

STRIPED DOLPHIN (*Stenella coeruleoalba*): Western North Atlantic Stock

STOCK DEFINITION AND GEOGRAPHIC RANGE

The striped dolphin, *Stenella coeruleoalba*, is distributed worldwide in warm-temperate to tropical seas (Archer and Perrin 1997). Striped dolphins are found in the western North Atlantic from Nova Scotia south to at least Jamaica and in the Gulf of Mexico. In general, striped dolphins appear to prefer continental slope waters offshore to the Gulf Stream (Leatherwood *et al.* 1976; Perrin *et al.* 1994; Schmidly 1981). There is very little information concerning striped dolphin stock structure in the western North Atlantic (Archer and Perrin 1997).

In waters off the northeastern USA coast, striped dolphins are distributed along the continental shelf edge from Cape Hatteras to the southern margin of Georges Bank, and also occur offshore over the continental slope and rise in the mid-Atlantic region (CETAP 1982). Continental shelf edge sightings in this program were generally centered along the 1,000 m depth contour in all seasons (CETAP 1982). During 1990 and 1991 cetacean habitat-use surveys, striped dolphins were associated with the Gulf Stream north wall and warm-core ring features (Waring *et al.* 1992). Striped dolphins seen in a survey of the New England Sea Mounts (Palka 1997) were in waters that were between 20° and 27°C and deeper than 900 m.

Although striped dolphins are considered to be uncommon in Canadian Atlantic waters (Baird *et al.* 1993), recent summer sightings (2-125 individuals) in the deeper and warmer waters of the Gully (submarine canyon off eastern Nova Scotia shelf) suggest that this region may be an important part of their range (Gowans and Whitehead 1995; Baird *et al.* 1997).

POPULATION SIZE

Total numbers of striped dolphins off the USA or Canadian Atlantic coast are unknown, although four estimates from selected regions of the habitat do exist for select time periods. Sightings were almost exclusively in the continental shelf edge and continental slope areas west of Georges Bank (Figure 1). An abundance of 36,780 striped dolphins (CV=0.27) was estimated from an aerial survey program conducted from 1978 to 1982 on the continental, shelf and shelf edge waters between Cape Hatteras, North Carolina and Nova Scotia (CETAP 1982). An abundance of 25,939 (CV=0.36) and 13,157 (CV=0.45) striped dolphins was estimated from line transect aerial surveys conducted from August to September 1991 using the Twin Otter and AT-11, respectively (Anon. 1991). The study area included that covered in the CETAP study plus several additional continental slope survey blocks. Due to weather and logistical constraints, several survey blocks south and east of Georges Bank were not surveyed. As recommended in the GAMS Workshop Report (Wade and Angliss 1997), estimates older than eight years are deemed unreliable, therefore should not be used for PBR determinations. Further, due to changes in survey methodology these data should not be used to make comparisons to more current estimates

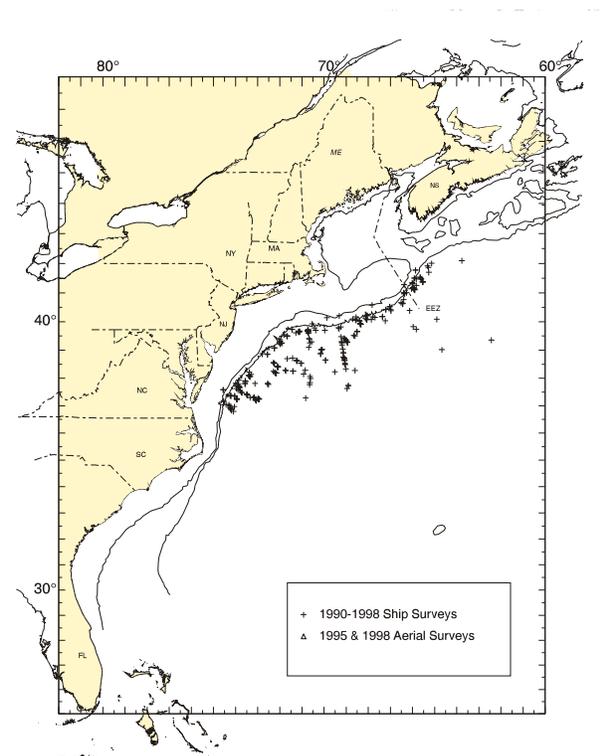


Figure 1. Distribution of striped dolphin sightings from NEFSC and SEFSC shipboard and aerial surveys during the summer in 1990-1998. Isobaths are at 100 m and 1,000 m.

