



## NOAA FISHERIES SERVICE



Protected Resources Division  
Southwest Fisheries Science  
Center

NOAA Fisheries

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## California Current Ecosystem Surveys for Whales, Dolphins and Porpoises: Mandates and Research Overview

### Mandates

The NOAA Fisheries Southwest Fisheries Science Center (SWFSC) is responsible for monitoring and estimating abundance of all cetacean species (whales, dolphins, and porpoises) in the California Current Ecosystem off the US West Coast. This research is mandated domestically by the Marine Mammal Protection Act and the Endangered Species Act.

Section 117 of the Marine Mammal Protection Act requires that NOAA Fisheries prepare stock assessments for each marine mammal stock that occurs in waters under the jurisdiction of the United States. Each assessment describes the geographic range of the affected stock, including any seasonal or temporal variation in such range, and provides the minimum population estimate, current and maximum net productivity rates, and current population trend for that stock. Stock assessment reports are required to be reviewed at least once every three years. The Endangered Species Act requires a recovery plan and a designation of critical habitat for each listed species. Recovery plans specify the research needed to monitor and evaluate the status of endangered species. For west-coast cetaceans, our SWFSC research cruises provide most of the data needed to carry out MMPA stock assessments, to meet the population research requirements of the recovery plans, and to designate critical habitat. Failure to conduct monitoring cruises would result in failure to meet these Congressional mandates.

### Research Overview

The Protected Resources Division, SWFSC, NOAA Fisheries, has been conducting cetacean assessment cruises off the US West Coast since 1979. The primary objective is to estimate the abundance of those stocks that are incidentally killed in west-coast fisheries and to monitor trends in the abundance of endangered whale species. Since 1991, these cruises have taken a multidisciplinary approach with a goal of characterizing the ecosystem of which these cetaceans are a part to allow us to better understand changes in abundance and distribution. Research also focuses on stock structure, morphology, life history parameters, acoustics, and behavior of all cetaceans in the ecosystem. Surveys of California alone were conducted in 1979, 1980, 1991, and 1993. Surveys of the entire US West Coast were conducted in 1996, 2001, 2005, and 2008. The next West Coast survey is anticipated in 2012. Details can be found at:

<http://swfsc.noaa.gov/textblock.aspx?Division=PRD&ParentMenuId=259&id=1511>