

Taking of Marine Mammals Is Illegal Act

Warning: The taking of a marine mammal, dead or alive, without a permit is an illegal act that can subject the taker or possessor to a fine, an arrest, or both.

The protected species are porpoises, seals, sea lions, whales, polar bears, sea otters, manatees and walruses.

Under the provisions of the Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972 and related regulations, none can be taken without a scientific research permit or a public display permit.

The prohibition was restated recently by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, because of the recent increase in numbers of marine mammals salvaged for their skins by people who found them on U.S. beaches, obviously soon after death occurred.

The Commerce Department agency's National Marine Fisheries Service administers and enforces the act as it applies to sea lions, seals, porpoises, and whales.

The other marine mammals are the responsibility of the De-

partment of the Interior.

Seals and sea lions are the most commonly found species. In each instance the finder, even though unaware of wrongdoing, is guilty of a violation of the law if in possession of a marine mammal.

The correct procedure is to leave the carcass where it is and inform state or local enforcement authorities or the local conservation department of the situation.

The ban against retention does not apply to bones, teeth, or ivory of marine mammals found on certain shorelands, provided such items are registered with agents of either the NMFS or the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife within 30 days of collection.

To date, but only as a temporary measure, a very small number of law violators have been punished only to the extent of being forced to relinquish marine mammal pelts when state authorities found them to be in illegal possession.

NMFS authorities said, however, that from now on a stricter application of the law will prevail in such situations. A violator, according to the legal provisions covering such occasions, can be fined as much as \$10,000 per violation.

By a Letter of Agreement dated April 10, 1974, arrangements were completed between the NMFS and the Smithsonian Institute, authorizing the Institute to collect and utilize for scientific research dead marine mammals found on U.S. beaches.

A system for a full record of each collection transaction is provided for in the agreement. The rights and responsibilities of the states as set forth in marine mammal legislation are not affected in any way under the new arrangement.

The agreement pertains to those species under NMFS responsibility and does not include marine mammals listed as endangered or threatened under the Endangered Species Act of 1973.