An abundance of 31,669 (CV=0.73) striped dolphins was estimated from a July to September 1995 sighting survey conducted by two ships and an airplane that covered waters from Virginia to the mouth of the Gulf of St. Lawrence (Table 1; Palka *et al.* in review). Total track line length was 32,600 km. The ships covered waters between the 50 and 1000 fathom depth contour lines, the northern edge of the Gulf Stream, and the northern Gulf of Maine/Bay of Fundy region. The airplane covered waters in the mid-Atlantic from the coastline to the 50 fathom depth contour line, the southern Gulf of Maine, and shelf waters off Nova Scotia from the coastline to the 1000 fathom depth contour line. Data collection and analysis methods used were described in Palka (1996).

An abundance of 39,720 (CV=0.45) for striped dolphins was estimated from a line transect sighting survey conducted during July 6 to September 6, 1998 by a ship and plane that surveyed 15,900 km of track line in waters north of Maryland (38° N) (Figure 1; Palka *et al.* in review). Shipboard data were analyzed using the modified direct duplicate method (Palka 1995) that accounts for school size bias and $g(0)$, the probability of detecting a group on the track line. Aerial data were not corrected for $g(0)$.

An abundance of 21,826 (CV=0.78) for striped dolphins was estimated from a shipboard line transect sighting survey conducted between 8 July and 17 August 1998 that surveyed 5,570 km of track line in waters south of Maryland (38°N) (Figure 1; Mullin in review). Abundance estimates were made using the program DISTANCE (Buckland *et al.* 1993; Laake *et al.* 1993) where school size bias and ship attraction were accounted for.

The best available abundance estimate for striped dolphins is the sum of the estimates from the two 1998 USA Atlantic surveys, 61,546 (CV=0.40), where the estimate from the northern USA Atlantic is 39,720 (CV=0.45) and from the southern USA Atlantic is 21,826 (CV=0.78). This joint estimate is considered best because together these two surveys have the most complete coverage of the species' habitat.

Table 1. Summary of abundance estimates for western North Atlantic striped dolphins. Month, year, and area covered during each abundance survey, and resulting abundance estimate (N_{best}) and coefficient of variation (CV).

Month/Year	Area	N_{best}	CV
Jul-Sep 1995	Virginia to Gulf of St. Lawrence	31,669	0.73
Jul-Sep 1998	Maryland to Gulf of St. Lawrence	39,720	0.45
Jul-Aug 1998	Florida to Maryland	21,826	0.78
Jul-Sep 1998	Florida to Gulf of St. Lawrence (combined)	61,546	0.40

Minimum Population Estimate

The minimum population estimate is the lower limit of the two-tailed 60% confidence interval of the log-normally distributed best abundance estimate. This is equivalent to the 20th percentile of the log-normal distribution as specified by Wade and Angliss (1997). The best estimate of abundance for striped dolphins is 61,546 (CV=0.40). The minimum population estimate for the western North Atlantic striped dolphin is 44,500 (CV=0.40).

Current Population Trend

There are insufficient data to determine the population trends for this species.

CURRENT AND MAXIMUM NET PRODUCTIVITY RATES

Current and maximum net productivity rates are unknown for this stock. For purposes of this assessment, the maximum net productivity rate was assumed to be 0.04. This value is based on theoretical modeling showing that cetacean populations may not grow at rates much greater than 4% given the constraints of their reproductive life history (Barlow 1995).

