

Permits are not issued in the USA.

The Marine Mammal Protection Act and the Endangered Species Act do not provide for permits or other authorizations to view or interact with wild marine mammals and sea turtles, except for specific listed purposes such as scientific research. We maintain as policy that interacting with wild marine life outside of permitted research should not be attempted and viewing marine mammals and sea turtles must be conducted in a manner that does not harass the animals. We do not support, condone, approve, or authorize activities that involve closely approaching, interacting, or attempting to interact with whales, dolphins, porpoises, seals, sea lions, and sea turtles in the wild. This includes attempting to swim with, pet, touch, or elicit a reaction from the animals.

Enforcement

Beyond science and regulations, we enforce more than 40 laws designed to protect marine life and their habitat. We enforce domestic laws and international treaty requirements to ensure these global marine resources are available for future generations. In partnership with states and other federal agencies, our special agents and enforcement officers work on all U.S. coasts and inland riverways to ensure compliance with the nation's marine resource laws and take enforcement action when violators disobey the laws.

Our primary jurisdiction is the U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone, which includes waters from 3 to 200 miles off the U.S. coast, including more than 3 million square miles of open-ocean and more than 95,000 miles of coastline. This includes 14 marine sanctuaries and five marine national monuments.

Key laws we enforce:

- [Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act](#)
- [Marine Mammal Protection Act](#)
- [Endangered Species Act](#)
- [Lacey Act and more](#)

Report A Violation (800) 853-1964

NOAA Fisheries' Enforcement Hotline provides live operator coverage 24 hours a day, 7 days a week for anyone in the United States to report a federal marine resource violation. During regular business hours, you may also contact the closest [NOAA Office of Law Enforcement field office](#) to report a possible violation.

Examples of violations include, but are not limited to:

- Feeding, injuring, or killing dolphins, whales, seals, sea lions, or any other marine mammal.
- Feeding, injuring, or killing sea turtles or harvesting sea turtle eggs.
- Intentional mislabeling of seafood for profit.
- Buying or selling fish without the proper permits.

Examples of information to include in your report are:

- Location, time, and date of the activity.
- Description of the activity.
- Name(s) of the vessel, owner/operator, captain, crew, or additional witnesses.

Rewards

Protecting our nation's living marine resources is a team effort, and information from the public plays a vital role. NOAA's Office of Law Enforcement (OLE) may, on a case-by-case basis, issue rewards to individuals who provide information that leads to an arrest, conviction, civil penalty assessment, or forfeiture of property for violation(s) of the laws and regulations NOAA enforces. In determining whether a reward is appropriate, OLE will evaluate whether the information provided was sufficiently substantial such that the unlawful activity would likely have continued undetected and/or a successful prosecution would not have been able to have been obtained without the information provided.

What We Do

U.S. marine resource laws exist to ensure sustainable fish populations, protect threatened marine species and the habitats they live in and to ensure these resources are around for future generations to enjoy. When people cheat and willfully violate fishery management regulations it puts those who comply with the rules at a significant disadvantage. When people harass or harm protected marine species, such as whales, dolphins or sea turtles, it threatens the survivability and, ultimately, the future of the species.

The mission of NOAA's Office of Law Enforcement is to not let that happen.

OLE is dedicated to enforcing laws that conserve and protect our nation's marine resources and their natural habitat. We ensure a level playing field for honest fishermen, defend U.S. economic and public health interest from illegal international and domestic fishing activities, and protect vulnerable marine species in order to ensure these global resources do not disappear.

[Learn more about enforcement](#)

NOAA's Office of Law Enforcement protects marine wildlife and habitat by enforcing domestic laws and supporting international treaty requirements designed to ensure global resources are available for future generations. OLE special agents, enforcement officers, as well as investigative and mission support staff provide stakeholders with compliance assistance and education about the nation's marine resource laws.

OLE directly supports the core mission mandates of NOAA Fisheries— maximizing productivity of sustainable fisheries and fishing communities, as well as protection, recovery, and conservation of protected species—

through its efforts to enforce and promote compliance with the marine resource protection laws and implementing regulations under NOAA's purview.

OLE jurisdiction generally covers ocean waters between 3 and 200 miles offshore and adjacent to all U.S. states and territories; this is called the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). The OLE jurisdiction includes:

- 3.36 million square miles of open ocean.
- More than 95,000 miles of U.S. coastline.
- 14 National Marine Sanctuaries and five Marine National Monuments.

OLE conducts enforcement activities through patrols both on and off the water as well as monitoring vessels electronically; criminal and civil investigations; partnerships with state, tribal, federal, and nongovernmental organizations; outreach and compliance assistance; and the use of innovative technological tools.

Marine Mammal Protection Act

Congress passed the Marine Mammal Protection Act in 1972 in response to increasing concerns among scientists and the public that significant declines in some species of marine mammals were caused by human activities. The MMPA established a national policy to prevent marine mammal species and population stocks from declining beyond the point where they ceased to be significant functioning elements of the ecosystems of which they are a part. This was the first legislation to mandate an ecosystem-based approach to marine resource management.

