

Natural Resources Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife, and Fisheries
Tuesday, July 21
LHOB 1334, 2pm-3:30pm

Panel II (Administration Witnesses)

- **Dr. Tim Petty**, Assistant Secretary for Oceans and Atmosphere, U.S. Department of Commerce, Washington, D.C. [*H.R. 7332 and H.R. 9621*]

Panel III (Outside Experts)

- **Mr. Nate Pamplin**, Director of External Affairs, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, Olympia, WA [*H.R. 9621*]
- **Dr. Marc Gaden**, Executive Secretary, Great Lakes Fishery Commission, Ann Arbor, MI [*H.R. 8876*]
- **Mr. Jared L. Blankenship**, State Director, District 1, Texas Farm Bureau, Hereford, TX [*H.R. 7466*]
- **Dr. Richard Merrick**, Independent Marine Scientist, Chief Science Advisor (Ret.), NOAA Fisheries, Falmouth, MA [*H.R. 7332 and H.R. 9621*] [*Minority Witness*]

Thank you Madam Chair –

It is great to be with you again today, and I appreciate our panelists coming to testify.

I'm especially grateful for Dr. Tim Petty from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and Mr. Nate Pamplin from the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife coming to talk about the realities of sea lion management in Washington state.

First of all, I want to highlight a few facts:

1. Sea lion populations are estimated to have grown from around 100,000 in the 1970s to up to 300,000 along the west coast today¹.

¹ *Pinniped Predation on Salmonids in the Washington Portions of the Salish Sea and Outer Coast*, Washington State Academy of Sciences, November 2022, <https://wdfw.wa.gov/sites/default/files/publications/02579/wdfw02579.pdf#page=21>

2. One peer reviewed study estimated that sea lions off the coast of Washington ate more than 2 million Chinook salmon over the course of 2021².
3. Pacific Northwest states and tribal sovereigns are having serious problems managing these populations.

As recently as March of this year, NOAA reported in a recent presentation to the Northwest Power and Conservation Council that current sea lion management techniques have “not been particularly effective at achieving the overall goal of balancing the requirements of the Endangered Species Act and the Marine Mammal Protection Act.”³

That is why I am thankful for Representative Emily Randall partnering with me to introduce H.R. 9621 – The Northwest Endangered Salmon Predation Prevention Act. This bill is the result of consultation with tribal sovereigns, federal, and state agencies from our region in an attempt to strike a better balance between wildlife conservation and common-sense management.

Let me be clear: this bill is a common-sense update to the Marine Mammal Protection Act to give the State of Washington and our Tribal sovereigns updated tools to manage invasive sea lion populations in a better way. It provides the potential to invest in non-lethal mitigation tactics, would expand the reporting requirements for already existing authority for lethal take of these populations, and allows for tribes of the Washington Coast and Puget Sound to participate in this management system.

² Lewis ZK, Nelson BW, Akmajian AM, Scordino JJ, Allyn EM, Brown S, et al. (2025) Steller sea lion (*Eumetopias jubatus*) consumption of ocean age-0 Chinook salmon (*Oncorhynchus tshawytscha*) along the northwest coast of Washington State. PLoS One 20(11): <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC12611116/pdf/pone.0334612.pdf#page=16>

³ Pinniped Predation in the Columbia River Basin, National Marine Fisheries Service, March 3, 2026, accessed at https://www.nwcouncil.org/fs/19781/2026_03_1.pdf#page=10

Madam Chair, let me just say, we need to put the 'Sea' back in Sea Lion.

I'd like to offer letters of support from the fishing group Long Live the Kings, the Puget Sound Partnership, and the Purse Seine Vessel Owners' Association, for the record.

With that Madame Chair, I yield back.