

STELLWAGEN SANCTUARY SPOTLIGHT

Stellwagen Bank, Bermuda sign agreement to protect North Atlantic humpback whales

New Sister Sanctuary Established

NOAA and the Government of Bermuda have signed a "sister sanctuary" agreement to support the protection of endangered humpback whales that swim past a new marine mammal sanctuary in the territorial waters of Bermuda on their annual migrations between NOAA's Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary off Massachusetts and breeding/calving grounds in the Caribbean Sea. The agreement became effective on September 21, 2012.

Together, the two marine sanctuaries will collaborate on research, monitoring and outreach programs that could lead to better protection for humpback whales in the North Atlantic Ocean.

Nearly 650 miles east of the North Carolina coast, Bermuda is strategically situated between the humpbacks' southern calving and breeding grounds and their northern feeding grounds.

"We are pleased to enlarge our network of sister sanctuaries with the inclusion of Bermuda as we share responsibility for protecting these endangered animals with other nations," said Craig MacDonald, superintendent, Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary.

In August 2011, the sanctuary signed a sister sanctuary agreement with France for the waters around the French Antilles in the Caribbean Sea. Stellwagen's sister sanctuary program with the Dominican Republic, created in 2006, was the world's first agreement to protect the same population of marine mammals at its critical habitats on the endpoints of its migratory route.

Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary, which is celebrating its 20th anniversary this year, encompasses 842 square miles of ocean, stretching between Cape Ann and Cape Cod. Renowned for its remarkable productivity, the sanctuary supports a rich diversity of marine life including 22 species of marine mammals, more than 53 species of seabirds, in excess of 80 species of fishes, and hundreds of marine invertebrates.

Remarks by The Honorable Marc A. Bean JP, MP, Bermuda's Minister of Environment, Planning and Infrastructure Strategy, are included on page 2.

The Memorandum of Agreement with Bermuda can be found at <http://stellwagen.noaa.gov> in our Sister Sanctuary section.

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Photo: Elliot Hazen; taken under NOAA Fisheries Permit #14245

Three humpback whales feed in the waters off the Massachusetts coast. Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary researchers participated in a humpback whale tagging project this past summer.



**REMARKS
BY:**

**THE MINISTER OF ENVIRONMENT, PLANNING AND INFRASTRUCTURE STRATEGY
THE HON. MARC A. BEAN JP, MP**

ON THE CREATION OF A MARINE MAMMAL SANCTUARY

21st SEPTEMBER 2012

Good afternoon,

Today I am thrilled to be able to stand before you with my colleague the Minister of Public Works the Hon. Michael Weeks JP MP to declare Bermuda's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) a Marine Mammal Sanctuary.

Bermuda's EEZ is, from today, 21 September 2012, a sanctuary for all marine mammals, with particular emphasis on the endangered humpback whale. This decision was approved by Cabinet last month.

This announcement stems from the Bermuda Government's commitment in 2010 to support the Sargasso Sea Alliance.

And I am proud to say that Bermuda is represented on the Alliance by the Ministry of Environment, Planning and Infrastructure Strategy.

As a result of the ongoing diplomatic efforts of the Sargasso Sea Alliance, steps were taken last year to establish a partnership with the Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary which is administered by the United States National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

Stellwagen Bank, famous for its excellent whale watching, is a 638-square-nautical-mile marine sanctuary located at the mouth of Massachusetts Bay. The endangered Atlantic humpback whale population spends the summer months feeding in the north before making the return voyage to the Caribbean Sea for the winter calving season. Individual humpback whales migrating from Stellwagen Bank past Bermuda have been routinely identified by the unique patterns of their tail fins, here in Bermuda as well as at Stellwagen Bank.

Consequently, on June 30th 2011, at a ceremony held in Bermuda, a letter of intent to build a model for international cooperation was signed with representatives from NOAA as a first step towards establishing this formal partnership agreement with the Stellwagen Bank Sanctuary in the interest of extending protection for the endangered humpback whale.

The next steps in this partnership I am also pleased to announce today. The formal declaration of the Bermuda Sanctuary means that Bermuda can now establish a "Sister Sanctuary" agreement with Stellwagen Bank. The Bermuda Government has today signed this collaboration agreement.

The area of the new Bermuda Marine Mammal Sanctuary will be more than 170,000 square nautical miles, approximately circular in shape with Bermuda at its centre. Although by no means the biggest Marine Mammal Sanctuary in the world, it is a very substantial size and we hope it will be a great contribution to marine mammal conservation in the Atlantic Ocean.

Within Bermuda's EEZ, Humpback Whales are protected by two pieces of Bermuda legislation. The Fisheries Act 1972 protects all species of whales and the Protected Species Act 2003 gives specific protection to whale species that are considered threatened.

To conclude, the establishment of this Marine Mammal Sanctuary and the conclusion of the agreement with Stellwagen Bank will protect, and assist in the global recovery of these, endangered species; promote and encourage research into and monitoring of this iconic species while consequently promoting Bermuda as an important hot spot for whale watching.

Thank You.