



MARINE MAMMAL COMMISSION

Fiscal Year (FY) 2025

CONGRESSIONAL JUSTIFICATION

MARINE MAMMAL COMMISSION

March 13, 2024

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 ecosystems. 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 12. 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 11).

In FY 2025, **the Commission requests \$5 million** to continue to meet its statutory responsibilities under the MMPA and to further mission critical objectives and support priority projects. This request would bolster the Commission’s grant program, increase personnel to aid in mission critical activities, and support Commission-hosted workshops on priority marine mammal issues. The majority (85 percent) of the Commission’s FY 2025 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 2025 Budget Overview

Summary (\$ thousands)

| | FY 2023 | FY 2024 | FY 2025 |
|---------------------------|----------------|-----------------|----------------|
| President’s Budget | 4,500 | 5,040 | 5,000 |
| Appropriations | 4,500 | 4,500 estimated | |

Budget by Category (\$ thousands)

| Identification code 95-2200-0-1-302 | FY 2023 | FY 2024 estimated | FY 2025 estimated | Change from FY 2024 |
|---|----------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------------|
| Program and Financing (\$ thousands) | | | | |
| Budget Authority | 4,500 | 4,500 | 5,000 | 500 |
| Total Budgetary Resources | 4,500 | 4,500 | 5,000 | 500 |
| Spending (\$ thousands) | | | | |
| Personnel | 2,677 | 2,821 | 3,146 | 325 |
| Research, Contracts, and Special Projects | 1,104 | 1,052 | 1,178 | 126 |
| Rent, Communications, and Utilities | 441 | 347 | 387 | 40 |
| Other (supplies, equipment, travel) | 278 | 280 | 288 | 8 |

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 identified by Congress and through agency strategic planning. The Commission operates under its [FY 2022–2026 Strategic Plan](#) under the leadership of its Commissioners and with input from 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 other agencies’ 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 understand, 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, advocate for inclusion of marine mammals in ecosystem-focused research and modeling activities, 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 meetings, Capitol Hill briefings, and other Commission events.

The agency priorities for FY 2025 are derived from the Commission’s the FY 2022–2026 Strategic Plan, which identifies the following suite of marine mammal conservation topics as its focus over the coming years: fisheries interactions, 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.

Priority Topics

Priority topics to address the five strategic goals identified in 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 2025 the Commission will use the requested funds to focus on the following:

- Fisheries Interactions: Understanding and assessing threats to marine mammals from domestic and international fisheries and recommending management actions and policies designed to reduce interactions between fisheries and marine mammals, particularly interactions that result in deaths, serious injuries and reduced health. Working with agency leadership to improve marine mammal take reduction programs. Tracking the implementation of the Import Provision Rule of the Marine Mammal Protection Act.
- Vessel Speed and Routing Management: Enhancing interagency cooperation on measures to reduce impacts of vessels on marine mammals by reviewing and providing recommendations, appropriate to specific U.S. regions, on vessel speed, routing and other measures to reduce the likelihood and severity of vessel strikes, reduce the impacts of vessel noise, and ensure protection of ecosystems important to marine mammals and marine mammal dependent human activities.
- Climate Change: Engaging management agencies to address research needs and fund priority actions identified in the Commission’s assessment of climate change impacts on marine mammals, especially impacts occurring as a consequence of direct human interactions or linked to unusual mortality events.
- Offshore Wind Energy: Assessing impacts of proposed and ongoing wind energy projects, identifying research, monitoring, and mitigation needs, and recommending actions to minimize adverse effects on North Atlantic right whales, Rice’s whales, and other marine mammals in U.S. waters where these projects are being developed or are planned.
- Arctic Marine Mammals and Ecosystems: Promoting partnerships in Alaska and the wider Arctic to identify and pursue research and monitoring needs and to further the conservation of marine mammals and Arctic ecosystems during times of accelerating climate-related ecosystem changes and increased human activity, which, among other things, will 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, including development of novel monitoring approaches, and building the capacity of marine mammal health surveillance and stranding response programs to provide information needed to understand the impacts of infectious agents, harmful algal blooms, and indirect consequences of climate change on marine mammal populations.

