

The Hon. Harriet Hageman, Chair
The Hon. Val Hoyle, Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife, and Fisheries
Committee on Natural Resources
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

July 21, 2025

Dear Chair Hageman and Ranking Member Hoyle,

On behalf of our organizations and our millions of members and supporters, we write to express our strong opposition to the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) reauthorization discussion draft offered by Rep. Begich, R-AK, which will be considered along with two harmful bills targeting the Endangered Species Act (ESA) at a July 22, 2025, subcommittee hearing. We request that this letter be included in the hearing record.

Enacted in 1972 with overwhelming bipartisan support, the MMPA has been an important conservation success story in protecting and restoring this nation's iconic marine mammal species, including whales, dolphins, polar bears, manatees, sea otters, and seals. These charismatic species are not only widely popular but also of immense economic, cultural—and, to Alaska Natives, subsistence—importance. Polls consistently show that the vast majority of Americans support protecting marine mammals from harmful human activities.

The MMPA established a science-based conservation framework ensuring human activities that risk harming or killing marine mammals may continue with appropriate mitigation measures, while allowing marine mammal populations to recover. Because of the MMPA, working in tandem with the ESA, over the last five decades we have not lost a single marine mammal species or stock in our waters, even as ocean uses have increased and intensified.

Rebounding marine mammal populations provide incalculable ecosystem and economic benefits to Americans by ensuring healthy oceans and abundant fish stocks. They are the basis for the world's largest wildlife watching industry, with operations bringing in billions of tourist dollars and supporting thousands of tourism jobs in coastal economies on every coast, including Alaska and Hawaii. And healthy marine mammal populations are critical to fulfilling the fundamental subsistence and cultural needs of Alaskan Natives.

This bill, if enacted, would fatally undermine the MMPA and reverse five decades of conservation gains. While ostensibly promoting objective, science-based management decisions, this radically anti-science bill ignores that agencies already implement the MMPA

based on the best available scientific data, guided by decades of scientific expertise and rigorous standards. By replacing current statutory and regulatory definitions with politically driven definitions of “optimum sustainable population,” “potential biological removal,” “minimum population estimate,” “harassment,” and “serious injury,” among others, the bill will foreclose the use of scientifically validated methodologies. This will inescapably degrade stock assessment reports and management measures, not improve them.

The bill would eviscerate critical safeguards for issuing incidental take regulations and incidental harassment authorizations, allowing harm, injury, and death to huge numbers of marine mammals across vast areas of the ocean. It will drastically curtail agency authority to require practicable mitigation measures. And it will create dangerous legal loopholes by excusing agency compliance with the ESA and the National Environmental Policy Act in permitting decisions, disproportionately harming already-imperiled species and delaying or foreclosing their recovery.

The bill would remove the mandate that incidental lethal bycatch in U.S. commercial fisheries be mitigated to insignificant levels, making a mockery of the MMPA’s stakeholder-driven, consensus-based management system that Congress approved by voice vote in 1994. The 1994 amendments reflect a compromise plan developed by a coalition of commercial fishing interests, animal protection groups, and environmental organizations. If enacted, the draft bill will have wide-reaching impacts not only on marine mammals in the United States and around the world, but also on U.S. consumers and U.S. fisheries. The bill’s drastically weakened bycatch standards would allow fish and fish products from nations whose fishing fleets indiscriminately kill marine mammals to enter the U.S. supply chain.

The bill would inappropriately impose limits on agency authority to issue “necessary and appropriate” regulations to implement the MMPA, favoring narrow industry interests in avoiding regulation over the public’s broad interests in marine mammal conservation.

Finally, the bill would put the critically endangered North Atlantic right whale on an inescapable extinction trajectory. Entanglements in U.S. commercial fisheries already kill right whales at nearly six times sustainable levels and drive the species’ birth rates down. This bill would not only eviscerate the MMPA’s commercial fisheries management system but also extend the deadline for new amendments to the Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Plan to 2035, all but guaranteeing that the iconic right whale—a part of America’s history from our nation’s earliest days—will be wiped from the face of the Earth.

We urge you to oppose this bill that will take a wrecking ball to America's beloved marine mammal species, part of our nation's precious and irreplaceable natural heritage.

Thank you for considering our comments.

Sincerely,

Alaska Veterinary Pathology Services
Alaska Whale Foundation
Allied Whale, College of the Atlantic
Animal Defenders International
Animal Welfare Institute (AWI)
Animal Wonders KC
Black Hills Preservation Project
Born Free USA
Carnivore Coexistence Lab
Cascadia Wildlands
Center for Biological Diversity
Cetacean Society International
Conservation Law Foundation
Defenders of Wildlife
Earthjustice Action
Edward Hunter Heritage Bush Reserve
Endangered Habitats League
Environmental Center of San Diego
Environmental Investigation Agency
Environmental Protection Information Center (EPIC)
Fish On
Forest Keeper
FOUR PAWS USA
Friends of Merrymeeting Bay
Great Old Broads for Wilderness
Healthy Gulf
Inland Ocean Coalition
International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW)
International Marine Mammal Project of Earth Island Institute
Jenkinson's Aquarium
Kettle Range Conservation Group

Large Carnivore Fund
League of Conservation Voters
Los Angeles Audubon Society
Marine and Coastal Ecology Research Center
Marine Mammal Research Program, University of Hawaii at Manoa
Marine Mammal Stranding Center
Mystic Aquarium
Natural Environments, Inc.
Natural Resources Defense Council
New York Marine Rescue Center
NY4WHALES
NYC Plover Project
Ocean Conservation Research
Oceana
Orleans Audubon Society
Pacific Whale Foundation
Pilchuck Audubon Society (W.A. State)
Prairie Hills Audubon Society (of Western S.D.)
Predator Defense
Project Coyote
Rachel Carson Council
Resource Renewal Institute
Rocky Mountain Wild
Sanctuary Education Advisory Specialists SEAS
Save the Manatee Club
Sea Turtle Recovery, Inc.
Sierra Club
The Cougar Fund
The Urban Wildlands Group
Turtle Island Restoration Network
United Plant Savers
Whale and Dolphin Conservation
Whale Trust
WildEarth Guardians
Wildlife for All
Wyoming Untrapped