

**The Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972: The Right to Live Undisturbed  
and Our Responsibility to Protect Marine Mammals**

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## **Process Paper**

Today, we take for granted the ability to see wild marine mammals undisturbed in their natural environment. However, for the majority of American history, this sight was becoming rarer. The Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972 (MMPA) was a key moment for many species and became a turning point. From being overhunted and at risk of extinction, species like the northern elephant seal recovered to a healthy population.

I chose this project because of my passion for marine mammals and my experiences viewing seals resting in nearby harbors. The Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972 connects to the theme of "Rights and Responsibilities in History" because the law was a critical step toward protecting marine mammal rights. It showed the responsibility people had towards conserving marine mammals. Today, it is illegal to harass, let alone hunt, a marine mammal without a specific permit.

I began my research by reading the MMPA and familiarizing myself with the main points. I then looked for early conservation stories and chose to feature Clinton G. Abbott and Henry Wood Elliott as two early marine mammal rights activists. I then branched out from there to research Dr. Ross's Dog and Cat Food as well as the fur trade. I used the Internet Archive to find electronic copies of reports, letters, and articles to gain more primary perspectives. I tried to use primary sources as much as possible, with secondary sources used to fill in information gaps.

I created my project using the NHD website builder. I used the dark blue theme with white font to have an oceanic feel, which I combined with the calm ocean background. I added visuals to strengthen my claims and provide a connection for viewers.

My historical argument is that the MMPA of 1972 ensured that marine mammals have the right to live uninterrupted and also showed the collective responsibility to protect the marine

mammals around us. The MMPA is significant today because of its impact on species like the California sea lion, the blue whale, and especially the northern elephant seal. Without this bill, there is a chance that many marine mammal species may have gone extinct. Despite facing challenges to conserve species like the northern right whale and impacting research projects, the MMPA continues to stand for protecting marine mammal rights today and in the future.