



Frequently Asked Questions

False Killer Whale Take Reduction



What is the false killer whale?

The false killer whale (*Pseudorca crassidens*, FKW) is a member of the oceanic dolphin family. FKWs are found worldwide, mainly in tropical and warm-temperate waters. Three stocks of FKWs have been identified in the central Pacific – the Hawaii Pelagic, Hawaii Insular, and Palmyra Atoll Stocks. FKWs feed on tuna and other commercially-important pelagic species.

What is take?

The Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) defines “take” as “to harass, hunt, capture, or kill, or attempt to harass, hunt, capture, or kill any marine mammal.” The MMPA prohibits take of marine mammals. Serious injuries and mortalities are considered take.

What is the problem?

During fishing operations, FKWs become hooked or entangled in fishing gear and, as a result, may become seriously injured or killed (i.e., bycatch). Currently, these takes are occurring at a level that is unsustainable for the Hawaii Pelagic Stock. In response, the MMPA requires the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) to convene a Take Reduction Team (TRT) to draft a plan for reducing serious injuries and mortalities of FKWs that occur incidental to fishing activities.

How can a few animals per year be unsustainable?

FKWs are long-lived, have only one calf every 2-4 years, and as top predators, do not occur in high densities. Further, cetaceans are known to form discrete, small, reproductively isolated populations in many parts of the world, including Hawaiian waters. Thus, the mortality or serious injury of more than a few individuals per year is more than the Hawaiian stocks can sustain, because they each consist of no more than a few hundred individuals.

What is a Take Reduction Team (TRT)?

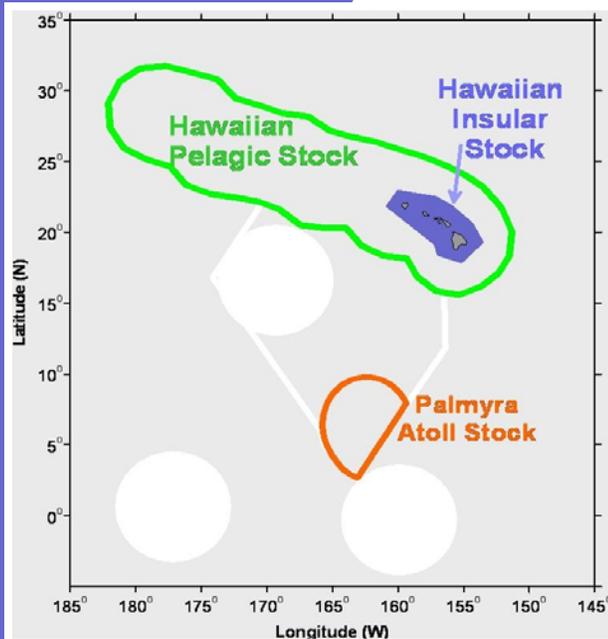
A TRT is an advisory group tasked with developing a plan for reducing bycatch of marine mammals. The TRT includes representatives from federal and state resource management agencies, fishery management councils, academic and scientific organizations, environmental groups, and the commercial fishing industry. TRT recommendations are forwarded to NMFS, which issues a final rule. TRT meetings are open to the public.

Why is a TRT being convened now?

Though NMFS was aware that interactions between the longline fishery and FKWs were occurring at an unsustainable level, NMFS lacked sufficient funding to begin the process of establishing a new TRT until 2009.

Which fisheries and marine mammal stocks are involved?

The scope of the Take Reduction Plan (TRP) has not yet been determined. The deep-set component of the Hawaii-based longline fishery, which targets tuna, and the Hawaii Pelagic Stock of FKWs meet the trigger under the MMPA that requires NMFS to convene a TRT. NMFS may include other hook-and-line fisheries, such as the shallow-set component of the Hawaii-based longline fishery (targeting swordfish), the American Samoa longline fishery, and the shortline fishery, which operates in Hawaiian state waters. The TRP may also address bycatch of the other two FKW stocks, or stocks of other marine mammals taken by the fisheries.



Map: Boundaries of False Killer Whale stocks in the Pacific Island Region

Why is a “pre-TRT” informational meeting being held?

The primary purpose of this "pre-TRT" informational meeting is to provide background on the Take Reduction process to interested stakeholders and members of the community, and to explain the mandates in the MMPA as well as the scientific data used to support the take reduction program.

What are the next steps?

Pending budget appropriations for 2010, NMFS expects to convene the TRT in February 2010. The TRT will meet a total of four times over the following six months to develop a draft TRP by consensus, and will then submit the draft to NMFS. All TRT meetings are expected to be held on Oahu.

How does NMFS use the TRT’s recommendations?

NMFS will finalize and implement the TRP (Take Reduction Plan), after considering comments from the public. Once the plan is in place and implemented, NMFS will monitor its progress and ensure it is meeting the MMPA goal of reducing FKW bycatch in the fishery. If the level of bycatch is not reduced to a sustainable level, NMFS will re-convene the TRT to open discussions on amendments to the TRP.

Can I be on the TRT?

TRT members are officially appointed by NMFS. As required by the MMPA, membership is based on expertise regarding the conservation or biology of the marine mammal species which the TRP will address, or the fishing practices which result in the incidental mortality and serious injury of such species. However, TRT meetings are open to the public, and all interested stakeholders are encouraged to attend.

Glossary of terms

Bycatch - animals caught by fishing that were not the intended target of the fishing activity.

Pelagic - pertaining to the part of the open sea or ocean comprising the water column, i.e., all of the sea other than that near the coast or the sea floor.

Serious injury – any injury that will likely result in mortality (>50% of the time).

Stock - as defined by the MMPA, the term "stock" means a group of marine mammals of the same species or smaller taxa in a common spatial arrangement, that interbreed when mature.

Take – as defined by the MMPA, the term “take” means to harass, hunt, capture, or kill, or attempt to harass, hunt, capture, or kill any marine mammal.

Acronyms

FKW – False Killer Whale

MMPA – Marine Mammal Protection Act

NMFS – National Marine Fisheries Service

TRT – Take Reduction Team

TRP – Take Reduction Plan