Recent Accomplishments

The Commission’s FY 2024 appropriation was \$4.5 million. We increased our reach by coordinating and cooperating with other federal and state agencies, academia, industry, non-governmental organizations, and other partners. Examples of recent accomplishments include:

- *Impacts of Climate Change on Marine Mammals*: The Commission continued to formulate recommendations for additional research and conservation measures, consult with other agencies to strengthen assessment methodologies, and integrate climate research elements into the MMPA’s stock assessment process. In early 2024, the Commission published a report following its Marine Mammal Health Surveillance Workshop, outlining a national plan for marine mammal health surveillance to detect impacts of climate change on health. The Commission also developed a suite of factsheets to communicate the implications of climate

change for marine mammal populations. In addition, the Commission's FY 2022-2024 grant programs were explicitly designed to support projects addressing or assessing impacts of climate change and to understand the effects of climate change on marine mammal health. The Commission held its 2023 Annual meeting in Washington, D.C. celebrating 50 years of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) and MMPA and focusing on national marine mammal science and management issues through the lens of a changing climate.

- *Highlighting Whales on the Brink:* In celebration of 50 years of the Endangered Species Act, the Commission co-led a scientific symposium with NMFS and the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History. The symposium focused on the science and management of Rice's whales and North Pacific and North Atlantic right whales. With an estimated 30 individuals remaining in the Eastern North Pacific population of right whales, which occur in Alaskan waters, the Commission continued to highlight its endangered status and extreme risk of extirpation. Significant gaps in our understanding of the population's distribution and movements are preventing the risk assessment that is necessary to provide effective management and protection of the population. Rice's whale, the only resident baleen whale species in the Gulf of Mexico, is one of the most endangered large whales, with a population estimated at less than 50 individuals. The Commission is working with scientists and managers to designate critical habitat for Rice's whales under the ESA and to minimize impacts of human activities in the Gulf.
- *Marine Mammal Unusual Mortality Events (UMEs):* The Commission continued to serve on the Working Group on Marine Mammal Unusual Mortality Events and maintained the [Global Stranding Network website](#), an informational website used to house information on marine mammal stranding response. The high level of public interest in recent marine mammal UMEs highlights the need to monitor marine mammal health and make that information readily available for those engaged in interagency efforts to promote a One Health approach to wildlife disease surveillance. The need for a One Health approach (integrating animal health, human health, and environmental health) was exemplified by the 2022 UME involving harbor and gray seals off the coast of Maine. In summer 2022, seals were dying from highly pathogenic avian influenza, H5N1. The pathogen has killed poultry, wild birds, and other wild mammals and has the potential to be transmitted to people and pets. Other ongoing UMEs remain a concern due to their impact on critically endangered populations, such as North Atlantic right whales, or their potential association with climate change, such as humpback whales in the northwest Atlantic. The Commission plays a strong role in ensuring the causes of UMEs and their relationship to anthropogenic activities are determined.
- *Protecting the North Atlantic Right Whale:* Entanglement in pot and trap fishing gear and vessel strikes are the two biggest threats to the survival and recovery of the critically endangered North Atlantic right whale. The ongoing North Atlantic Right Whale UME remains active and the species' population remains precariously low at approximately 360 individuals, a decline of 25 percent from 2016 to 2021. The Commission remained committed to staving off the extinction of the North Atlantic right whale and ultimately achieving its recovery to the point where it no longer is endangered. In response to the need to locate North Atlantic right whales to reduce risk, the Commission co-hosted a North Atlantic right whale tagging workshop to review the science and inform research permitting decisions, and published the workshop report in early 2024. The Commission provided comments in support of an enhanced vessel-speed rule for the East Coast, and participated in a vessel strike avoidance technology workshop. The Commission participated on the Atlantic Large Whale Take

Reduction Team, recommended changes to National Marine Fisheries Service's (NMFS) take-reduction regulations needed to meet the MMPA mandate to reduce fisheries-caused serious injury and mortality to below the species potential biological level (i.e., to less than one per year), advocated for the development and adoption of "on-demand" fishing gear, and provided advice to Congress on legislative initiatives and funding priorities.

