

# MARINE MAMMAL HANDLING/RELEASE GUIDELINES

A Quick Reference for Atlantic Pelagic Longline Gear



## GUIDELINES FOR ALL MARINE MAMMALS

- Have an identification guide, paper, and camera ready at all times in case of an interaction.
- Document as much information as possible to describe the marine mammal, particularly physical appearance and potential injuries:
  - Animal's length
  - Animal's features to be used for species identification (color pattern, dorsal fin shape, head shape)
  - Any gear remaining on the animal (type, placement, color, size, etc.)
  - Any existing tags on the animal (description, tag number)
- Take photographs from different angles. Pictures of the head, dorsal fin, and tail are most helpful in species ID. Fishermen should submit these photos to NMFS Office of Protected Resources, along with the NMFS Marine Mammal Injury/Mortality Reporting Form (see below).
- Attempt to release the animal with minimal injury (see below).
- After an interaction with a marine mammal:
  - Remove remainder of the gear from the water
  - Move at least one nautical mile away to avoid further interactions
  - Alert other fishermen in the area to the presence of marine mammals
  - Record all injuries and mortalities of marine mammals within 24 hours of returning to shore on the NMFS Marine Mammal Injury/ Mortality Reporting Form
- **Reporting Requirement:** Submit the Marine Mammal Injury/Mortality Reporting Form by fax to (301) 427-2522, or by mail: NMFS Office of Protected Resources Attn: MMAP, 1315 East West Highway, Silver Spring MD 20910. Additional copies of the reporting form may be requested from the same address, or found online at: [http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/pdfs/interactions/mmap\\_reporting\\_form.pdf](http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/pdfs/interactions/mmap_reporting_form.pdf).

## GUIDELINES FOR SMALL MARINE MAMMALS

- Ensure the crew is ready to assist.
- Avoid abrupt actions or vessel movements that may panic the animal.
- As soon as the opposite side of the mainline is available, use two long gaffs to recover it. **DO NOT USE GAFFS OR SHARP OBJECTS** in direct contact with the animal. A gaff should be used only to control the line.
- Move the vessel cautiously, **STOP THE VESSEL** within range of the marine mammal.
- Gently bring the marine mammal alongside the vessel.
- If a tangle exists:
  - Gaff the other side of the mainline and attach it to the vessel or float ball to isolate the vessel and marine mammal from any tension on the remaining gear in the water
  - Work the tangle off the marine mammal as smoothly and quickly as possible
- If the animal is hooked:
  - Use a NMFS-approved dehooking device
  - Cut the barb off the hook with long-handled bolt cutters
  - Cut the line with line cutters as close to the hook as possible
- Remove as much line as possible from the animal.
- **DO NOT** use a tether, ninja sticks, or sea turtle dehooking or disentangling devices to control the animal.

## GUIDELINES FOR LARGE WHALES

- If a large whale is alive and entangled in fishing gear, contact the Provincetown Center for Coastal Studies Disentanglement Hotline at (800) 900-3622 or immediately contact the U.S. Coast Guard at VHF Ch. 16 for instructions.
  - Maneuver the vessel in such a way as to minimize tension on the line
- If a large whale is dead and on the line, immediately contact the U.S. Coast Guard at VHF Ch. 16 for instructions.

## SAFETY FIRST!

Hooked or entangled marine mammals can be unpredictable. There are inherent human safety concerns associated with handling/disentangling marine mammals. Be prudent and safe on the water. Human safety is paramount.

## GET A MOVE ON!

If you have one marine mammal interaction, there is a high likelihood that you will have additional encounters if you continue fishing in the same area. Alert other fishermen via radio communication and MOVE, or wait 48 hours to reset gear rather than risk further interactions.

This placard meets the regulatory requirements of 50 CFR 229.36(c).

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