POTENTIAL BIOLOGICAL REMOVAL

Potential Biological Removal (PBR) is the product of minimum population size, one-half the maximum productivity rate, and a "recovery" factor (MMPA Sec. 3. 16 U.S.C. 1362; Wade and Angliss 1997). The minimum

population size is 44,500 (CV=0.40). The maximum productivity rate is 0.04, the default value for cetaceans. The “recovery” factor, which accounts for endangered, depleted, threatened stocks, or stocks of unknown status relative to optimum sustainable population (OSP) is 0.5 because this stock is of unknown status. PBR for the western North Atlantic striped dolphin is 445.

ANNUAL HUMAN-CAUSED MORTALITY AND SERIOUS INJURY

Total annual estimated average fishery-related mortality to this stock during 1994-1998 was 7.3 striped dolphins; CV=0.08) Table 2).

Fishery Information

USA

No mortalities were observed in 1977-1991 foreign fishing activities off the northeast USA coast. Nineteen mortalities were documented between 1989 and 1993 (see below) in the pelagic drift gillnet fishery, and two mortalities were documented in 1991 in the North Atlantic bottom trawl fishery.

Data on current incidental takes in USA fisheries are available from several sources. In 1986, NMFS established a mandatory self-reported fishery information system for large pelagic fisheries. Data files are maintained at the Southeast Fisheries Science Center (SEFSC). The Northeast Fisheries Science Center (NEFSC) Sea Sampling Observer Program was initiated in 1989 and since that year several fisheries have been covered by the program. In late 1992 and in 1993, the SEFSC provided observer coverage of pelagic longline vessels fishing off the Grand Banks (Tail of the Banks) and provides observer coverage of vessels fishing south of Cape Hatteras.

Bycatch has been observed by NMFS Sea Samplers in the pelagic drift gillnet and North Atlantic bottom trawl fisheries but no mortalities or serious injuries have been documented in the pelagic longline fisheries, pelagic pair trawl, Northeast multispecies sink gillnet, and mid-Atlantic coastal sink gillnet fisheries.

Pelagic Drift Gillnet

The estimated total number of hauls in the pelagic drift net fishery increased from 714 in 1989 to 1144 in 1990; thereafter, with the introduction of quotas, effort was severely reduced. The estimated number of hauls in 1991, 1992, 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, and 1998 were 233, 243, 232, 197, 164, 149, and 113 respectively. In 1996 and 1997, NMFS issued management regulations which prohibited the operation of this fishery in 1997. Further, in January 1999 NMFS issued a Final Rule to prohibit the use of driftnets (*i.e.*, permanent closure) in the North Atlantic swordfish fishery (50 CFR Part 630). Fifty-nine vessels participated in this fishery between 1989 and 1993. Since 1994, between 10 and 13 vessels have participated in the fishery. Observer coverage, percent of sets observed, was 8% in 1989, 6% in 1990, 20% in 1991, 40% in 1992, 42% in 1993, 87% in 1994, 99% in 1995, 64% in 1996, NA in 1997, and 99% in 1998. The greatest concentrations of effort were located along the southern edge of Georges Bank and off Cape Hatteras. Examination of the species composition of the catch and locations of the fishery throughout the year, suggested that the pelagic drift gillnet fishery be stratified into two strata, a southern or winter stratum, and a northern or summer stratum. Estimates of total bycatch, for each year from 1989 to 1993, were obtained using the aggregated (pooled 1989-1993) catch rates, by strata, assuming the 1990 injury was a mortality (Northridge 1996). Estimates of total annual bycatch for 1994 and 1995 were estimated from the sum of the observed caught and the product of the average bycatch per haul and the number of unobserved hauls as recorded in self-reported fishery information. Variances were estimated using bootstrap re-sampling techniques. Forty striped dolphin mortalities were observed in this fishery between 1989 and 1998 and occurred east of Cape Hatteras in January and February, and along the southern margin of Georges Bank in summer and autumn. Estimated annual mortality and serious injury (CV in parentheses) attributable to this fishery was 39 striped dolphins in 1989 (0.31), 57 in 1990 (0.33), 11 in 1991 (0.28), 7.7 in 1992 (0.31), 21 in 1993 (0.11), 13 in 1994 (0.06), 2 in 1995 (0), 7 in 1996 (CV=0.22), NA in 1997, and 4 in 1998 (CV=0). The 1994-1998 average annual mortality and serious injury to striped dolphins in the pelagic drift gillnet fishery was 7.3 (CV=0.08) (Table 2).

