



## NOAA FISHERIES SERVICE

### Harbor Porpoise (*Phocoena phocoena*)

#### Description

Like other true porpoises, Harbor porpoises are small cetaceans with no prominent beak and small pectoral flippers. They have a dark gray cape shading to light gray sides with a white belly and throat. They appear on the surface only briefly to breathe.

#### Habitat and Distribution

Harbor Porpoises are coastally distributed in northern temperate and subarctic waters, and are often found in fjords, bays, estuaries, and harbors.

#### Sounds

Harbor porpoise produce high-frequency vocalizations outside of the range of human hearing. These clicks and bursts are thought to be used for echolocation and communication.

#### Feeding

Harbor porpoise forage individually on demersal and benthic species, mostly schooling fish (herring, capelin, sprat, and silver hake) and cephalopods.

#### Threats

Incidental mortality (“bycatch”) in gillnets and trawls is the main threat faced by harbor porpoises, and considerable effort has been invested in experimenting with acoustic pingers to warn them away from the nets.

#### Fun Fact

The term “porpoise” is derived from the Latin *porcus* for “pig” and *piscus* for “fish”. Fishermen in the Canadian Maritimes and New England call harbor porpoise “puffing pigs” or “puffers”.



Family: Phocoenidae  
Population: >700,000  
Status: Least Concern  
Length: 5 – 5.5 feet  
Weight: 135 – 170 lbs