



NOAA

NATIONAL OCEANIC AND
ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION
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Captive killer whale included in endangered listing

NOAA Fisheries will issue a final rule to include Lolita, a captive killer whale at the Miami Seaquarium, in the endangered species listing for Southern Resident Killer Whales that spend much of the year in the inland waters of Washington and British Columbia.

While Lolita will now share the endangered listing status of the population she came from, the decision does not impact her residence at the Miami Seaquarium. Lolita is a killer whale that has resided at the Miami Seaquarium since 1970. She was caught in Puget Sound, and the Southern Resident killer whale population she originated from was later listed as endangered under the Endangered Species Act (ESA).

However, because that listing included an exemption for captive members of the population like Lolita, she did not share the endangered listing status of the Southern Resident population. In 2013, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals Foundation petitioned NOAA Fisheries to drop the exclusion, so the listing would also cover Lolita.

NOAA Fisheries considered the petition and concluded that captive animals such as Lolita cannot be assigned separate legal status from their wild counterparts. The final rule NOAA Fisheries issued today will include Lolita in the endangered listing status of the Southern Resident killer whale population.

NOAA Fisheries received many public comments on the proposal to list Lolita as endangered along with the Southern Resident population. Most of the comments favored including Lolita in the endangered listing, and many also urged that Lolita be returned to the Pacific Northwest and eventually released into the wild.

Currently, the Miami Seaquarium is not proposing to move Lolita. While issues concerning release into the wild are not related to this Endangered Species Act listing decision, any future plan to move or release Lolita would require a permit from NOAA Fisheries and would undergo rigorous scientific review.

Releasing a whale which has spent most of its life in captivity raises many concerns that would need to be carefully addressed. These concerns include disease transmission, the ability of released animals to adequately find food, difficulty in social integration, and that behavioral patterns developed in captivity could impact wild animals. Previous attempts to release captive killer whales and dolphins have often been unsuccessful, and some have ended tragically with the death of the released animal.

NOAA Fisheries' remains focused on the protection and recovery of Southern Resident Killer Whales, an imperiled population of fewer than 80 whales that primarily eat fish and travel in social groups called pods. They are the subject of extensive research including an [ongoing project using satellite tracking](#) to better understand their feeding patterns and habitat needs.

"We are focusing time, resources and attention on the future of the Southern Resident killer whales population," said Will Stelle, regional administrator of NOAA Fisheries' West Coast Region. "NOAA Fisheries and our many partners are working very hard to learn more about these endangered whales and to protect them and their habitats, which is the only way we're going to recover this population."

Last year NOAA Fisheries released a [comprehensive report](#) summarizing the last 10 years of research and conservation of Southern Resident Killer Whales and outlining NOAA's research and management priorities to help with their long-term recovery.

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For more information

NOAA West Coast Region killer whale web page:

http://www.westcoast.fisheries.noaa.gov/protected_species/marine_mammals/killer_whale/

10-year report on Southern Resident Killer Whales:

http://www.nwfsc.noaa.gov/news/features/killer_whale_report/index.cfm