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Whales [Add Topic](#)

72 whales have died on the East Coast in a year. NOAA must take action.

3-minute read

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Whales captivate our imagination and offer invaluable lessons. They demonstrate care for their own, and even us, yet we often fall short in protecting them. In recent years, we have witnessed numerous accounts of whales exhibiting bravery, selflessness and admirable traits. They safeguard not only their kind but also humans, showcasing qualities that seem undervalued in today's society. Stories like the mother orca carrying her deceased calf for thousands of miles, the humpback whale rescuing marine biologist Nan Hauser from a tiger shark, or the two whales guiding a fellow with a broken spine to her final resting place, all provide a poignant glimpse into their values that could enrich our lives. But up against one of the gravest threats — extinction — will these species be around to enrich our children's lives in the same way?

So, what have we learned from the recent whale deaths off the East Coast — 72 since December 2022?

Quick to point fingers as whales keep dying

They have compelled local communities to question the risks and benefits of offshore wind. Sadly, these same deaths have revealed a disturbing lack of curiosity among the oil-companies-turned-offshore-wind-developers, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and even some marine scientists who rush to the cameras every time a whale dies to point fingers away from offshore wind development along the eastern seaboard.

Proponents of offshore wind are quick to blame global warming (to which of course their

solution is offshore wind turbines) moving feeding grounds into shipping lanes and general episodic “vessel strikes” for these deaths. Many hope to close the investigation within the same day or two because the last thing they need is to have two dead whales, less than 30 miles apart, stealing the headlines for a full week. Proponents of these systems are also quick to claim that offshore wind will not harm marine mammals, yet their own action seemingly contradicts that.

Wind versus whales: How dead whales became the symbol of a political battle in NJ and elsewhere

NOAA attributes most whale deaths to vessel strikes and entanglements, conveniently answering the “what” without focusing on the “why.” For example, by studying the question “Why have species that have evolved over centuries shared their ecosystem with ships of all sizes suddenly started dying in the last few years?” and “How have mammals which have over centuries learned to navigate away from danger suddenly lost that ability?” They see no connection between offshore wind projects and these deaths, especially if they do not look too closely, and especially when their investigations fail to ask “Why?”

Wind debacle: What now? New Jersey has to hit reset button on its energy policy — now

Whale death debate: The right is wrong about offshore wind. Climate change and pollution are killing whales

Why is NOAA reluctant to assess wind turbines' impacts?

The Marine Mammal Protection Act prohibits harming whales unless permission is granted from NOAA. Companies can request Incidental Harassment Authorizations, effectively licensing to harm, harass, or even kill whales. With these permissions, licensees can harm marine mammals without legal consequences. If no connection exists between the high-resolution surveys and whale deaths, why has NOAA granted wind companies permission to harm over 7,000 whales for marine site characterizations since 2017 and why have the companies requested such authorizations?

NOAA refuses to conduct a programmatic review to assess the impact of Incidental Harassment Authorizations on individual species. For example, offshore wind companies can now harass nearly three times the number of critically endangered North Atlantic Right Whales currently alive. Yet, why hasn't anyone asked, if these companies claim their work is harmless to marine mammals, why do they even apply for "takes," and why does NOAA

grant so many permissions if they're so confident that no association exists? These questions deserve answers from our government agencies.

Unfortunately, offshore wind companies benefit from our collective indifference. We have failed to ask the most critical questions: Will offshore wind developments combat climate change? Will they reduce carbon dioxide emissions? Will they wean us off fossil fuels? The offshore wind industry doesn't want us to ask these questions.

For some, even if they knew that offshore wind activities contributed to recent whale deaths, they continue to view these projects as a solution to climate change. However, many are unaware that preserving whale populations is essential for climate change mitigation. Whales sequester millions of tons of carbon dioxide, distribute crucial nutrients for the carbon cycle, and enhance primary productivity. The consequences of losing these whale species are unpredictable, affecting the marine environment, our world, and ourselves.

Just as a child questioning the tooth fairy may lead to doubts about the Easter Bunny and Santa Claus, questioning the impact of offshore wind projects on whales might lead to doubts about their contribution to our climate goals. Offshore wind companies understand this and discourage our curiosity. This should serve as a telling sign.

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