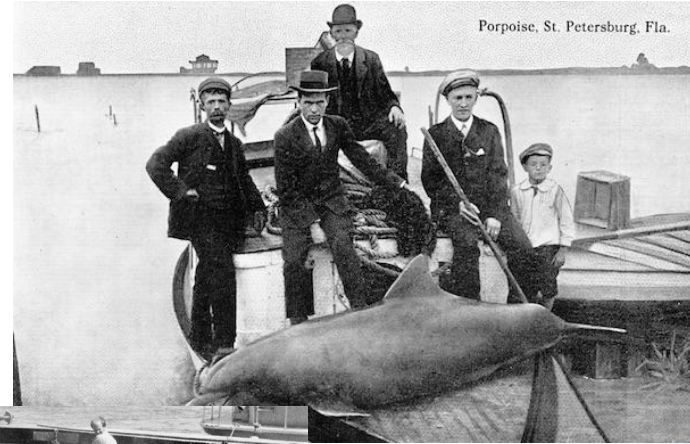
Successes of the past 50 years under the MMPA

- Improved scientific understanding
- Most of the 259 stocks are stable or recovering
- High public interest



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Brief history of the MMPA

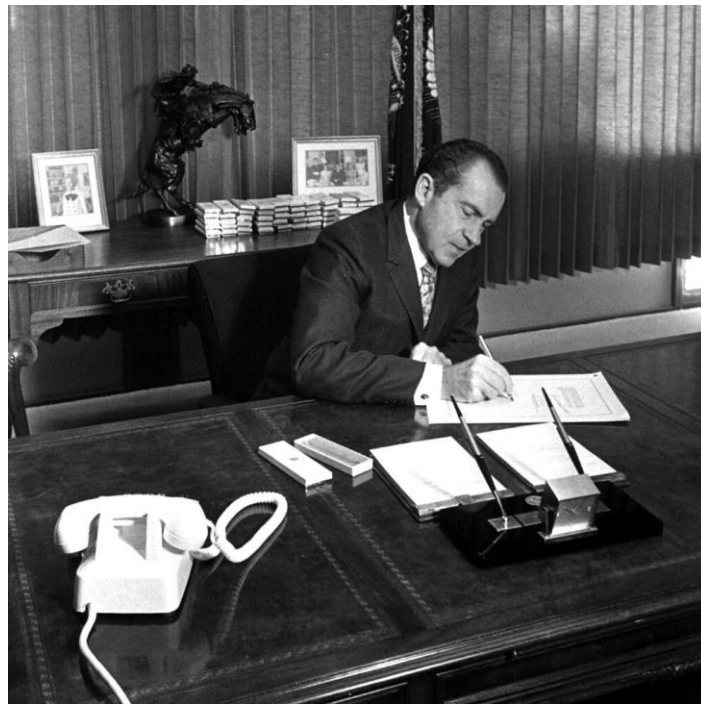


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Signing of the MMPA on October 21, 1972

*Recent history indicates that **man's impact upon marine mammals has ranged from what might be termed malign neglect to virtual genocide.** These animals, including whales, porpoises, seals, sea otters, polar bears, manatees and others, have only rarely benefited from our interest; they have been shot, blown up, clubbed to death, run down by boats, poisoned, and exposed to a multitude of other indignities, all in the interests of profit or recreation, **with little or no consideration of the potential impact of these activities on the animal populations involved***

House Report (Merchant Marine and Fisheries Committee) No. 92-707,
Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972



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Role of the MMPA

- All marine mammals are protected under the MMPA
- Three federal entities share responsibility for implementing the MMPA:
 - NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service
 - U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
 - Marine Mammal Commission