- *Marine Mammals in the Arctic and Alaska Native Organizations:* As a member of the Interagency Arctic Research Policy Committee (IARPC) and in fulfillment of the Administration's Arctic Research Plan 2022–2026, the Commission continued to support the development of systematic monitoring and other research to inform U.S. Arctic policies and priorities. The Commission also engaged on 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 the Aleut Marine Mammal Commission. For example, the Commission worked with the Alaska Beluga Whale Committee and federal and state agencies on efforts to assess beluga populations in the Western Arctic and promote the development and implementation of harvest management plans. Additionally, the Commission provided support for an Alaska Sea Grant summer internship with IPCoMM. The Commission continued working with IPCoMM and other ANOs to build capacity for ANOs to participate in marine mammal research and conservation efforts and safeguard cultural, economic, and subsistence values.
- *Restoring the Gulf of Mexico:* The Commission has engaged at many levels to further efforts to restore Gulf of Mexico marine mammal populations impacted by the 2010 Deepwater Horizon oil spill. The Commission continued engagement with federal agencies to provide recommendations for cross-agency efforts to improve assessments of marine mammals and inform management efforts related to energy development. Commission staff participated in a temporary capture of bottlenose dolphins in Barataria Bay, Louisiana, to assess the health and recovery of the population after the oil spill, and to understand the effect of vessel traffic on dolphin behavior. The Commission also serves as an advisor to a multiagency-funded project to inform restoration efforts and improve assessments of offshore marine mammals in the Gulf of Mexico through the deployment of passive acoustic monitoring devices throughout the Gulf, including in Mexican waters.
- *Supporting Conservation of Critically Endangered Marine Mammals:* The Commission continued longstanding collaborations with international scientific and conservation teams on initiatives to reduce threats to some of the world's most at-risk marine mammals. For example, the Commission participated in U.S. government and international organization work with the Government of Mexico to prevent extinction of the vaquita, worked with a collaborative international team to address threats to Mekong River Irrawaddy dolphins in Cambodia, served as a member of the Arabian Sea Whale Network seeking to conserve humpback and other whale species in that area, and worked with NMFS to raise the profile of the critically endangered North Pacific right whale. The Commission assisted in building international awareness of threats to particular species or groups of marine mammals and supplying expert technical assistance through its work with the International Whaling Commission (IWC), the International Union for the Conservation of Nature's Cetacean Specialist Group, the Rare Pinniped Conservation Network and other international and national bodies. The Commission also directed grant funds to support international projects on species of concern.
- *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 2023, the Commission completed the fifth year of data collection with its updated platform and will be releasing the results of the FY 2023 survey by April 2024.

Project Highlights for FY 2025

In FY 2025, the Commission will continue to meet its duties under the MMPA by, among other things, initiating, continuing, or completing projects to address priority topics under the Commission's strategic goals. Highlighted below are a few examples of activities planned for FY 2025 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 NMFS, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), U.S. Geological Survey National Wildlife Health Center, BOEM, Department of State, and U.S. Navy (the Navy), as well as state wildlife and conservation agencies, Alaska Native coastal communities and Native American Tribes, and Alaska Native Organizations.
- The Commission will work with agencies to promote faithful and effective implementation of the MMPA by fostering a science-based regulatory process that adheres to applicable laws and Congressional directives and considers relevant stakeholder views. For example, the Commission reviews and comments on proposed MMPA incidental take authorizations and related National Environmental Policy Act documents to assess potential impacts of human activities on marine mammals and to identify 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 with state and federal agencies and other stakeholders to identify research and monitoring priorities to improve our understanding of potential impacts of wind energy development on marine mammals and to design and implement effective mitigation strategies.

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.

- The Commission will participate in reviewing and evaluating assessments of the health, status and human impacts on marine mammal stocks required under section 117 of the MMPA. This includes reviewing annual draft stock assessment reports, participating in meetings of Take Reduction Teams and regional Scientific Review Groups, and evaluating 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 published a report identifying objectives for a National Marine Mammal Health Monitoring and Surveillance Plan in FY 2024, and will work to support implementation of the plan in FY 2025.
- 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. The Commission expects continued engagement with NMFS and BOEM to provide recommendations for cross-agency efforts to improve assessments of marine mammals and inform management efforts related to energy development. The Commission will continue to work with NMFS, non-governmental organizations, and academic researchers to develop monitoring programs to assess the impact of large-scale restoration and development projects that have the potential to take marine mammals. The Commission will serve as an advisor to a multiagency-funded project to inform restoration efforts and improve assessments of offshore marine mammals in the Gulf of Mexico through the deployment of passive acoustic monitoring devices throughout the Gulf, including in Mexican waters.
- As directed by the National Defense and Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2023, the Commission will consult with NMFS on the development of the marine mammal health monitoring analysis platform, Health MAP, which is designed to maximize the availability and use of marine mammal health information. The platform will give scientists, resource managers, and the public 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. The Commission will track NMFS’s report to Congress on the progress of Health MAP development, which will be submitted in FY 2025.

