

SJR

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SJR 21 Relating to Efforts
of the Government of Mexico to Protect
Gray Whales

Sponsor Statement

Senator Jay Kerttula

In the early 1900's the advent of mechanized whaling ships nearly brought gray whales to extinction. Today, gray whales no longer exist in the Atlantic Ocean; and the gray whale's status in the Western Pacific is uncertain. It is likely, however, that the Western Pacific stock of gray whales is below critical population size and may be nearing extinction. Only in the North Pacific has the gray whale population recovered to the extent that the species, though diminished, is no longer endangered.

The gray whale has been on the federal Endangered Species List since 1973, the year the List began. In the early 1970's, the Mexican Government recognized the gray whales' plight and, in a spirit of international concern and cooperation, acted to help save the gray whale before it vanished forever. Within its territorial waters, Mexico made several gray whale breeding lagoons off limits to tour boats and private tourists and, to further encourage population growth within the species, Mexico also severely limited access to several other breeding lagoons -- all in an attempt to ensure the whales were not disturbed during calving.

During this same period, the Marine Mammal Protection Act included gray whales as a protected species, and allowed no commercial "harvesting" of the whales.

Through the twin efforts of Mexico's protection of the gray whales' breeding grounds and the international ban on commercial harvesting of the species, the North Pacific gray whale has demonstrated amazing resilience, recovering, in this one area at least, to its estimated original, pre-commercial whaling population.

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Through its concern and its initiative in protecting the gray whales' breeding areas, the Government of Mexico ensured that calves would be born undisturbed each year, thus promulgating the species. More than this, they showed that humankind can, with wisdom and determination, undo the harm it too often creates and can bring species like the gray whale back from the edge of extinction. Accordingly, Mexico has earned our gratitude and our thanks for its part in helping save this magnificent marine mammal species.