MMPA Provisions

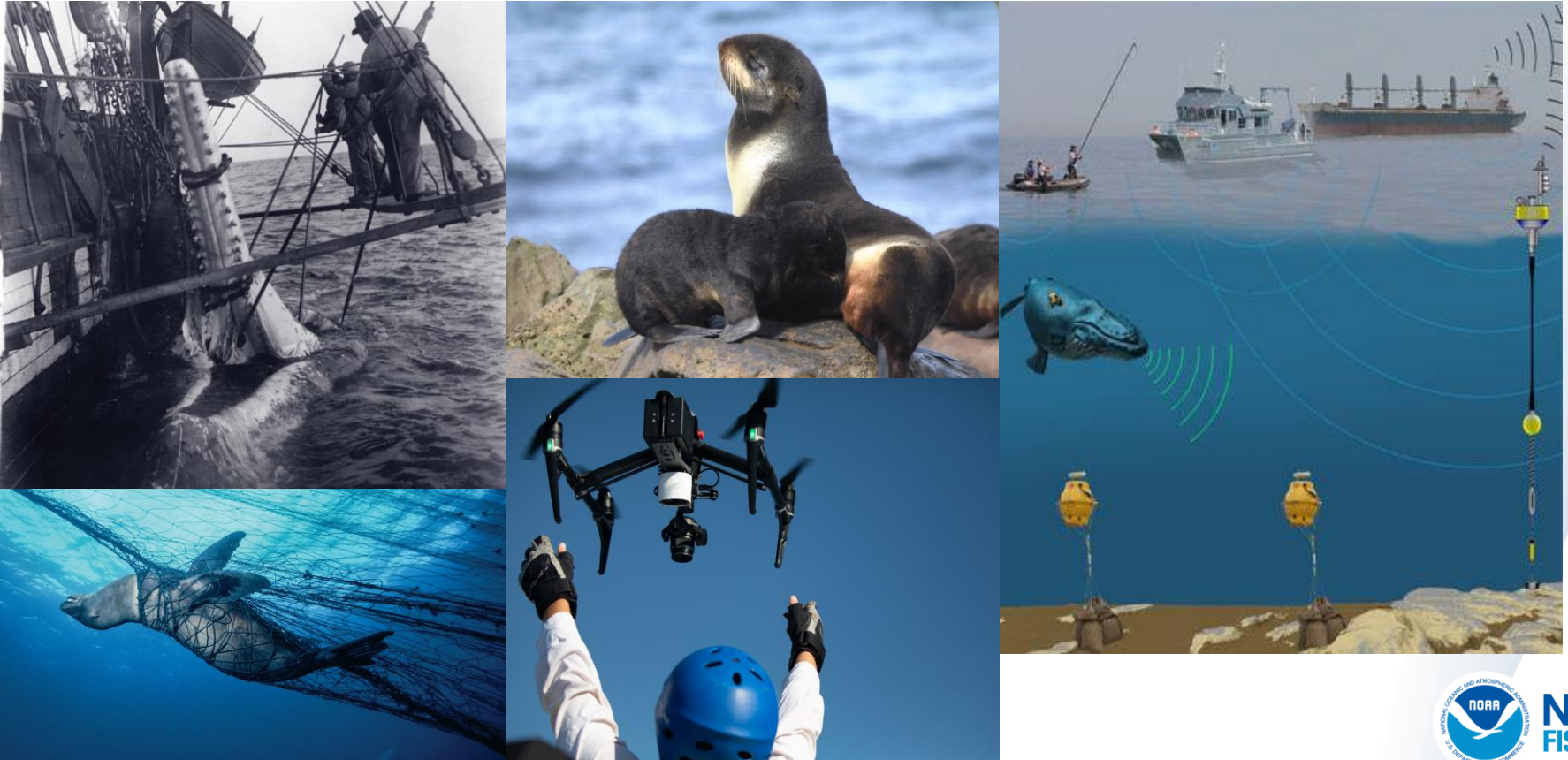
The Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA):

- Prohibits the “taking” (i.e., harass, hunt, capture, or kill) of marine mammals unless exempted in the statute or under a MMPA permit or authorization
- Exempts marine mammal take by Alaska Natives for subsistence
- Outlines other requirements & programs to further/support the conservation of marine mammals



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Because of the MMPA we were able to:



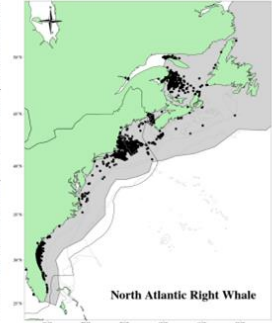
Robust Stock Assessments and PBR

- NMFS maintains stock assessment reports for 259 stocks of marine mammals that occur in U.S. waters
- Best monitored marine mammal populations in the world due in part to the establishment of “Potential Biological Removal” level framework
- Data used in this framework are critical in evaluating human impacts, particularly the effects of climate change

NORTH ATLANTIC RIGHT WHALE (*Eubalaena glacialis*):
Western Atlantic Stock

STOCK DEFINITION AND GEOGRAPHIC RANGE

The western North Atlantic right whale population ranges primarily from calving grounds in coastal waters of the southeastern U.S. to feeding grounds in New England waters and the Canadian Bay of Fundy, Scotian Shelf, and Gulf of St. Lawrence (Figure 1). Mellinger *et al.* (2011) reported acoustic detections of right whales near the nineteenth-century whaling grounds east of southern Greenland, but the number of whales and their origin is unknown. Knowlton *et al.* (1992) reported several long-distance movements as far north as Newfoundland, the Labrador Basin, and southeast of Greenland. Resightings of photographically identified individuals have been made off Iceland, in the old Cape Farewell whaling ground east of Greenland (Hamilton *et al.* 2007), in northern Norway (Jacobsen *et al.* 2004), in the Azores (Silva *et al.* 2012), and off Brittany in northwestern France (New England Aquarium unpub. Catalog record). These long-range matches indicate an extended range for at least some individuals. Records from the Gulf of Mexico (Moore and Clark 1963, Schmidt *et al.* 1972, Ward-Geiger *et al.* 2011) represent individuals beyond the primary calving and wintering ground in the waters of the southeastern U.S. East Coast. The location of much of the population is unknown during the winter.



