



Marine Mammal Commission

An Independent Agency of the U.S. Government



Results Highlights

Of the 248 stocks in the 2013 reports NMFS provided—

- minimum estimates of abundance (Nmin) for only 138 stocks (56%) (Figure 1);
- estimates of maximum productivity rates (i.e., did not use a default value) for only 12 stocks (5%);
- population trend information for 76 stocks (31%); and
- a current potential biological removal level for only 134 stocks (54%).

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Review of the National Marine Fisheries Service’s Marine Mammal Stock Assessment Reports

Range, Abundance, and Potential Biological Removal

Section 117 of the Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972 (MMPA) establishes a science-based process for assessing the status of marine mammal stocks¹ that occur in U.S. waters.

The Problem

Inadequate information in the stock assessment reports compromises the National Marine Fisheries Service’s (NMFS) ability to prioritize its management and recovery actions in any meaningful or effective way. It also impedes the accurate evaluation of impacts from permitted sectors such as fisheries, energy, and defense, as well as impacts of catastrophic events such as the Deepwater Horizon Gulf Oil Spill, exposing marine mammal stocks to unnecessary risks.

A copy of the [full Commission review](#)² is available on our website.

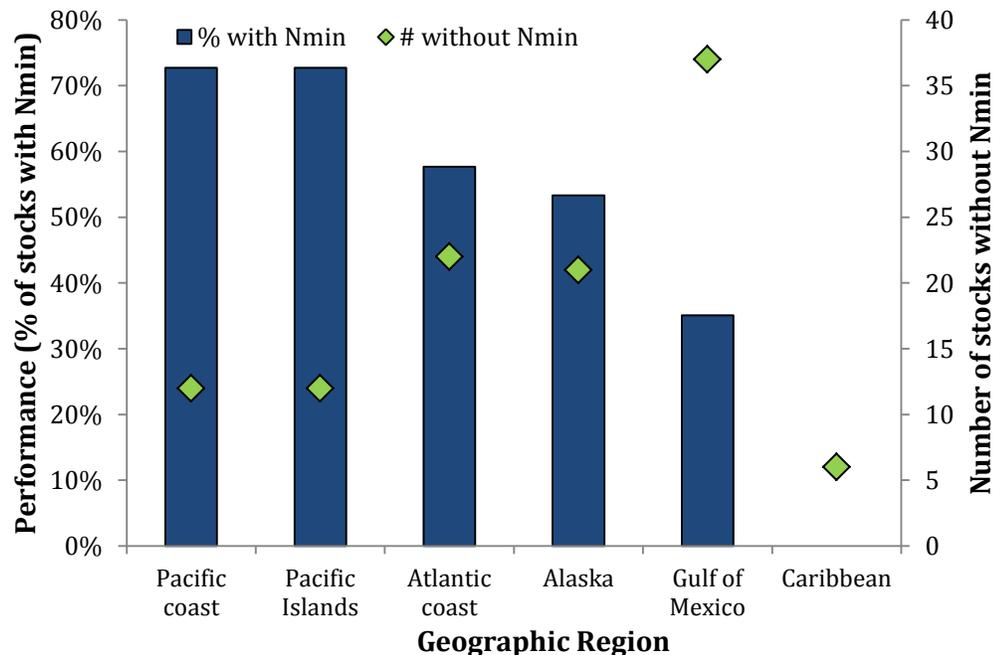


Figure 1. Performance of NMFS in the 2013 assessment reports by geographic region, with regard to % of stocks for which a minimum estimate of abundance (Nmin) was provided. The number of stocks without an Nmin is also presented (right axis) to illustrate what is required to reach 100% in each region.

Recommendations

The Commission recommends that Congress—

- Work with leadership in NOAA, the Department of Commerce, and other Administration officials, to identify and secure the resources necessary to implement Section 117 of the MMPA and produce high quality, thorough, stock assessment reports nationally;

And that Congress support NMFS in its efforts to—

- Improve understanding of stock structure, particularly for marine mammals in the Gulf of Mexico, central and western Pacific, and Arctic regions.
- Identify and survey the ranges of marine mammal stocks to more accurately estimate abundance and distribution of stocks and hence better manage human interactions, risks of injury and mortality, and detect changes in stock status.



Humpback whales, *Megaptera novaeangliae*, can be found in all geographic regions where stock assessments are conducted.

- Implement a national stock assessment strategy that describes the infrastructure and resources needed to adequately conduct required stock assessments coordinated across regions, incorporates efforts to identify new stocks, and follows a schedule that ensures that NMFS has the status and trend information needed to identify, manage, and conserve depleted, threatened, or endangered stocks. NMFS currently undertakes some of these activities as part of its “Protected Resources Science Investment and Planning Process (PRSIPP).”³
- Identify and prioritize, on a national rather than regional basis and as part of the PRSIPP, those stocks for which an estimated PBR level cannot be calculated.

Summary

To improve stock assessments particular focus should be placed on vessel, ground, and aircraft surveys of the U.S. EEZ and adjacent waters conducted with consistent methodology at least twice in an eight-year period (to estimate the abundance and trends of all marine mammal stocks in U.S. waters), development of alternative survey technologies, genetic analyses and other approaches to better identify and define discrete marine mammal stocks in U.S. waters.

The Commission would welcome the opportunity to discuss the results of its review with NMFS, NOAA, the Department of Commerce, the Administration, and Congress. The Commission believes that, with adequate resources, NMFS can fulfill the vision and mandates set forth in the MMPA for marine mammal stock assessments.

¹ According to the MMPA the term “population stock” or “stock” means a group of marine mammals of the same species or smaller taxa in a common spatial arrangement, that interbreed when mature.

² Link to full report: <http://www.mmc.gov/wp-content/uploads/SARsReport.pdf>

³ NMFS has a proposal for conducting rotational surveys on a predictable schedule to increase efficient use of resources nationally but lacks the funding to support this initiative.