



Marine Mammal Observer Fact Sheet

This fact sheet is intended to provide some simple guidance to the most frequently asked questions regarding how to start working as a Marine Mammal Observer (MMO) or a Passive Acoustic Monitoring Operator (PAM) Operator. Although every effort has been made to verify the accuracy of items in this Fact Sheet users are urged to check independently on matters of specific interest. The MMO Association will not be held responsible for any misinterpretation of this information.

What is a MMO?

A MMO carries out visual detection of marine mammals during surveys associated with research or industry. The latter is primarily associated with mitigating the potential impacts of anthropogenic sound on marine mammals by implementing a suite of real-time mitigation measures. MMOs are frequently employed on geophysical seismic surveys, during pile-driving associated with construction (especially offshore wind farms), during the use of explosives (e.g. for decommissioning of oil platforms) and during military sonar trials. In some cases (e.g. seismic surveys), the use of an MMO may be mandatory in particular locations.

The role of an MMO includes visually monitoring marine mammals (and other marine fauna) at sea using binoculars, completing the necessary effort, sighting and operational data forms, implementing the required mitigation measures (job and region specific), reporting to the client/authority and providing general advice and guidance on minimising impacts on marine mammals. Further information on the roles of MMOs and PAM Operators is available at the MMOA website: <http://www.mmo-association.org>

What is a PAM Operator?

A PAM operator carries out acoustic monitoring and detection of marine mammals during surveys. Marine mammals spend most of their time underwater and acoustic monitoring can increase the likelihood of detection, particularly when conditions are unfavourable for visual detection. PAM also provides the only method of detecting marine mammals at night. A PAM operator is expected to be competent at deploying and retrieving hydrophone cables, essential maintenance, configuring the monitoring hardware and software and interpreting acoustic signals.

What do I need to do to become an MMO/PAM Operator?

There are no formal qualifications for becoming an MMO / PAM but as with any professional job, you are expected to be suitably skilled and experienced. Your employers and certain governments may require you to have particular training. The MMO Association has listed what skills the MMO and PAM Operator are expected to have to complete their job professionally and competently. You find these in our position statements on our website <http://www.mmo-association.org>

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In very limited cases, you may be required to attend a training course to work in a particular jurisdiction. To work offshore, there is usually the need for certain occupational health and safety certificates including offshore survival courses and medical fitness certificates. Some guidance is available in the Information Directory of the MMOA website which is available to Associate and Full Members.

How can I locate a suitable training course?

It should be noted that mitigation requirements for monitoring marine mammals differ between countries. If a training course is required, this may only qualify you to work in a particular country, as long as you have other suitable experience observing marine mammals. For information on required training courses, you should check with the responsible authority for the country in question. Training requirements, if any, are usually outlined in the regulatory documents themselves. These documents can be found in the Information Directory MMOA website which is available to Associate and Full Members. A simple internet search may also locate suitable training courses in your region.

Note – whether you have training or not, MMOA endorses a minimum level of skill and experience for independent MMO/PAM operators, in accordance with principles of best practice for environmental professionals. For more information, check requirements for Full Membership of MMOA, including the Code of Conduct.

Further information

This fact sheet provides a brief summary of information on becoming an MMO/ PAM Operators. If you are a newly-qualified MMO or PAM operator or are about to training to become an MMO, membership of the Marine Mammal Observer Association (MMOA) will allow you access to further information on MMO and PAM issues, discuss professional matters with the Full Members and identify a pathway for achieving and demonstrating personal competency as an MMO/PAM.