

SAVED! Hawaii's False Killer Whales

On behalf of the Pacific Whale Foundation's over 300,000 supporters, I would like to fully endorse the proposed listing of Hawaiian insular false killer whales as Endangered under the Endangered Species Act. This genetically unique population requires prompt and immediate protection, to halt the tragic decline that has been witnessed during the past twenty years in Hawaii.

While I have only recently joined the Pacific Whale Foundation as Research Director, my background includes studies of odontocete populations around the Hawaiian Islands and 22 years of research on marine mammals, especially cetaceans, in various countries around the world.

The Pacific Whale Foundation's research team and I agree that there is adequate scientific evidence to demonstrate that Hawaiian insular false killer whales are a distinct genetic stock, based on the work by Chivers and colleagues and Baird and colleagues in particular.

Listing this species under the Endangered Species List is appropriate, given the compelling evidence which suggests a decline of at least 50% in population size, based on comparative data over time (specifically work by Reeves and colleagues) and data on sighting rates based on aerial surveys by Mobley and colleagues

It is especially compelling to list Hawaiian insular false killer whales as endangered, given the extensive survey

work by Baird and colleagues demonstrating that population size for the insular stock of false killer whales is unsustainably low (less than 150 individuals) and that this stock possibly has limited reproductive output because only 46 of these whales are reproductively active.

Immediate protective action is required, based on recent NMFS estimates of mortality from interactions with the Hawaiian commercial and recreational fisheries, which show annual rates of false killer whale mortality to be higher than the Potential Biological Removal (PBR), putting this population at risk of extinction.

Given the real risk of extinction of these animals, Pacific Whale Foundation strongly supports the immediate inclusion of Hawaiian insular false killer whales as endangered under the U.S. Endangered Species Act and immediate action to develop a management plan that will assess all the potential sources of false killer whale mortality in Hawaiian waters with the intent to reduce said mortality to zero in the immediate future.

Pacific Whale Foundation strongly supports an increase in the scope of the fishery observer program in Hawaii to include 100% coverage in all waters where longline fisheries operate and the immediate adoption of mitigation measures such as round hooks or weak hooks to protect wildlife caught as bycatch. We also support an indefinite and complete ban of longline fishing in waters frequented by the insular stock of Hawaiian false killer whales, if this

measure should be deemed necessary to allow this population to recover.

As far as research is concerned, Pacific Whale Foundation encourages and supports increased long-term monitoring efforts to broaden our knowledge of the natural history, behavior, movement patterns and feeding habits of false killer whales in Hawaiian waters and the instauration of effective collaborative agreements among research group to share information and data about this species.

Much needed is also a comprehensive and inclusive reporting system for false killer whale sightings.

Gathering and sharing data about Hawaii's false killer whales, and expanding the focus of our efforts to provide information to the NMFS and to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) managers will be an increasing priority at Pacific Whale Foundation.

During the summer of 2010, we re-launched our study of odontocetes in Maui County waters. This NMFS-permitted study is a follow-up of earlier studies conducted since 1998. In 2010, we covered 2,017 nautical miles of systematic line transect surveys within Maui County waters using a dedicated research vessel. Water depths during surveys ranged between 60 and over 600 ft.

During these surveys, we recorded 42 odontocete sightings but only three species were found. Bottlenose dolphins comprised 40% of the sightings, spotted dolphins

31% and spinner dolphins 26%. However, our educational marine ecotour fleet, covering similar depths, and waters within the same region, recorded 25 false killer whale sightings.

I have preliminarily examined historical records of wildlife sighted during Pacific Whale Foundation's educational marine ecotours between 1995 and 2010 and have found 136 sightings of false killer whales recorded during that 5 year period. I am submitting to you a map showing the locations of sightings for which we have confirmed location information, which include data between 1998 and 2010.

?During our 1999-2000 research effort, conducted outside of our marine ecotour operations, we were able to individually identify 54 false killer whales, and we are currently analyzing additional photos. We hope to be able to add this information to future management plans and to scientific data already available.

Thanks to our newly developed whale and dolphin tracking software, as of this year, all of Pacific Whale Foundation's marine ecotour staff is required to log all cetacean sightings occurring during our educational marine ecotours. Information collected using this Platform of Opportunity will include GPS location, school size, school composition and behavior. We anticipate that this will provide a powerful data source in the future.

Pacific Whale Foundation's odontocete study will continue this year. It is one of our goals to add to the body of

knowledge about Hawaii's false killer whales, and to continue to share our findings with wildlife management agencies to provide data that will be useful in establishing and maintaining management plans for Hawaiian insular false killer whales. In addition, we are committed to educating the public about these lesser-known marine mammal residents of Hawaii and to help achieve greater public recognition of their importance in the ecosystem and of the value of protecting them.

On behalf of Pacific Whale Foundation's staff, members and supporters

Daniela Maldini, Ph.D.
Research Director