

## **Marine Mammals Committee**

**Committee Members:** R. L. Brownell, Jr. (USA), C. Callahan (USA), J. Dines (USA), H. H. Edwards (USA), J. M. Lapsertis (USA), I. Martinez-Serrano (Mexico), S. L. McDonald (USA), T. J. McIntyre (USA), J. Moore (USA), D. K. Odell (USA, Chair), T. J. O'Shea (USA), C. W. Potter (USA), S. Sheffield (USA), R. J. Small (USA), and J. A. Thomas (USA).

### **Mission:**

The marine mammals committee was formed in 1921 and Chaired by E. W. Nelson. It is the longest-standing active committee of the American Society of Mammalogists. Its mission is to maintain and encourage interest in marine mammals in the ASM, to provide the Society membership with information about marine mammalogy, including conservation and legislative issues, to spearhead resolutions and legislation involving marine mammals, and to serve as a liaison between ASM and the Society for Marine Mammalogy (SMM). Members of the Marine Mammals Committee are frequently active in both ASM and SMM.

### **Information Items:**

**(1)** The Committee continually watches matters related to marine mammals and their environment. As appropriate, the committee may draft comments for Presidential signature or resolutions on certain items. Many of this committee's information items are short-lived and time-critical. We are looking forward to future posting of information items on the ASM web page.

**(2)** D. K. Odell will step down as chair of the Marine Mammal Committee after the June 2009 annual meeting of the ASM.

**(3) US Navy exercises off southern California coast**—On 14 October 2008, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) issued a proposed rule to govern the unintentional take of marine mammals by U.S. Navy activities off southern California. Naval training exercises will occur from 1 January 2009 through 31 December 2013, and possibly beyond. Expected activities include: air-to-surface and surface-to-surface gunnery exercises (machine gun fire), air-to-surface and surface-to-surface missile exercises, bombing exercises, mine warfare exercises, and anti-submarine warfare exercises (mid-frequency and high-frequency active sonar). The first Letter of Authorization was issued by NMFS on 22 January 2009 (authorizations will be reviewed and renewed annually) and include monitoring, mitigation and reporting measures designed to minimize take ("take" is defined to include many things, including harassment and death of marine mammal species).

**(4) 2010 National Marine Mammal Stranding Network conference**—The last National Marine Mammal Stranding Network meeting was held in 2005. The next national conference is scheduled for 5-9 April 2010 at the USFWS National Conservation

Training Center in Shepherdstown, WV. A steering committee has been formed that will narrow down the topics to be covered at the conference but invited presentations, poster sessions, workshops, and hands-on training sessions are planned.

**(5) NMFS Prescott Grant Funding**—Senate Resolution 859 was introduced into the Senate on 22 April 2009. Among other things, this bill would amend Title IV of the Marine Mammal Protection Act to increase the authorization for the Prescott grant program to \$7 million for each fiscal year (\$6 million to NMFS vs. \$4 million currently), increase the maximum award amount for projects from \$100,000 to \$200,000, officially establish an Emergency grant program and waive the matching requirement for emergency grants. It also addresses entanglements. SR 859 mirrors a similar resolution that already passed in the House.

**(6) North Atlantic right whale**—In January 2009, NOAA implemented a 10-knot speed limit in the shipping channels and other areas of the east coast where right whales commonly occur. Speed restrictions are designed to reduce the possibility of ships striking the highly endangered whales, causing death or injury. Restrictions are set to end in 2013, but researchers will evaluate the effectiveness of the speed rule before it expires.

**(7) Cook Inlet belugas**—This population currently numbers about 375 individuals, reduced from about 1,300 in the 1980s. In October 2008, the population was listed as Endangered under the ESA (over objections from AK Gov. Palin); they are threatened by oil/gas development, contaminants, shipping, and other factors. Procedures for designation of critical habitat are ongoing by NMFS (ordinarily designated at the time of listing).

**(8) 1st International Conference on Marine Protected Areas (MPAs)** was held 29 March - 3 April 2009 in Maui, HI and attended by >200 marine mammal scientists, MPA managers, and other marine experts from 40 countries. The Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society (WDCCS) presented findings that conclude that current MPAs are too small to adequately serve whales and dolphins; they found that 40% of existing MPAs for marine mammals are too small to offer any protection. Less than 1% of the world's marine mammal critical habitat has been identified; emphasis should be placed on rare and endangered species, but there also is a need to protect healthy populations so they do not become endangered. The WDCCS calls for a global network of MPAs to protect whales and dolphins, identification and mapping of critical habitat and hot spots, and creating networks of MPAs.

**(9) Wind energy** (coastal New Jersey) —In April 2009, consultants to the NJ State Department of Environmental Protection issued their authorized report "Ocean/Wind Power Ecological Baseline Studies" (312 pp.). The report states that wind power could potentially be harmful to the NJ coastal marine environment, and that the potential impact of wind turbine farms off the NJ coast includes noise levels that are high enough to disturb marine mammals. The report also found that there could be disruption of marine life due to the electrical current running through the large transmission lines associated

with the turbine farms. NJ Gov. Corzine is providing extensive verbal support for wind power and has plans for multiple large wind farms off the NJ coast.

**(10)** The Government of Japan continues its scientific whaling program under Article 8 of the IWC, which allows member countries to unilaterally kill whales for the purpose of scientific research. In 1987-1988 approximately 300 whales were taken through scientific research whaling; this number has increased to more than 1,000 per year and now includes six species. Since the commercial moratorium in 1986, over 12,000 whales have been taken for lethal scientific research in the Antarctic and the western North Pacific. Japan is currently the only country conducting lethal scientific research. Most members of the IWC believe this research is not needed for the management of these whales under the Commission.

**(11)** The Senate Foreign Relations Committee has presented a list of Treaties pending for Advice and Consent that it will consider in the 111th Congress. Treaties of interest to the ASM include the Convention on the Law of the Sea and the Convention on Biodiversity and the Convention on Albatross and Seabirds in the Southern Ocean. The URL is <http://foreign.senate.gov/treaties.pdf>

**Action Items:** None.

**Respectfully submitted,**  
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