

# 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 Injury/Mortality Reporting Form.
- 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
  - Record all injuries and mortalities of marine mammals within 24 hrs of returning to shore on the NMFS Marine Mammal Injury/Mortality Reporting Form (see below)
  - Move at least one nautical mile away to avoid further interactions
  - Alert other fishermen in the area of the presence of marine mammals
- **Reporting Requirement:** Submit the Marine Mammal Injury/Mortality Reporting Form by fax to (301) 713-0376 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: <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/national/marine-mammal-protection/marine-mammal-authorization-program>

## 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 other devices more appropriate for dehooking or disentangling sea turtles to control the animal.

## GUIDELINES FOR LARGE WHALES

- If a large whale is alive and entangled in fishing gear, call the entanglement hotline at (800) 755-6622 or immediately contact the U.S. Coast Guard on 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 on 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.

# MARINE MAMMAL SPECIES FACT SHEET



## LONG-FINNED PILOT WHALE

*Globicephala melas*



**SIZE:** 16-18 ft, 4,000-5,000 lbs

**BODY:** Long robust body, bulbous head with prominent

melon and slight beak. Sickle-shaped flippers are sharply pointed and long. Black with white cape behind dorsal fins, prominent white anchor patch on abdomen between flippers, very long peduncle.

**DIET:** Squid and fish.

**HABITAT:** Pelagic continental shelf edge and slope, submerged banks; associated with Gulf Stream features.

## HUMPBACK WHALE

*Megaptera novaeangliae*



**SIZE:** 36-52 ft, 25-30 tons

**BODY:** Flippers long, usually white, flukes broad with

irregular trailing edge. Black with white on throat and belly. Small dorsal fin with a broad base, raised bump in front, and "knuckles" behind. Shows flukes when diving.

**DIET:** Small schooling fish (herring, sand lance, capelin) and krill.

**HABITAT:** Pelagic and coastal.

## SHORT-FINNED PILOT WHALE

*Globicephala macrorhynchus*



**SIZE:** 15-18 ft, 3,000-4,000 lbs

**BODY:** Long robust body, flippers gently curved, pointed and less than one-sixth of body

length, all black, diffuse white anchor patch between fins, very long dorsal fin.

**DIET:** Squid and fish.

**HABITAT:** Tropical, pelagic to coastal; in the Gulf Stream.

## MINKE WHALE

*Balaenoptera acutorostrata*



**SIZE:** 29-33 ft, 5-10 tons

**BODY:** Small, sleek body, head is sharply pointed with a flat rostrum. Flippers

pointed, flukes broad. Black or dark grey, white band on both flippers. Prominent dorsal fin, two thirds back on body.

**DIET:** Variety of schooling fish, squid, and zooplankton.

**HABITAT:** Pelagic, but common in bays and shallow coastal waters.

## RISSO'S DOLPHIN

*Grampus griseus*



**SIZE:** 10-12.5 ft, 500-600 lbs

**BODY:** Blunt head with squared melon but no beak. Vertical crease in forehead.

Light gray back and sides with darker dorsal fin, flippers, and flukes. White color from scarring, large prominent dorsal fin, and darker than body. Large black eyes.

**DIET:** Squid specialist.

**HABITAT:** Pelagic; continental shelf edge and steep upper sections of slope; tropical waters.

## ATLANTIC SPOTTED DOLPHIN

*Stenella frontalis*



**SIZE:** 7-7.5 ft, 220-310 lbs

**BODY:** Long, thick, white-tipped beak. Tri-color background, variable spotting. Dorsal fin is

tall, dark, located on middle back.

**DIET:** Squid and variety of fish.

**HABITAT:** Coastal to pelagic. Tropical to warm-temperate waters over the continental shelf.

## BOTTLENOSE DOLPHIN

*Tursiops truncatus*



**SIZE:** 6-12 ft, 330-1,435 lbs

**BODY:** Short, thick well-defined beak. Coastal form is shorter and slimmer, offshore

form is larger. Gray with no distinctive color pattern. Dorsal fin is tall with broad base, located on the middle back.

**DIET:** Fish, invertebrates, and squid.

**HABITAT:** Coastal form: shallow, warm inshore waters. Offshore form: offshore waters of shelf edge and slope.

## PANTROPICAL SPOTTED DOLPHIN

*Stenella attenuata*



**SIZE:** 5.2-8.5 ft, 220-255 lbs

**BODY:** Slender body with long narrow, white-tipped beak. Bi-color background, distinct

cape is narrow at face, dips deeply forward of dorsal fin. Small spots develop with age. Dorsal fin is tall and slender.

**DIET:** Squid and schooling fish.

**HABITAT:** Pelagic; deep waters seaward of shelf edge, tropical to warm-temperate waters.

## PYGMY SPERM WHALE

*Kogia breviceps*



**SIZE:** 10-12 ft, 695-880 lbs

**BODY:** Robust body with squared or conical shark-like head with tiny underslung

lower jaw. Dark gray, lighter down sides to white belly. Pale crescent-shaped false gill on each side between eye and flipper. Tiny dorsal fin, located aft of mid-back.

**DIET:** Squid, fish, and crustaceans.

**HABITAT:** Pelagic; continental shelf edge, and slope.

## COMMON DOLPHIN

*Delphinus delphis*



**SIZE:** 7.5-8.5 ft, 155-245 lbs

**BODY:** Slender body, with long pointed beak. Black back and cape form V-shaped saddle,

hourglass pattern on sides: tan patch forward and gray patch aft. Black beak and eye ring, line from jaw to flipper.

**DIET:** Variety of fish and squid.

**HABITAT:** Pelagic; subtropical to temperate waters >100 fathoms.

## HARBOR PORPOISE

*Phocoena phocoena*



**SIZE:** 4.5-6 ft, 125-145 lbs

**BODY:** Smallest cetacean in the U.S. Atlantic. Stocky with small pointed flippers, no

beak. Dark gray or black on back with lighter sides and white belly. No distinctive markings. Dorsal fin is small, triangular; located slightly aft of mid-body.

**DIET:** Schooling fish and invertebrates.

**HABITAT:** Coastal, cold waters usually less than 650 ft.

## STRIPED DOLPHIN

*Stenella coeruleoalba*



**SIZE:** 7-8 ft, 200-330 lbs

**BODY:** Slender body with narrow pale tail stock, moderately long dark beak.

Bold light blaze from shoulder to dorsal fin, black stripe from eye to anus. Dorsal fin is tall and dark.

**DIET:** Deepwater squid, fish, and shrimp.

**HABITAT:** Pelagic; deep waters of continental shelf edge and slope. Associated with Gulf Stream north wall.