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 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, and ultimately to rates approaching zero, as mandated by the MMPA. The Commission also will work with agency leadership to support the National Take Reduction Program. The Commission will continue to participate on all active Take Reduction Teams administered by NMFS, provide analyses and recommendations concerning federal agency actions and policies to address fisheries interactions with marine mammals, and sponsor research and workshops designed to find innovative solutions for reducing the entanglement and hooking of marine mammals in commercial fishing gear. Further, the Commission will work to understand the

importance of prey populations to marine mammals, and the impact that fishing has on the availability of prey.

- The Commission will build upon its assessment of climate change-related impacts 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 support the Administration's efforts to develop offshore wind and other sources of renewable energy. To address concerns regarding the potential impacts of offshore renewable energy on marine mammals, particularly large whales, the Commission will continue to identify priorities for research and monitoring of construction and operation of wind and wave energy facilities and potential longer-term effects on availability of marine mammal prey species. The Commission will also continue to participate in the Working Group on Marine Mammal Unusual Mortality Events to investigate causes of whale deaths and investigate any potential associations with human activities.
- 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 work on identifying habitat restoration activities with the goal of increasing salmon prey for Cook Inlet beluga whales. It will continue to promote restoration of salmon populations prey to Southern Resident killer whales, protection of the whales' critical foraging habitat, and amelioration of the impacts of vessel disturbance and contaminants on these endangered whales. The Commission will also assist in the planning of a third meeting of the Rare Pinniped Conservation Network, which will focus on conservation and management issues in the Southern Hemisphere in early FY 2025.

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 this program in FY 2025 to promote new partnerships 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 2023 request for proposals, the Commission received 84 proposals seeking a total of \$4.7 million. The Commission is currently supporting 35 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, measuring the effectiveness of implemented actions, and advancing diversity, equity, inclusiveness, and justice in marine mammal science.

- As marine ecosystems continue to be altered by climate change and other anthropogenic impacts, the Commission will advocate for marine mammals as sentinels of ecosystem variability and will encourage the inclusion of marine mammals in multidisciplinary ecosystem research. As top predators, marine mammals shape the marine environment (e.g. food-web dynamics and nutrient cycling), as well as respond to natural and anthropogenic changes in marine ecosystems. Understanding the extrinsic (e.g. marine mammal ecology – shifts in range, phenology and/or hotspots) and intrinsic (e.g. marine mammal health – changes in diet, disease and body condition) responses of marine mammals to climate change will provide insight into ecosystem processes to help guide the management of marine mammals and their ecosystems in the future.
- 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 especially gear innovation research. The Commission has funded several projects in recent years through its grants program 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 to work with NMFS to identify and prioritize actions to reduce threats to the Rice’s whale and to implement conservation measures to reduce impacts of energy development, shipping, aquaculture, and other human activities on this critically endangered species. The Commission will also work with NMFS, BOEM, industry, and academic partners to determine the extent of the species range beyond its core habitat off the coast of western Florida using passive acoustic monitoring and other survey methods. The Commission participated in efforts to solicit public input on Rice’s whale recovery strategies and will continue to work with NMFS to develop a draft recovery plan for public review and to designate critical habitat under the ESA.

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 frequently 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 Endangered Species Act will conclude in FY 2025.
- In FY 2025, 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) and other Alaska Native Organizations. The Commission intends to continue serving on the Bering Task Force, which focuses on reducing impacts on

subsistence and cultural activities within the Northern Bering Sea Climate Resilience Area. The Commission also intends to consult with the Makah Tribe on issues of mutual interest, including the Tribe's request for authorization to hunt gray whales.

- The Commission provided detailed comments on a USCG Port Access Route Study of Alaska's Arctic waters, which were largely incorporated by the USCG into its draft routing measures. With the retreat of sea ice in the Arctic, the USCG will continue to seek input from Alaska Native hunters, Alaska Native Organizations, and other stakeholders to refine its draft routing measures to minimize impacts of increased vessel traffic on marine mammals and the Alaska Natives that depend on them for subsistence. The Arctic Watch program is being established to provide critical real-time communication between Alaska Native subsistence communities and the Marine Exchange Alaska on vessel traffic, subsistence hunting activities and marine mammal occurrence in the Bering Strait region. The Commission will continue to support the development and dissemination of the Arctic Watch program to minimize the risk of vessel groundings or other mishaps that could harm sensitive marine environments, jeopardize Alaska Native hunting activities, and cause harm to key subsistence species, including bowhead and beluga whales and walrus.
- The Commission serves on U.S. delegations to the International Whaling Commission and participates in the inter-agency development of 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 among other things reviews progress on implementing the Circumpolar Action Plan to conserve polar bears, and meetings of the U.S.-Russia Polar Bear Commission. The Commission anticipates continuing these roles in FY 2025, although activity under the bilateral agreement with Russia is currently on hold.
- In addition to providing dozens of formal recommendations to other federal agencies regarding implementation of 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 reviewed the science to provide updates on strandings of large whales along the East Coast. The Commission also, participated in meetings with the Department of Interior, NOAA Office of Marine Sanctuaries, the Northwest Hawaiian Islands Coral Reef Ecosystem Reserve Advisory Council, and other partners as they work toward meeting the Administration's America the Beautiful Challenge.

