

## Marine Mammals Committee

**Committee Members:** D. Allen, R. L. Brownell, Jr., C. M. Callahan, J. P. Dines (Chair), K. M. Dudzinski, H. H. Edwards, J. Lapsertis, M. S. Leslie, T. J. McIntyre, D. K. Odell, T. J. O'Shea, C. W. Potter, S. Sheffield, E. E. Smith.

### **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 the Society for Marine Mammals.

### **Information Items:**

- (1) The Committee welcomed new members Dee Allen and Christopher Callahan this year.
- (2) Members of the Committee monitored issues pertinent to the Committee's mission.

#### **(A) Update on the vaquita (*Phocoena sinus*)**

Based on acoustic surveys conducted late last summer, the population of vaquitas was estimated at 30 individuals, down 50% from the previous year. The critically endangered vaquita is a diminutive porpoise endemic to Mexico's Gulf of California and has the misfortune of being trapped in illegal gillnets set for the totoaba fish. The swimbladders of totoabas have a black market value of tens of millions of dollars, making their harvest difficult to control despite urgent efforts by the Mexican government and conservation organizations. In a last-ditch effort to save the species from extinction, plans are underway to use trained dolphins from the US Navy to help round up the last living vaquitas and move them to protected sea pens later this year. This action isn't without controversy as porpoises are extraordinarily difficult to maintain in captivity.

#### **(B) Change in status of humpback whale (*Megaptera novaeangliae*)**

The National Marine Fisheries Service issued a final determination to revise the listing status of the humpback whale (*Megaptera novaeangliae*) under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). Formerly listed as an endangered species globally, *M. novaeangliae* has now been divided into 14 distinct population segments (DPS). The species-level endangered listing has been removed, and in its place four DPSs are listed as endangered and one DPS as threatened. The remaining nine DPSs were determined to not warrant listing.

**Action Items:** None.

**Respectfully submitted,**

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