



# 2023 ANNUAL REPORT

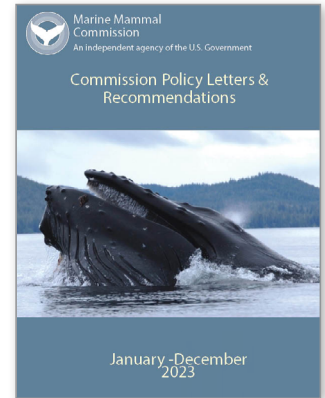
## About Us

The Marine Mammal Commission is an independent federal agency charged under the [Marine Mammal Protection Act \(MMPA\)](#) with providing comprehensive oversight of federal government science, policy, and management actions affecting marine mammals and their ecosystems. The MMPA acknowledges the integral role marine mammals play in the world's oceans and in some freshwater habitats.

**Legal and Policy Oversight:** The Commission reviews actions proposed by federal and state agencies and other stakeholders to further the MMPA's policies. We recommend measures to minimize adverse impacts on marine mammals and their habitats and promote science-based, practical, cost-effective, solutions to conservation and management issues related to marine mammals. In 2023, the Commission sent [over fifty letters](#) commenting on and providing recommendations concerning proposed policies and actions under the MMPA and [related laws](#). The Commission tracked and reviewed proposed activities associated with [offshore wind energy development](#) to anticipate and minimize potentially adverse impacts on marine mammals. The Commission held workshops and webinars to provide advice to the Marine Mammal Health and Stranding Response Program and participated on the Working Group on Marine Mammal Unusual Mortality Events, with a heightened focus on [large whale strandings along the Atlantic coast](#).

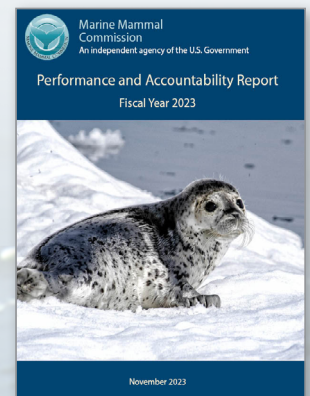
**Community & Stakeholder Engagement:** The Commission facilitates cooperation and communication among government agencies, marine mammal scientists, conservation advocates, Alaska Native Organizations (ANOs) and ocean resource users through meetings, webinars, briefings and other outreach. The Commission 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. In 2023, the Commission co-hosted a [North Atlantic right whale tagging workshop](#) to review the science and inform research permitting decisions. Throughout 2023, we consulted with and provided briefings for Congressional offices, federal agencies, ANOs and NGOs to encourage partnerships and explore solutions to complex marine mammal conservation challenges, including those involving [effects of climate change](#), North Atlantic and [North Pacific right whales](#), [Rice's whales](#), and the preparation of marine mammal stock assessments.

## Letters



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

## Performance and Accountability Report



Review our FY2023 [Performance and Accountability Report](#) for an overview of our accomplishments.

# HIGHLIGHTS FROM 2023

**Reducing Marine Mammal Bycatch Globally:** The Commission addresses global marine mammal bycatch at multiple levels through its [policy work](#), [grants program](#), and participation in take reduction teams. In 2023, we continued to focus on preventing the extinction of [North Atlantic right whales](#), mitigating entanglement risks to humpback whales on the West Coast, and reducing bycatch of [false killer whales](#) in the Hawaii longline fishery. We collaborated with the Atlantic Large Whale, Pelagic Longline, and False Killer Whale [Take Reduction Teams](#) in developing and recommending bycatch mitigation measures, engaged in efforts to further ropeless or pop-up gear technology, and provided input on federal budget priorities concerning these issues.



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



Learn more about our [2023 Grant Awards](#).

**Supporting Marine Mammal Research and Collaboration:** The Commission's small [grants and research program](#) funds novel, low-cost, small-scale projects designed to leverage available funding and catalyze future work. In 2023, we [funded seven projects](#) that further the conservation and management goals of the MMPA and study the effects of climate change on marine mammals. The Commission provided support for an intensive learning experience in Hawai'i for underrepresented, minority high school students to learn about marine mammal science and an Alaska Sea Grant summer internship with the Indigenous People's Council for Marine Mammals (IPCoMM). The Commission advised the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) on the

development of Health MAP, which is designed to maximize the availability and use of marine mammal health information, and integrate it with ecosystem data. The Commission also engaged 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.

**International Conservation:** The Commission supports and participates in many international efforts that further the goals of the MMPA. Commissioner Gulland continued to lead the [global network of marine mammal stranding responders](#) and the Executive Director continued serving on the International Whaling Commission Scientific Committee. The Commission continued to participate in efforts to persuade Mexico to enforce gillnet bans in the northern Gulf of California, the key for avoiding extinction of the critically endangered [vaquita](#). The Commission also continued to lead the [Rare Pinniped Conservation Network](#), planning and guiding its second successful meeting. A team of Commission scientists worked with local researchers to enhance conservation of Mekong River Irrawaddy dolphins in Cambodia.



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

**Emphasizing Science-Based Decision Making:** The Commission promotes the use of the best-available science in decision-making as mandated by the MMPA and related statutes. We track and report on relevant research funding by federal agencies through our annual [Survey of Federally Funded Marine Mammal Research](#). The Commission continued engagement with ANOs, such as IPCoMM and the Chugach Regional Resources Commission Marine Mammal Working Group, to advance research and management of marine mammals and safeguard cultural, economic, and subsistence values. The Commission also [co-led a scientific symposium](#) with NMFS and the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History focused on the science and management issues facing Rice's whales and North Pacific and North Atlantic right whales. The Commission commented on proposed critical habitat designation for Rice's whales, the Chumash Heritage National Marine Sanctuary designation, multiple actions related to take reduction teams, and updates to NMFS's Technical Guidance for assessing the effects of anthropogenic sound on marine mammal hearing.