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. The Commission has focused a portion of its FY 2024 grant program on advancing Diversity, Equity, Inclusiveness, Belonging, Accessibility and Justice (DEIBAJ) in marine mammal science. Recently, the Commission provided support for an intensive learning experience in Hawai'i for underrepresented, minority high school students to learn about marine mammal science. The Commission also 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 established 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 with 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, the Commission has high employee satisfaction. 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 participate in our work and to provide learning experiences for college students or recent graduates, particularly those from Alaska Native and/or other underserved communities. In FY 2023, the Commission provided funds to support an Alaska Sea Grant summer internship with the IPCoMM and will continue to work with Alaska Sea Grant in FY 2025.

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. 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 resource agencies, and Tribes and tribal organizations (e.g., IPCoMM and species- or region-specific Alaska Native Organizations). The Commission reviews numerous environmental analyses and applications seeking authorizations to take marine mammals, including taking incidental to 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.

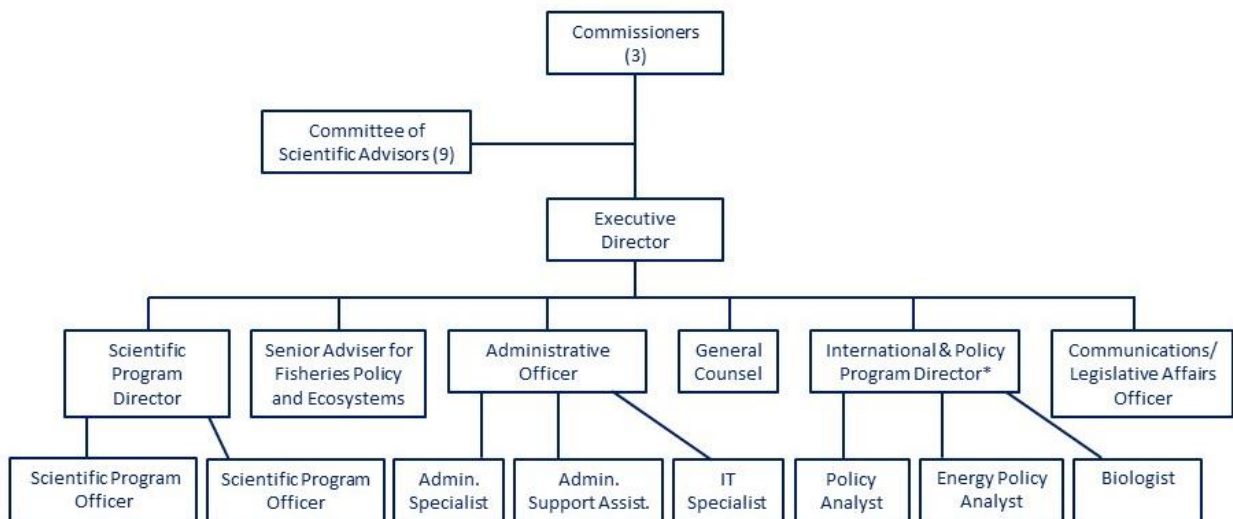
Statutory Duties

The Commission is charged with fulfilling basic statutory duties as set forth in section 202 and other sections of the MMPA. To meet these responsibilities, the Commission:

- Reviews all marine mammal stock assessment reports and related documents prepared by NMFS and FWS;
- Participates in take reduction teams and recommends 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.
- Reviews 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;
- Reviews all scientific research and other permit applications involving the taking or importing 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;
- Consults 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;
- Reviews all proposals for listing, or changing the listing status, of marine mammals under the Endangered Species Act (ESA);
- Recommends actions to enhance and monitor 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, Rice's whale, southern sea otter, polar bear, bearded seal, ringed seal, and West Indian manatee;
- Promotes co-management of marine mammals taken for subsistence purposes by Alaska Natives pursuant to section 119 of the MMPA and effective implementation of tribal consultation requirements established under Executive Order 13175; and

- Facilitates 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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