

# Marine Mammal Handling and Release Guidelines

## SAFETY FIRST!

Hooked or entangled marine mammals can be very powerful and unpredictable. Be safe on the water!

### Small Whales and Dolphins

1. Make sure the crew is ready to help.
2. Avoid sudden actions and movements that may scare the animal.
3. Move the boat carefully, stop the boat, and put the transmission in neutral when the animal is close.
4. If the far side of the mainline is within reach, use gaffs to grab only the line. This will keep any remaining gear in the water from pulling on the line and the animal. **Do NOT use gaffs or sharp objects to grab or hold an animal.**
5. Slowly bring the animal next to the boat.



*False Killer Whale*

#### If the animal is tangled in line:

1. Grab the far side of the mainline and tie the mainline to the boat.
2. Use a long-handled line cutter to cut as much line off the animal as you can.

#### If the animal is hooked:

1. Use a dehooker to remove the hook or use a long-handled bolt cutter to cut the barb off the hook.
2. If the hook cannot be removed or cut, use a long-handled line cutter to cut the line as close as you can to the hook.
3. Remove as much line as possible from the animal. Do not use ropes or other lines to tie the animal to the boat.

### Large Whales

- If a large whale is alive and hooked or entangled in fishing gear, immediately call the Disentanglement Hotline at **1-888-256-9840**, or the U.S. Coast Guard on VHF Ch.16 for instructions.  
Move the vessel to minimize tension on the fishing gear.
- If a large whale is dead and hooked or entangled in fishing gear, immediately call the U.S. Coast Guard on VHF Ch.16 for instructions.

### For All Interactions

- Have an identification guide and paper available in case of a marine mammal interaction.
- If an interaction occurs, make sure the captain is notified to supervise the handling and release of the animal.
- Write down as much information as possible to describe the animal and its injuries:
  - How long was the animal?
  - What did the animal look like (did it have stripes, spots, or different colors)?
  - Was there any fishing gear still on the animal when it was released?  
If so, where, what kind, how much?
  - Did you see any tags on the animal? If yes, can you see any letters or numbers on the tag?

After an interaction with a marine mammal, get the rest of your fishing gear out of the water. Then record all the information about the interaction on your Marine Mammal Authorization Program Mortality / Injury Reporting Form, even if you had an observer aboard. Mail the form when you get to port.

**CAUTION:** If you have a marine mammal interaction, you could have another if you keep fishing in the same area. Move away from the area, and call other fishermen to warn them. If you stay in the same area, it is suggested that you wait two days before setting your gear to avoid more interactions.

**For more information, contact NOAA Fisheries Pacific Islands Regional Office, Sustainable Fisheries Division at (808) 944-2200.**

