

Endangered false killer whales get habitat protection

By Associated Press

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Kina, a 40-year-old false killer whale, at Sea Life Park in Waimanalo, Hawaii. AP

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HONOLULU — A federal agency will designate waters around Hawaii as protected critical habitat for endangered false killer whales.

About 17,500 square miles of ocean habitat will be protected under a new rule by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's National Marine Fisheries Service, [the Honolulu Star-Advertiser reported.](#)

The rule was published Tuesday in the Federal Register and goes into effect on Aug. 23.

The waters around the state host about 150 false killer whales, which are actually members of the dolphin family. The Center for Biological Diversity has been advocating for the protection of the species.

“It’s a very good day for the false killer whales,” said Brett Hartl, the center’s government affairs director. “Getting critical habitat is a very important step and a very useful tool to help get a species on the path to recovery.”

Enlarge ImageFalse killer whales swim off the coast of Oahu, Hawaii.^{AP}

The protected habitat covers ocean from Niihau to the Big Island and includes depths of 147 feet to 1.9 miles.

The rule excludes 14 areas, including 13 sites requested by the US Navy and one area requested by the federal Bureau of Ocean Energy Management.

“What they’ve done is probably not exactly what we hoped for, but I think at the end of the day, the critical habitat that the false killer whale receives is a huge step in the right direction,” Hartl said.