



PACIFIC

Assessing the Global Impact of Marine Debris and Derelict Fishing Gear on Marine Mammals: Beginning the dialog

Worldwide, more than 375 Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) have been specifically designated for or include populations of marine mammals. MPAs have been identified as a critical tool for managing ocean resources, yet their effectiveness is challenged by the highly mobile nature of marine species. Marine mammals may use key habitat within MPA boundaries, but may also spend a significant amount of time elsewhere and therefore are often affected by global issues such as marine debris.

The need for managers charged with protecting marine mammals to network is evident. It is also evident that certain issues, such as the threat posed to marine mammals by marine debris, are shared issues that managers may tackle more successfully together. With all of this in mind, marine mammal and MPA experts developed the idea for The First International Conference on Marine Mammal Protected Areas that will be held in Wailea, Maui in March of 2009.



Humpback whale entangled in marine debris. Photos courtesy HIHWNMS, #932-1489.

In order to assess the global impact of marine debris and derelict fishing gear at the Conference, a special session featuring entanglement and marine debris experts will be held. This session will provide a forum for discussion and will highlight current strategies. It will also provide a better assessment of the extent of the risk that marine debris poses to marine mammals worldwide as well as a more thorough understanding of the approaches that are being utilized presently.

While The First International Conference on Marine Mammal Protected Areas will cover a broad range of other topics as well, the overarching goal is to foster communication and establish lasting cooperation with regard to shared issues as they relate to the protection of highly mobile and migratory animals.

WHAT IS MARINE DEBRIS?

Marine debris is any persistent solid material that is manufactured or processed and directly or indirectly, intentionally or unintentionally, disposed of or abandoned into the marine environment or the Great Lakes.

MARINE DEBRIS SOURCES

Sources of marine debris include land-based sources, such as littering, dumping, and industrial losses. Ocean-based debris can come from fishing vessels, cargo ships, stationary platforms, and other vessels.

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MANDATES

Mandates supporting NOAA's marine debris efforts include the following:

- Marine Debris Research, Prevention, and Reduction Act of 2006, 33 U.S.C. §§ 1951 et seq.
- U.S. Ocean Action Plan
- Coral Reef Conservation Act
- Marine Plastic Pollution Research and Control Act, 33 U.S.C. §§ 1901 et seq.
- Marine Protection, Research, and Sanctuaries Act, (Title II) 33 U.S.C. §§ 1401 et seq.
- Clean Water Act, 33 U.S.C. §§ 1251 et seq.

CURRENT PARTNERS

- NOAA Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary
- NOAA Office of National Marine Sanctuaries
- NOAA National Marine Fisheries Service Protected Resources and Office of International Affairs
- NOAA Marine Debris Program
- Australian Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts
- Other NGO and international partners to be determined

BENEFITS OF THE PROJECT

- Provide a forum for networking for marine mammal and marine protected area managers
- Disseminate information, assessment techniques and mitigation measures a broad international audience
- Develop an assessment of the extent of the risk that marine debris poses to marine mammals worldwide and what is currently being done about the problem throughout the world and within marine protected areas
- Develop a strategy to address shared issues such as marine debris

CONTACTS

Naomi McIntosh
NOAA Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale
National Marine Sanctuary
Naomi.Mcintosh@noaa.gov
(808) 397-2651 x 251

David Mattila
NOAA Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale
National Marine Sanctuary
David.Mattila@noaa.gov
(808) 879-2818 x 5



Endangered Hawaiian monk seal entangled in a derelict rope and buoy. *Photo courtesy of NOAA Fisheries.*

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