

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

For Release December 5, 1972

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INTERIOR AND COMMERCE PROPOSE RULES PROTECTING MARINE MAMMALS

The Departments of Commerce and Interior today announced publication of proposed rule making dealing with the Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972, signed into law by President Nixon on October 21.

An immediate effect of the Act will be to end polar bear and walrus hunting in Alaska on December 21, the date when the law creating a moratorium becomes effective in prohibiting the taking or importation of any marine mammal or marine mammal product.

The Department of Commerce is responsible for whales, porpoises, seals, and sea lions, while Interior is responsible for all other marine mammals including walrus, polar bears, manatees, and sea otters.

Two exceptions to the ban deal with the taking of marine mammals incidental to commercial fishing operations, and to marine mammals taken for subsistence or for making authentic native handicrafts by Indians, Aleuts, and Eskimos. The commercial fishing exemption is for two years from the date of enactment. It is subject to regulations which will be designed to achieve a goal of zero mortality of marine mammals.

In addition, the Pribilof Island fur seal program is not subject to the moratorium, but the program will be studied for possible modification.

Enforcement of the Act will be the joint responsibility of the Commerce and Interior Departments.

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The proposed Interior Department regulations were published in the Federal Register on December 1, and by the Commerce Department on December 2. Comments from interested parties are requested by December 15, 1972. It is anticipated that the interim regulations will be promulgated by December 21, effective on that date.

After the effective date, the record will remain open for additional comments for a 60-day period expiring February 21, 1973. Written comments, views or objections to the proposed regulations, or, after December 15, 1972, to the interim regulations, should be made to the Director, National Marine Fisheries Service, NOAA, U.S. Department of Commerce, Washington, D.C. 20235, or to the Director, Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife, U.S. Department of the Interior, Washington, D.C. 20240.

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