



## NOAA FISHERIES SERVICE



## Reporting Guidelines

With first-hand knowledge of the interaction and detailed knowledge of the local marine environment, local fishermen can provide invaluable information for monk seal conservation, fisheries management, and human safety. Fishermen making a report will be given guidance over the phone on what to do depending on the situation.

- As soon as possible, call NOAA hotline (888) 256-9840, available 24/7.
- As human safety considerations allow, please stay nearby the animal to keep track of it until trained response staff can arrive.
- Be ready to provide as much specific information as possible to describe the animal, and any injuries. Even if an entangled or hooked seal is able to free itself, this vital information will help NOAA Fisheries locate and provide assistance to the seal if necessary.
- Information provided will also be useful in identifying and tracking seals that may require special animal management actions by NOAA Fisheries to prevent the seals from becoming conditioned to persistently interact with fishermen and/or fishing gear.
- Photos or video of the seal and other details of the interaction, such as GPS coordinates where the interaction took place, can be quite helpful, as long as human safety and seal protection are always the priority.

### Callers to the hotline will be asked to provide the following information:

- Date, time and location of the interaction
- Approximate size of the animal (length and weight)
- Was there any fishing gear still on the animal when it was released? If so, where, what kind, and how much?
- Does the seal have flipper tags or human-applied bleach marks? If yes, what letters or numbers do you recognize?
- Does the seal have any other identifying marks, such as markings or scars? If yes, please describe.



## Contact Info and Websites

NOAA collects data on monk seal location, behavior, and feeding behavior in the main Hawaiian Islands.

### Report All Seal Sightings:

Call Oahu: (808) 220-7802  
Kauai: (808) 651-7668  
Molokai: (808) 553-5555  
Maui/Lanai: (808) 292-2372  
Island of Hawaii  
East: (808) 756-5961  
West: (808) 987-0765

or email: [pifsc.monksealsighting@noaa.gov](mailto:pifsc.monksealsighting@noaa.gov)

### Report Hooked, Entangled, or Injured Seals:

Call (888) 256-9840

NOAA Fisheries Service, Pacific Islands Regional Office  
[www.fpir.noaa.gov](http://www.fpir.noaa.gov)

NOAA Fisheries Service, Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center  
[www.pifsc.noaa.gov](http://www.pifsc.noaa.gov)

## Hawaiian Monk Seals and Fishing Interactions Guidelines for Prevention, Safety and Reporting

NOAA Fisheries Service recognizes the importance of fishing in Hawai'i and the tradition of ocean stewardship in Hawai'i's fishing communities. NOAA Fisheries seeks to promote beneficial co-existence between fishermen and endangered Hawaiian monk seals through practical solutions and increased awareness.

The term "interaction" is used when a seal is hooked or entangled in fishing gear. A seal stealing bait or fish from hook and line, or feeding from a net is considered an interaction. Also considered an interaction is a seal swimming in close proximity or attempting to "play" or make physical contact with a person in the water. Interactions are generally bad for the conservation and recovery of endangered monk seals, and they often have negative impacts on fishing as well. The guidelines presented below are provided to help prevent interactions before they occur and to minimize impacts to seals and fishermen if they occur.

### Reporting is Essential

Above all, NOAA asks that fishermen please report all interactions with monk seals by calling the toll-free hotline at 1-888-256-9840. Timely reports are essential because the information shared between fishermen and NOAA can help protect monk seals and also help reduce impacts on fishing. For instance, detailed reports can help NOAA identify and track seals that are likely to become habituated to interacting with fishing gear, so NOAA can intervene if necessary, with seal behavior modification techniques.

### Prevent the Event

#### How to Prevent Seals from Taking Fish and Bait

In some cases, seals may steal bait and catch directly off fishing gear, leaving the gear intact while the seal escapes without being hooked or entangled. In other cases, the fishing line snaps and the seal steals the catch or bait with the gear still attached. This increases the seal's risk of injury or death from ingestion of hooks and lures and/or entanglement in line.

Taking preventative measures to decrease interactions with seals can be a win-win solution. Avoiding and/or minimizing interactions is beneficial to the seals, provides a better long term fishing experience for fishermen, and will increase the likelihood of preserving fishing gear.





### 1. Don't feed seals or discard old bait or scraps into the water

One might assume that feeding a seal would keep it satisfied and uninterested in fishing gear and bait, but in fact, the opposite is the case. Intentionally feeding seals, or accidentally feeding them by tossing old bait and scraps in the water when a seal is around, only contributes to the problem, increasing the likelihood that the seal will come back for more food and persist in the fishing area.

