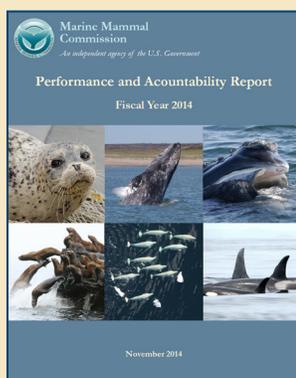
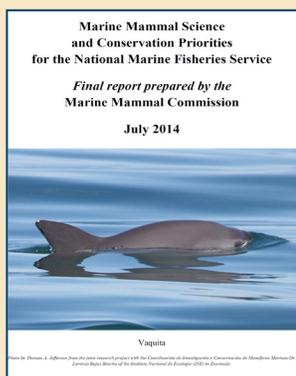


Marine Mammal Commission Strategic Plan (FY15-19)¹



2014 Performance and Accountability Report highlights top accomplishments in 2014³



Marine Mammal Commission 2014 Priorities Report⁵

About Us

The Marine Mammal Commission (Commission) is an independent government agency charged by the Marine Mammal Protection Act to further the conservation of marine mammals and their environment. We work to ensure that marine mammal populations are restored and maintained as functioning elements of healthy marine ecosystems in the world’s oceans. We provide science-based oversight of domestic and international policies and actions of federal agencies with mandates to address human impacts on marine mammals and their ecosystems. Our role is unique—we are the only U.S. entity that provides comprehensive oversight of all science, policy, and management actions affecting marine mammals. Our work is centered on five strategic objectives outlined in our [FY15-19 Strategic Plan](#)¹, and we pay special attention to [particular species](#)² considered to be most vulnerable to human activities.

Recent Accomplishments

The Commission’s [Performance and Accountability Report](#)³ provides a detailed overview of our accomplishments for 2014. Listed below are a few highlights.

- *Offshore Energy:* In response to a request by the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management for comments on planned oil and gas lease sales off Alaska, we mapped and provided recommendations on environmentally sensitive areas in the Arctic and in Cook Inlet aimed at minimizing the impacts of offshore energy exploration and development on marine mammal populations and subsistence communities that depend on them.
- *Species Conservation:* We provided technical and funding support for the conservation and recovery of the vaquita, the world’s most endangered small cetacean. We also provided analyses in support of extending a rule aimed at reducing ship strike deaths of right whales and participated in consultations on the risks posed by ship traffic in Bering Strait to both whales and Alaskan Native hunters.
- *Marine Mammal Health Monitoring and Analysis Platform:* We are co-leading the development of a web-based data management and visualization platform for marine mammal health information. This will allow ready access to data on trends in marine mammal health by the public, scientists, and decision-makers.
- *Commission Letters:* In 2014 we [submitted 122 letters](#)⁴ to federal agencies and various action proponents with specific recommendations aimed at minimizing impacts of human activities on marine mammals.

1 Strategic Plan: <https://www.mmc.gov/priority-topics/>

2 Species of special concern: <https://www.mmc.gov/priority-topics/species-of-concern/>

3 Performance and Accountability Report: https://www.mmc.gov/wp-content/uploads/MMC_FY14_PAR.pdf

4 2014 Commission letters: <https://www.mmc.gov/letters-and-reports/letters/>



Credit: Northeast Fisheries Observer Program, NEFSC/NOAA

Strengthening Partnerships and Collaboration

The current and future budget outlook for the Commission and for science-based federal agencies in general requires us to be more strategic about our work, establish priorities, and explore partnerships with other agencies and organizations. The [Priorities Report](#)⁵ released by the Commission in 2014, focused on the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) but applicable more broadly, provides guidance for funding decisions to optimize the effectiveness of research on and conservation of marine mammals and marine ecosystems. We will continue to look for ways to reduce costs and leverage resources from external partners. For example, every year our [annual meeting](#)⁶ brings together science, policy, and

management experts to discuss the most pressing issues related to marine mammals. We also promote partnerships and support targeted conservation-oriented research through our [Research Grants Program](#)⁷.

Highlighted below are a few examples of activities and projects we plan to undertake in 2015-2016.

- *Gulf of Mexico Marine Mammal Research and Monitoring:* We will convene a meeting of scientists, resource managers, and industry representatives working in the Gulf of Mexico to identify priority marine mammal information needs for the next 15 years, promote collaboration and data sharing, and explore potential funding sources.
- *Marine Mammal Health Data Standards:* We will convene workshops in 2015-2016 to enable health and data management experts to develop standards for marine mammal health information among federal, state, and private agencies, including the broader ocean observing community. These efforts will facilitate integration of this information with environmental and public health data, and improve public knowledge of marine mammal health trends.
- *Vaquita:* We will work with U.S. and Mexican agencies to conduct an international Economic Summit that focuses on providing local communities with financially, socially, and ecologically viable alternatives to the gillnet fishing that is driving the vaquita toward extinction. We will also maintain support for monitoring vaquita abundance and trends.
- *Advanced Survey Technology for Marine Mammals:* We will continue to work with NMFS to evaluate innovative, cost-effective ways of surveying to inform stock assessments. We will convene a workshop to assess NMFS's use of passive acoustic survey methods and will produce a report on the use of unmanned aerial systems.
- *Marine Mammal Bycatch:* Fisheries bycatch is the number one human cause of marine mammal mortality. We will continue to participate on NMFS's marine mammal take-reduction teams, fund relevant research, and provide advice on measures to reduce bycatch.

⁵ 2014 Priorities Report: https://www.mmc.gov/wp-content/uploads/final_priorities_rpt_071514.pdf

⁶ 2014 Annual Meeting: <https://www.mmc.gov/events-meetings-and-workshops/marine-mammal-commission-annual-meetings/2014-annual-meeting-washington-d-c/>

⁷ Research Grants Program: <https://www.mmc.gov/grants-and-research-survey/>