Three federal entities share responsibility for implementing the MMPA:

- **NOAA Fisheries**—responsible for the protection of whales, dolphins, porpoises, seals, and sea lions.
- **U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service**—responsible for the protection of walrus, manatees, sea otters, and polar bears.
- **Marine Mammal Commission**—provides independent, science-based oversight of domestic and international policies and actions of federal agencies addressing human impacts on marine mammals and their ecosystems.

The [Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service](#), a part of the Department of Agriculture, is responsible for regulations managing marine mammals at public display facilities (i.e., aquaria and zoos) under the Animal Welfare Act.

All marine mammals are protected under the MMPA. Some are also protected under the Endangered Species Act and the [Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora](#).

Innovative Legislation

The MMPA was an innovative piece of legislation for the early 1970s. In addition to shifting the focus of conservation from species to ecosystems, the MMPA contains other features never before established in legislation. The MMPA:

- Included protection for population stocks in addition to species and subspecies—a population stock is a group of marine mammals of the same species or smaller taxa in a common spatial arrangement that interbreed when mature.
- Shifted the burden from resource managers to resource users to show that proposed taking of marine mammals would not adversely affect the resource or the ecosystem—"take" as defined in the MMPA means to harass, hunt, capture, or kill, or attempt to harass, hunt, capture, or kill any marine mammal.
- Established the concept of "optimum sustainable populations" to ensure healthy ecosystems. Prior to the MMPA, the management of marine species was aimed at producing a "maximum sustainable yield" to ensure the species replenished itself for an adequate harvest in subsequent years.
- Directed federal agencies to seek changes in international agreements, such as the Convention for the Regulation of Whaling and the North Pacific Fur Seal Convention, so they corresponded to the protections outlined in the act.

Amendments of 1992

The MMPA was amended in 1992 to include Title IV, the [Marine Mammal Health and Stranding Response Program](#), which mandates emergency responses to marine mammals in distress, monitoring health and health trends in marine mammal populations, and investigating [marine mammal unusual mortality events](#). Title IV was subsequently amended in 2000 to include the [John H. Prescott Marine Mammal Rescue Assistance Grant Program](#), which provides grants or cooperative agreements to eligible stranding network participants for: (1) recovery and treatment (i.e., rehabilitation) of stranded marine mammals; (2) data collection from living or dead stranded marine mammals, and (3) facility upgrades, operation costs, and staffing needs directly related to the recovery and treatment of stranded marine mammals and the collection of data from living or dead stranded marine mammals.

Amendments of 1994

The MMPA was substantially amended in 1994 to provide:

- A statutory definition of the term “[harassment](#),” which is a prohibited activity and means: “any act of pursuit, torment, or annoyance, which -- has the potential to injure a marine mammal or marine mammal stock in the wild (Level A harassment); or has the potential to disturb a marine mammal or marine mammal stock in the wild by causing disruption of behavioral patterns, including, but not limited to, migration, breathing, nursing, breeding, feeding, or sheltering (Level B harassment).”
- Certain exceptions to the moratorium on take, including for [takes of small numbers of marine mammals incidental to specified activities](#), when [access by Alaska Natives to marine mammal subsistence resources can be preserved](#), and the [general authorization for scientific research](#).
- A program to authorize and reduce the taking of marine mammals incidental to commercial fishing operations. Learn more about the [Marine Mammal Authorization Program](#).
- A requirement to prepare stock assessments for all marine mammal stocks in waters under U.S. jurisdiction. Learn more about [stock assessment reports](#).
- Studies of [interactions between pinnipeds \(seals and sea lions\) and fisheries](#).

Protection, Conservation, and Recovery of Marine Mammals

To protect all marine mammals, the MMPA prohibits the “taking” of any marine mammal species in U.S. waters where “take” means to hunt, harass, capture, or kill any marine mammal or attempting to do so. It also prohibits the import and export of marine mammals and their parts or products.

Exceptions to these prohibitions include:

- Permitted incidental take (e.g., unintentional take) by commercial fisheries managed through the [Marine Mammal Authorization Program](#).
- [Authorized incidental take](#) that may occur during [non-fishing activities](#) including oil and gas development, military readiness activities, renewable energy projects, construction projects, and research.

- Permitted directed take and import for scientific research, enhancement, commercial or educational photography, and public display.
- Permitted import, export, and receipt of parts for scientific research.
- Pre-act determinations for marine mammal parts taken before December 21, 1972.
- Take by Alaska natives for subsistence use or to create and sell authentic articles of handicrafts and clothing.

In addition to managing the taking of marine mammals, NOAA Fisheries also performs the following conservation and management actions:

- Develops and implements conservation plans for species designated as depleted.
- Develops and implements [take reduction plans](#) to minimize dead and seriously injured marine mammals in commercial fishing gear.
- Coordinates the National Marine Mammal Stranding Network to support the mandates of the [Marine Mammal Health and Stranding Response Program](#).
- Partner with other nations to ensure that international trade does not threaten species.
- Investigates and prosecutes violations of the MMPA.

[Read the full text of the MMPA](#)

<https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/topic/laws-policies#marine-mammal-protection-act>

More Information

[www.https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/topic/marine-life-viewing-guidelines](https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/topic/marine-life-viewing-guidelines)