Seals that have been fed (intentionally or unintentionally) are more likely to seek out humans because they learn to associate people with free handouts and an easy meal. These seals may approach and, in some cases, come in close contact with fishermen and other ocean users. Not only can this be an unwanted experience for the fishermen, but it also increases the seal's risk of accidental hooking or entanglement and their vulnerability to injury and death.

### 2. If a seal is encountered while fishing, take a short break or change locations

Seals are very curious creatures and investigate new objects in their environment. Taking a short break from fishing while a seal is passing through the immediate area may increase the chances that the seal will move through quickly and allow fishing to be resumed. Fishing success may also be increased by changing fishing locations away from areas where seals are present.

### 3. Reduce seal attractants in the water

When spearfishing and/or wading, remove fish as quickly as possible from the water - onto a vessel or float, or into a sealed container. Refrain from throwing back bottomfish bycatch when seals are in the area. Report abandoned nets that may catch and hold fish that attract seals and pose seal entanglement and safety risks.

### 4. Use a barbless circle hook

Barbless hooks help minimize post-hooking injuries to seals and can still be used with live bait. Barbless hooks have been proven as effective as barbed hooks for catching fish while reducing the severity of injuries to non-target species, including turtles and seals. These hooks allow the animal a better chance of quickly ridding itself of the hook without human intervention.

For more information on barbless circle hooks or the program, please visit the NOAA Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center barbless circle hook webpage: <http://www.pifsc.noaa.gov/outreach/barblesshook.php>

### 5. Follow the State of Hawaii lay gill net rules for your area\*

Highlights of these rules include:

- Register all lay nets.
- Limit the overall length of the net to 125 ft x 7 ft.
- Keep watch over the net. Nets may not be left unattended for more than a half-hour.
- Lay net only during the allowable times and for the allowable length of time. Nets may not be used during the period from a half-hour after sunset to half-hour before sunrise. There is a maximum set time of 4 daylight hours per 24 hour period.

Adhering to the State fishing regulations and checking your nets frequently to remove fish caught will preserve gear and catch as well as prevent seals from being attracted to a free meal.

*\*To access the "Molokai special rules" and a complete listing of the State of Hawaii lay gill net rules, please visit this website: [http://hawaii.gov/dlnr/dar/regulated\\_gear.html](http://hawaii.gov/dlnr/dar/regulated_gear.html)*

## If an Interaction Occurs

Be safe - please follow these guidelines:

**In the event of any seal fishing interaction -  
Call NOAA as soon as possible (888) 256-9840**

### If a seal is hooked:

- **Never try to reel in a seal that may be hooked.**
- If the hook is set, carefully take in any slack line and then cut the line as close to the seal as safely possible. If the hook is not visible in or around the seal's mouth or throat, there is a possibility that the hook has been ingested, and pulling on the line may cause serious injury or death.
- If the hook is not set, put slack on the line and give the seal time to release itself.
- Please notify NOAA of the incident as soon as possible at (888) 256-9840

### If a seal is entangled:

- **For your safety and their protection, never try to disentangle a seal** or other marine mammal without prior contact with NOAA. Please call NOAA immediately: (888) 256-9840.

### If a seal acts aggressively:

Most monk seals are not aggressive toward humans, unless they feel threatened. However, seals that have been previously fed (intentionally or unintentionally) and have learned to associate humans with food can sometimes appear aggressive when they go after fish or bait in the water. This can be of particular concern for spearfishermen with fish on stringers in areas where seals have been previously fed.

- **To avoid the escalation of aggressive behavior, it is advisable to end the interaction as soon as possible.** For your safety and the safety of others, we recommend that you end the dive or change locations as soon as a safe opportunity arises. And please notify NOAA Fisheries Service of the incident as soon as possible at (888) 256-9840.
- Following the above guidelines above to "Prevent the Event" will greatly reduce the chances of aggressive interactions with seals.
- Although the Endangered Species Act (ESA) prohibits the "take" (disturb, harm, kill, etc.) of these animals, ESA Section 11(a)(3) states that a person may take a threatened or endangered species if it is based on a good faith belief that he/she was acting in defense of his/her life or the lives of others. The self-defense exception, however, is typically not available for the protection of property or pets.