Supporting the Nation's Defense and Economy while Conserving Marine Mammals



Examples of MMPA success stories

- Harbor porpoise
- Tuna-dolphin interactions
- Humpback whale



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Supporting Responsible Marine Wildlife Viewing

- Developed programs, guidelines, policies, and regulations to support and encourage safe and responsible wildlife viewing practices that protect both marine mammals and people



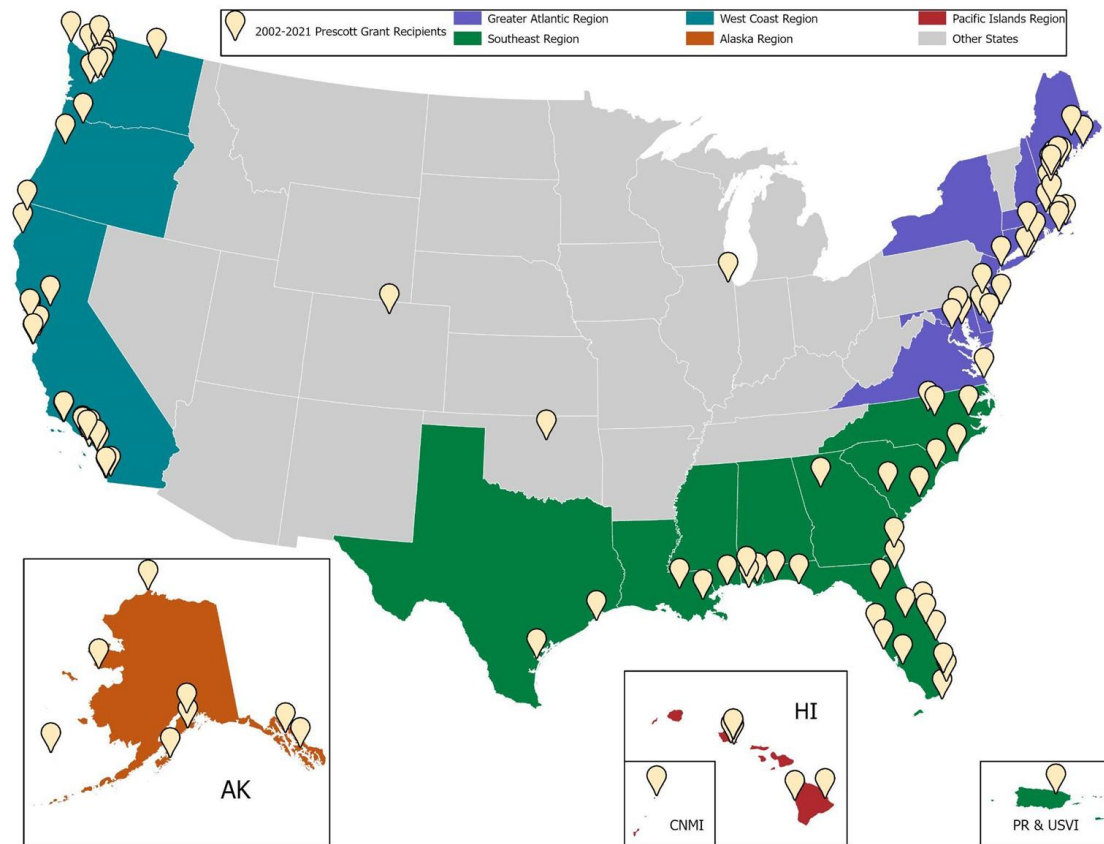
Important Elements of Our Work under the MMPA



- Established the Marine Mammal Health and Stranding Program
- Established the Unusual Mortality Event Program
- Working with stakeholders to reduce fisheries bycatch



Supporting our Partners via Prescott Grants



Provided over **\$67.6 million** to our stranding network partners through **794 grants** to support the rescue and rehabilitation of stranded marine mammals, and data collection for health research

Ongoing Challenges and Impacts



- Climate change
- Wind energy infrastructure
- Ocean noise
- Oil spills and other pollution
- Aquaculture particularly with gear that puts lines in the water
- Entanglements in fishing gear or marine debris



