



NEWS FROM NOAA

NATIONAL OCEANIC & ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION • US DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

Contact: Connie Barclay
(301) 713-2370

NOAA05-078
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
June 16, 2005

ADMINISTRATION BILL UPDATES PROTECTIONS FOR MARINE MAMMALS ***NOAA Joins Administration Partners in Resubmitting*** ***Marine Mammal Protection Act Reauthorization Bill***

NOAA Fisheries Service, the principal agency charged with protecting marine mammals, joined the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Marine Mammal Commission, and Department of Defense in resubmitting the Administration's Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) reauthorization bill to Congress today. This proposed legislation fulfills a goal of the administration's U.S. Ocean Action Plan. The bill's major amendments would strengthen initiatives to reduce marine mammal bycatch, clarify the definition of marine mammal harassment for the regulated community and the public, and enhance the Act's enforcement capabilities.

"We have worked closely with a number of partner agencies to address the most significant issues facing marine mammals today," said Dr. Bill Hogarth, NOAA Fisheries Service Director. "The Administration has testified on this bill a number of times. We've briefed Congress and the public on this bill, and we believe that it will improve marine mammal conservation and management for years to come."

For example, biologists believe that modifications to fishing gear and practices are needed to reduce the number of marine mammals being injured and killed in fishing gear. The Administration's bill would help reduce marine mammal bycatch by requiring more research on marine mammal safe gear. The bill would also clarify in the harassment definition activities that disturb these animals, such as chasing, feeding and swimming with marine mammals in the wild, which are illegal. The bill would also improve enforcement of the Act by increasing the allowable fines and penalties for MMPA violations. The MMPA's fine and penalty levels have gone unchanged since the Act's original passage more than 30 years ago.

The Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972 is the principal Federal legislation that guides marine mammal species protection and conservation. This Act protects all marine mammals within the waters of the United States. NOAA Fisheries Service is responsible for whales, dolphins, porpoises, seals and sea lions, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service manages manatees, sea otters, polar bears, dugongs, and walrus. In addition, the Marine Mammal Commission provides an oversight role for the Federal agencies implementing the MMPA.

Congress passed the MMPA in 1972. The MMPA prohibits, with certain exceptions, the take of marine mammals in U.S. waters and by U.S. citizens on the high seas, and the importation of marine mammals and marine mammal products into the U.S. The MMPA was last reauthorized in 1994. It comes up for reauthorization every five years.

- more -

“Today, more than 30 years have passed since the enactment of the MMPA,” Hogarth said. “In that time, there have been many successes, but we need to do more. Some of the best minds in the country have been working on this bill for reauthorization, and we believe we can do more to recover and conserve marine mammal populations.”

NOAA Fisheries Service is dedicated to protecting and preserving our nation’s living marine resources and their habitat through scientific research, management and enforcement. NOAA Fisheries Service provides effective stewardship of these resources for the benefit of the nation, supporting coastal communities that depend upon them, and helping to provide safe and healthy seafood to consumers and recreational opportunities for the American public.

NOAA, an agency of the U.S. Commerce Department, is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through the prediction and research of weather and climate-related events and providing environmental stewardship of the nation’s coastal and marine resources.

###

On the Web:

NOAA: <http://www.noaa.gov>

NOAA Fisheries: <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/>