



NOAA FISHERIES

Report large whales in distress to either:

1-(877) SOS-WHAlE
(767-9425)
24/7 hotline

Hail the United States Coast
Guard on **VHF CH-16**

Ocean users play an important role in efforts to save whales in distress from pain, deformity, and death.

Safety first!

Entangled whales are unpredictable and potentially dangerous for would-be rescuers and the animal. **Stay a minimum of 100 yards away.**

Prompt Reporting

Prompt reporting of injured, entangled, and ship-struck whales is the best way to help the distressed animal.

Stay with the animal

If you are able to safely do so, stay with the animal until trained help arrives.

Trained Teams

California has a network of highly trained and experienced teams authorized (NMFS permit #932-1489) to respond to whales entangled in fishing gear and marine debris.

Whale Entanglements off California Fact Sheet



The concern

Entanglement of marine mammals, particularly large whales, in fishing gear and marine debris is a concern because of the potential impacts to marine mammals (individually and at a stock/population level), the fishing industry, and the environment.

Commercial fishery estimated average bycatch from 1990-1999¹:

- World-wide: **307,753** cetaceans² per year
- United States: **3,029** cetaceans² per year (1% of global estimate)

Reported large whale entanglements

- U.S. west coast (California/Oregon/Washington): an average of **11** large whales³ reported as entangled per year from 2000-2012⁴
 - Actual number of entangled whales is unknown; reports are based on opportunistic sightings reported to the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) and the disentanglement response networks; also from NMFS commercial fishery observers
 - Commercial fishermen have been actively engaged with NMFS on developing methods to reduce interactions with marine mammal along the west coast
 - Gray (*Eschrichtius robustus*) and humpback (*Megaptera novaeangliae*) were the most frequently reported entangled whale species
- California: an average of **8** large whale entanglement reports per year from 2000 to 2012⁴

¹ Read A., P. Drinker, and S. Northridge. 2006. Bycatch of Marine Mammals in U.S. and Global Fisheries. Conservation Biology Volume 20, No. 1, 163-169

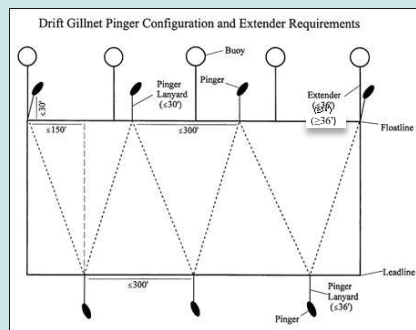
² Whales, dolphins, and porpoises

³ West coast large whales include: blue, fin, gray, humpback, minke, north Pacific right, sei, and sperm whales; reported entangled whale species include: fin, gray, humpback, minke, and sperm

⁴ NMFS whale entanglement databases: Southwest Region (California), Northwest Region (Oregon and Washington)

Conservation case study: Gillnet modifications to reduce entanglements

- A Pacific Cetacean Take Reduction Team was formed in 1996 and led to requirements for the placement of acoustical pingers and deployment depths in the CA large mesh drift gillnet fishery targeting swordfish/thresher sharks
- Acoustic pingers produce sounds to warn animals of the presence of the net (required on all large mesh drift gillnet sets)



Required gear configuration on large mesh drift gillnets in California

Results (1996-2009)⁷:

- Nearly 50% reduction in cetacean bycatch; and
- no observed beaked whale bycatch

⁷Carretta, J.V. and J. Barlow. 2011. Long-term effectiveness, failure rates, and "dinner bell" properties of acoustic pingers in a gillnet fishery. Marine Technology

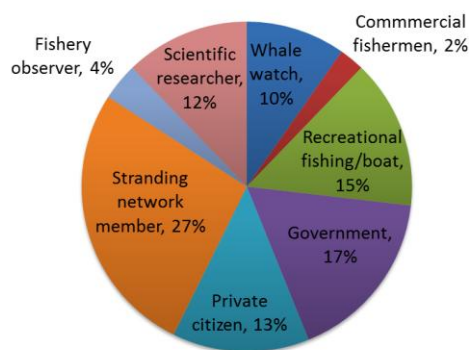
Gear types

For many confirmed entanglement reports, an on-water response is not possible and a photograph or description of the entanglement is all that can be obtained. The origin of the entangling gear (active fishing gear or marine debris) is difficult to identify.

- From 2000-2010, the **majority of large whale entanglements reported in California (38%) were identified as trap/pot gear**; 30% of reports indicated netting and the source of the entangling gear was unidentified in 32% of reports
- A Fixed Gear Guide characterizing commercial fixed gear fisheries off California, Oregon, and Washington is available to assist responders and managers with identification of the entangling gear: http://swr.nmfs.noaa.gov/psd/fixed_gear.htm.

Reporting sources

NMFS uses reports to track entanglements and provide the foundation for disentanglement response, if possible. Reporting of entangled whales originates from a variety of sources with the majority coming from on-water observations (figure below). There are greater number of entanglements reported near larger cities such as San Francisco, Los Angeles and San Diego where boating activity is higher. It is important to note that where the entangled whale is initially sighted may not necessarily reflect where the entanglement occurred.



Reporting party for whale entanglement reports in California from 2000 to 2010 (n=82)

How you can help

- ✓ **Raise awareness** of marine mammal entanglements by sharing this document, the Fixed Gear Guide, brochures, videos, and on the web
- ✓ **Take photos** of the marine mammal (dorsal/back area, fins, fluke/tail, and head) and the entanglement (buoy(s), line(s), and netting)
- ✓ **Assess the situation** by documenting: mammal species, nature of distress, general condition of the whale, location (GPS), time of last sighting, approximate size, weather, animal speed and heading, and any identifying markings on gear
- ✓ **Report** entangled whales to the **SOS-WHAlE** hotline (1-877-767-9425), and report entangled or stranded dolphins, seals, sea lions, or sea turtles to your local stranding network member. Information can be found at: <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/health/networks.htm>
- ✓ **Stay with the animal** (at a safe distance of 100 yards minimum) until trained help arrives and be prepared to share information with responders