



WORKING GROUP TO DEVELOP RECOMMENDATIONS TO ESTIMATE BYCATCH FOR THE MARINE MAMMAL PROTECTION ACT IMPORT PROVISIONS

For decades, the United States (U.S.) government has fostered practices to estimate and reduce marine mammal bycatch in U.S. fisheries. Now, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) has issued the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) Import Provisions, a new rule requiring nations that export fish and fish products to the U.S. to adhere to bycatch standards comparable to those of the U.S. Many of the affected nations may not have sufficient data or the internal monitoring and regulatory capacity to track, evaluate, and reduce marine mammal mortality. Recognizing this, the Lenfest Ocean Program has convened an expert working group to develop scientific tools to assess data sets and methods in order to evaluate the rates and impacts of bycatch on marine mammal populations.

Marine Mammal Protection Act Import Provisions

Under the new rule, NOAA has classified foreign fisheries that export fish and fish products to the U.S. based on their frequency of marine mammal interactions. Some fisheries already demonstrated that they do not allow the intentional killing of marine mammals in commercial fisheries. For other export fisheries, starting January 1, 2017, nations entered a five-year exemption period to provide the time necessary to develop regulatory programs comparable in effectiveness to the U.S. program. Actions may include:

- assessing marine mammal stocks, estimating bycatch, calculating bycatch limits, and reducing total bycatch below the bycatch limit for fisheries that have interactions with marine mammals; or
- demonstrating alternative measures that are comparable in effectiveness to those governing bycatch in U.S. fisheries.

By the end of the five-year period, each exporting nation must have successfully applied

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- André Punt

for and received a “comparability finding” for each of its fisheries from NOAA to continue exporting fish and fish products to the U.S. Throughout the exemption period, NOAA will work with nations, to the extent possible, to support their efforts to meet the regulation’s standards.

Working Group Charge

The scientific tools that the working group produces will aim assist nations in their efforts to apply to NOAA for the comparability finding. Led by Dr. André Punt, University of Washington (UW) and the UW Ocean Modeling Forum, the working group will identify and recommend data sets and methods that could be used to assess marine mammal bycatch and its impacts, with a particular focus on data-poor fisheries and/or poorly monitored marine mammals. The working group will meet four times over 2018 and 2019, and will also develop user-friendly software that nations can tailor to their needs and evaluate potential management strategies.

WORKING GROUP MEMBERS

- André Punt, Chair, University of Washington
- Tessa Francis, Co-Chair, University of Washington Tacoma
- Rob Williams, Co-Chair, Oceans Initiative
- Philip Hammond, University of St. Andrews
- Jeffrey Moore, NOAA Southwest Fisheries Science Center
- Andrew Read, Duke University
- Randall Reeves, Okapi Wildlife Associates
- Maritza Sepulveda, University of Valparaiso
- Gudjon Mar Sigurdsson, Marine and Freshwater Research Institute
- Margaret (Megsie) Siple, University of Washington
- Gisli Vikingsson, Marine and Freshwater Research Institute
- Paul Wade, NOAA National Marine Mammal Laboratory
- Alex Zerbini, Contractor, NOAA National Marine Mammal Laboratory

WORKING GROUP OBSERVERS

- Rohan Currey, Marine Stewardship Council
- Kristy Long, NOAA Fisheries

Contact

For any questions, please contact Emily Knight, Manager, Lenfest Ocean Program, at eknight@lenfestocean.org or Tessa Francis, University of Washington Tacoma and the Ocean Modeling Forum, at tessa@uw.edu. To learn more about the Lenfest Ocean Program, follow us on Twitter @lenfestocean or sign up for our newsletter at www.lenfestocean.org. To learn more about the Ocean Modeling Forum, follow @oceanmodeling or visit www.oceanmodelingforum.org.

“ WE WILL PRODUCE SOFTWARE COUNTRIES CAN TAILOR TO THEIR NEEDS AND EVALUATE MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES TO TRACK AND REDUCE MARINE MAMMAL BYCATCH.”

- Tessa Francis