

<b><i>NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE POLICY 02-308</i></b> Effective on: March 9, 2012	
To be reviewed on: November 26, 2023	
Protected Resources Management	
Marine Mammal Health and Stranding Response Program	
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<b>Author name:</b> Protected Resources <b>Office:</b> Protected Resources	<b>Certified by:</b> Donna Wieting <b>Office:</b> Protected Resources
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I. Introduction

With the passage of the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) of 1972, the Secretary of Commerce granted the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration’s (NOAA) National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) jurisdiction over all cetaceans and all pinnipeds, except walrus, in U.S. waters. The MMPA also granted NMFS the authority to take stranded marine mammals in a humane manner, if such taking is for the protection or welfare of the mammal, the protection of the public health and welfare, or the nonlethal removal of nuisance animals. Following the passage of the MMPA, the marine mammal stranding network was formally established and organized as independent volunteer organizations coordinated through each of the NMFS jurisdictional regions.

II. Objective

Mounting concerns over marine mammal health and deteriorating ocean conditions prompted the passage of the Marine Mammal Health and Stranding Response Act (MMHSRA) in 1992, which was codified as Title IV of the MMPA. Title IV established the Marine Mammal Health and Stranding Response Program (MMHSRP) with three primary purposes to:

1. facilitate the collection and dissemination of reference data on the health of marine mammals and health trends of marine mammal populations in the wild;
2. correlate the health of marine mammals and marine mammal populations, in the wild, with available data on physical, chemical, and biological environmental parameters; and

3. coordinate effective responses to unusual mortality events (UME) by establishing a process in the Department of Commerce in accordance with Section 404 of the MMPA.

This directive establishes the framework for the implementation of the MMHSRP by NMFS. MMPA Title IV and implementing regulations are adopted by reference as the NMFS Policy on Marine Mammal Health and Stranding Response.

### III. Authorities and Responsibilities

Title IV of the MMPA establishes the following programs and responsibilities overseen by the NMFS Office of Protected Resources, NMFS Regional Offices and NMFS Science Centers:

- National Marine Mammal Stranding Network
- National Marine Mammal UME Investigation Program
- National Marine Mammal Tissue Bank (NMMTB) and Quality Assurance Program
- Marine Mammal Health Biomonitoring, Research, and Development Program
- National Marine Mammal Entanglement Response Program
- John H. Prescott Marine Mammal Rescue Assistance Grant Program
- Information Management and Dissemination Program.

The National Marine Mammal Stranding Network consists of organizations nationwide that respond to stranded or entangled marine mammals. These organizations are authorized by NMFS to respond to stranding events under the authority of Section 112(c) or Section 109(h) of the MMPA.

Under a Scientific Research and Enhancement Permit issued under the MMPA and the Endangered Species Act (ESA) by the NMFS Office of Protected Resources' Permits Division, the MMHSRP authorizes stranding response by the National Marine Mammal Stranding Network members for ESA-listed marine mammal species, marine mammal entanglement response efforts, and a variety of marine mammal health-related research, monitoring or investigative activities. The MMHSRP obtains health information and samples from marine mammals that are stranded, undergoing rehabilitation, by-caught, subsistence hunted, remotely accessed, and live captured and released.

### IV. Measuring Effectiveness

This Policy will be reviewed and updated as necessary prior to the set review date (see page 1). Under MMPA, stock assessments are used to assess progress in protecting marine mammals and preventing them from diminishing below their optimal sustainable population. These reports are produced annually and data from the MMHSRP are reviewed and used in these reports. Effectiveness of Unusual

Mortality Event investigations is reviewed annually by the Working Group on Marine Mammal Unusual Mortality Events.

In addition, NMFS will hold quarterly conference calls and annual retreats with the regional stranding coordinators to discuss MMHSRP updates and needs. NMFS invites stranding networks to annual or biennial regional conferences to discuss stranding data, conduct training, provide information, and assess the effectiveness of current policies and procedures. NMFS continues to process new Stranding Agreement applications, as well as review and renew expiring Stranding Agreements on an as needed-basis according to the appropriate regional timetable.

V. References

Procedural directives will be issued to implement this policy as needed.

Signed  \_\_\_\_\_ 11/26/2018  
Chris Oliver Date  
Assistant Administrator for Fisheries