



Congresswoman Stephanie Murphy  
Remarks as Prepared for Delivery  
House Natural Resources Committee, Subcommittee on Water, Oceans, and Wildlife  
Hearing on H.R. 2848, the *Marine Mammal Research and Response Act*.  
July 29, 2021

Chairman Huffman and Ranking Member Bentz, thank you for the opportunity to speak about my bipartisan bill, H.R. 2848, the *Marine Mammal Research and Response Act*.

I introduced this bill with Congressman Brian Mast of Florida and Congresswoman Marilyn Strickland of Washington State. The bill's cosponsors are evenly divided between Democrats and Republicans.

An identical bill was introduced by Senator Maria Cantwell and unanimously approved by the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation on May 12<sup>th</sup>.

In summary, this bill would strengthen the federal government's ability to protect beloved marine mammals like manatees, dolphins, seals, and whales.

Specifically, the bill would authorize increased funding for two key initiatives, the Unusual Mortality Event Fund and the Prescott Marine Mammal Rescue Assistance Grant Program.

The federal government uses these accounts to support efforts by local governments and non-profit organizations to rescue and rehabilitate sick or injured marine mammals and to research what is causing them to become sick or injured in the first place.

One of the main reasons I chose to file this bill is to better understand, and to help stop, the rapid die-off of manatees in my home state of Florida. This phenomenon is deeply concerning to my constituents and to advocacy groups across the nation.

The statistics are staggering. The Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission has reported 881 manatee deaths between January 1<sup>st</sup> and July 23<sup>rd</sup>. That's the highest death toll ever recorded in a single year. And we still have five months remaining in 2021.

Back in March, I urged the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to declare this record die-off as an "unusual mortality event," or UME, which is a sudden and significant surge in deaths of a marine mammal species. To its credit, the Fish and Wildlife Service quickly made this official designation.

That declaration unlocked federal funding in the Unusual Mortality Event Fund so it could be used to reimburse the Florida government and non-profit organizations for efforts they undertake to save manatees and nurse them back to health.

Our bill would authorize additional funding for this important account so that the federal government can respond to UME's like the one we have witnessed in Florida wherever and whenever they occur.

Our bill also authorizes increased funding for the Prescott Grant Program, which the federal government uses to provide competitive grants to stranding networks organizations to rescue, rehabilitate, or investigate distressed marine mammals.

In addition, our bill would help local governments and non-profit organizations quickly access federal funding to treat marine mammals with emergency health conditions even before a UME is declared. It would do this by creating a "Marine Mammal Rescue and Rapid Response Fund."

Finally, our bill establishes a "Marine Mammal Health Monitoring and Analysis Platform" to collect and report data regarding marine mammal deaths, and it directs the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine to study marine mammal mortality events. These actions will advance the effort to protect these animals through science.

If manatees continue to die in such high numbers, experts fear the species could decline to near-extinction levels. The federal government must do more to protect these majestic creatures and all other threatened marine mammals. I believe passage of our legislation is the best way to do that. I hope we can swiftly enact this bill into law. Thank you.