**Marine Mammal
Protection Act**

**U.S. Fish & Wildlife
Service**



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Jurisdiction

- **Polar Bear**
 - Chukchi/Bering Seas Stock
 - Southern Beaufort Sea Stock
- **Pacific Walrus**
- **Northern Sea Otter**
 - Southwest Alaska Stock
 - Southcentral Alaska Stock
 - Southeast Alaska Stock
 - Washington Stock
- **Southern Sea Otter**
- **West Indian Manatee**
 - Florida Stock
 - Puerto Rico Stock
- **Dugong***



Marine Mammal Conservation - Challenges

- **Climate Change**
 - Sea ice loss
- **Human Impacts**
 - Oil & gas
 - Coastal development
 - Pollution
 - Boat strikes
- **Remote nature and expansiveness of species distributions**
 - Costly to monitor species trends



Progress in Marine Mammal Conservation

Southern sea otter

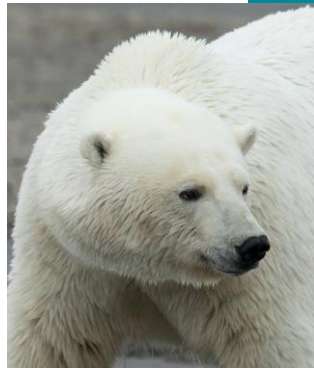
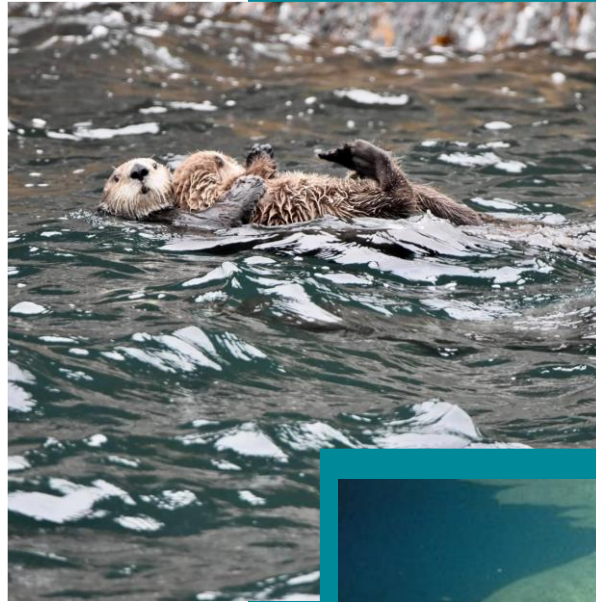
- In 2016, the population index exceeded 3,090 for the first and continues an upward trend

Partnerships with the Alaska Natives

- Development of cooperative agreements with Alaska Native organization
- Co-managing subsistence use of marine mammals

John H. Prescott Marine Mammal Rescue Assistance Grant

- Since inception in 2019 over \$3,000,000 awarded
- Support to:
 - Various state and local agencies
 - Academic institutions
 - Non-profit conservation groups
- Purchase of:
 - Essential monitoring equipment
 - Vehicles for land and water
 - Equipment to improve and expand rehabilitation capabilities
- Provide:
 - Response for major disasters
 - Outreach and educational events for the public





Marine Mammal Commission

An independent agency of the U.S. Government





Independent Oversight

- Independent federal agency created by Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972
- Protect and conserve marine mammals and their environment using best available science
- Oversight of domestic and international policies and actions related to marine mammals and their habitat

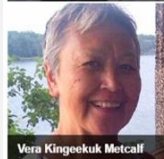
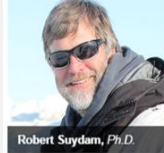


Who We Are

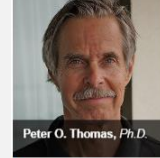
Commissioners



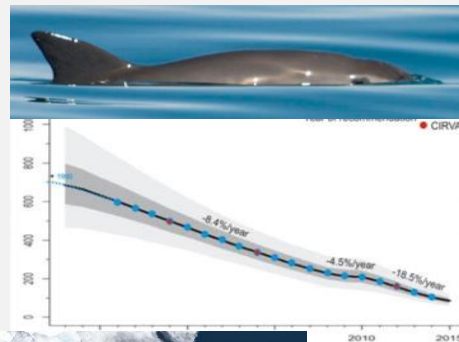
Committee of Scientific Advisors



Commission Staff



Then and Now



Moving Forward

1. Provide Policy & Legal Oversight
1. Improve Population Assessment, Health Surveillance and Ecosystem Research
1. Assess and Address Threats
1. Engage MMPA Stakeholders



Q&A Session

Submit questions or comments in the question box!



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Upcoming MMPA Briefings

- Marine Mammal Health and Stranding Response Program in Spring
- Permits and Authorizations in Summer
- Bycatch in Fall

Look out for the 50th anniversary celebration of the ESA in 2023!



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Thank you!

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