



**NOAA  
FISHERIES  
WEST  
COAST  
REGION**

To report a dead, injured or stranded marine mammal  
**Call: 1-866-767-6114**

For law enforcement, harassments, and other violations  
**Call: 1-800-853-1964**

Entangled marine mammals  
**Call: 1-877-SOS-WHALE or 1-877-767-9425, or Hail the U.S. Coast Guard on VHF Ch. 16**

To report derelict gear  
**Call: 1-855-542-3935**



**with  
California  
Sea Lions**

## Frequently asked questions

### There is a sea lion hauled out. What should I do?

Keep your distance. The West Coast Marine Mammal Stranding Network encourages you to “Share the Shore” with California sea lions. Sea lions may use docks, breakwaters, buoys, and other man made structures on a daily basis to rest and regulate their body temperature. Please stay back 100 yards if possible, keep your dogs on a leash, and if the animal is injured call our hotline at **1-866-767-6114**. The best thing you can do is to leave the animal alone. You can also find contact information for your local stranding network coordinator at: <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/west-coast/marine-mammal-protection/west-coast-marine-mammal-stranding-network>

### Can I feed, touch, or pick up a sea lion?

**NO.** Sea lions (and all marine mammals) are protected by law under the Marine Mammal Protection Act. Federal marine mammal regulations prohibit harassing or capturing sea lions onshore to reduce human disturbance of important life processes. Feeding sea lions in the wild is also prohibited and is considered harassment. What is harassment? It is when we disturb, injure, or interfere with its ability to hunt, feed, communicate, socialize, rest, breed, or care for its young. If you feed, touch, harass, pour water on or pick up a sea lion you may be investigated by NOAA’s Office of Law Enforcement for violating the marine mammal regulations.

### I can closely approach young sea lion. Is it sick?

**NO.** Many sea lion pups are too young to have developed protective wariness (escape response) and may not flee when approached while resting and warming up. Some pups haulout in public areas and are not sensitive to



human presence. Adult sea lions are more wary and may escape to the water, if approached. Some sea lions may not flee at all, but may feel threatened and may be defensive. Please Share the Shore and give the animal space.

*Photo: Sharon Melin, NOAA*

## The sea lion is injured. What should I do?

Sea lions are wild animals and occasional minor injuries can be expected. If you think the animal is seriously injured call our hotline at **1-866-767-6114** or use our GIS maps to find the stranding coordinator in your area; [www.fisheries.noaa.gov/west-coast/marine-mammal-protection/west-coast-marine-mammal-stranding-network](http://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/west-coast/marine-mammal-protection/west-coast-marine-mammal-stranding-network). Sometimes what you may think is an injury, may be normal. Sea lions in the water may lie on their sides and commonly hold a foreflipper into the air, but this is part of their way to regulate their temperature. Some sea lions may have tags on their back flippers or what look like marks/numbers on their fur. These were placed by scientists studying these animals or rehabilitation facilities before they released the animal back in the wild.

## Is the sea lion population healthy?

Yes, under the Marine Mammal Protection Act California sea lion populations have recovered to healthy numbers. The California sea lion population is estimated to be at about 300,000 animals.

## Why do sea lions strand?

California sea lions can strand for a number of reasons including injury, illness, and weather and/or ocean conditions. Availability of prey is very important for nursing sea lion mothers; for the pups as they begin to wean and start foraging on their own; and for the other age classes of sea lions as well. Other potential causes for large numbers of increased strandings included infectious disease outbreaks and harmful algal blooms. If you see a stranded sea lion, call our hotline at **1-866-767-6114** or use our GIS maps to find the stranding coordinator in your area; <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/west-coast/marine-mammal-protection/west-coast-marine-mammal-stranding-network>



Photo: Eric Boener, NOAA



Photo: Tony Orr, NOAA

In some cases, animals with serious injuries are considered as candidates to be taken in for treatment. Rehabilitation can only be done by trained experts at an authorized facility; these facilities cannot accept illegally captured marine mammals delivered to them for treatment by unauthorized individuals. Rehabilitation of sea lions is difficult and many will not survive; rehabilitation does not guarantee the long-term survival of the animal post-release.

## What is the rehabilitation policy for sea lions?

There are NMFS authorized rehabilitation facilities that are available to provide clinical care to a limited number of sick or injured marine mammals. The decision to place an animal in a rehabilitation facility is made on a case-by-case basis by authorized Federal, state, or local officials, or by local Stranding Agreement holders who have been authorized by NMFS to conduct live animal first response and triage. Our overall goal is to provide an appropriate response to ensure that animals have the best chance to survive on their own in the wild, which may mean leaving the animal in the wild. The sea lion population is healthy, so we do not intervene in cases of natural mortality. Intervention to capture individual sea lions is avoided to minimize the impacts and disturbance of other animals at the site, including nursing females and their pups.

## How can I learn more about California sea lions?

For more information about sea lions, please visit our website at:

<https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/species/california-sea-lion>