North Atlantic Bottom Trawl

Vessels in the North Atlantic bottom trawl fishery, a Category III fishery under the MMPA, were observed in order to meet fishery management needs, rather than marine mammal management needs. An average of 970 vessels (full and part time) participated annually in the fishery during 1989-1995. The fishery is active in New England waters in all seasons. The only reported fishery-related mortalities (two) occurred in 1991. Total estimated mortality and serious injury attributable to this fishery in 1991 was 181 (CV=0.97); average annual mortality and serious injury during 1994-1998 was zero.

Total estimated average annual fishery-related mortality and serious injury to this stock in the Atlantic during 1994-1998 was 7.3 (CV=0.08) (Table 2).

CANADA

No mortalities were documented in review of Canadian gillnet and trap fisheries (Read 1994). However, in a recent review of striped dolphins in Atlantic Canada two records of incidental mortality have been reported (Baird *et al.* 1997). In the late 1960's and early 1970's two mortalities each, were reported in trawl and salmon net fisheries.

Between January 1993 and December 1994, 36 Spanish deep-water trawlers, covering 74 fishing trips (4,726 fishing days and 14,211 sets), were observed in NAFO Fishing Area 3 (off the Grand Bank) (Lens 1997). A total of 47 incidental catches were recorded, which included two striped dolphins. The incidental mortality rate for striped dolphins was 0.014/set.

Table 2. Summary of the incidental mortality of striped dolphins (*Stenella coeruleoalba*) by commercial fishery including the years sampled (Years), the number of vessels active within the fishery (Vessels), the type of data used (Data Type), the annual observer coverage (Observer Coverage), the mortalities recorded by on-board observers (Observed Mortality), the estimated annual mortality (Estimated Mortality), the estimated CV of the annual mortality (Estimated CVs) and the mean annual mortality (CV in parentheses).

Fishery	Years	Number Vessel	Data Type ¹	Range of Observer Coverage ²	Observed Serious Injury	Observed Mortality	Estimated Mortality	CVs	Mean Annual Mortality
Pelagic Drift Gillnet	94-98	1994=12 1995=11 1996=10 1998=13	Obs Data Logbook	.87, .99, .64, NA, .99	0, 0, 0, 0, 0	12, 2, 7, NA, 4	13, 2.0 ³ , 10, NA, 4	.06, 0, .22, NA, 0	7.3 (0.08)
TOTAL									7.3 (0.08)

¹ Observer data (Obs. Data) are used to measure bycatch rates, and the data are collected within the Northeast Fisheries Science Center (NEFSC) Sea Sampling Program. Mandatory logbook (Logbook) data are used to measure total effort for the pelagic drift gillnet and longline fishery, and these data are collected at the Southeast Fisheries Science Center (SEFSC).

² Observer coverage for the pelagic drift gillnet and bottom trawl fishery are in terms of sets.

³ One vessel was not observed and recorded 1 set in a 10 day trip (in the logbook). If you assume 1 set, the point estimate would increase by 0.01 animals.

Other Mortality

From 1995-1998, seven striped dolphins were stranded between Massachusetts and Florida (NMFS unpublished data).

In eastern Canada, ten strandings were reported off eastern Canada from 1926-1971, and nineteen from 1991-1996 (Sergeant *et al.* 1970; Baird *et al.* 1997; Lucas and Hooker 1997). In both time periods, most of the strandings were on Sable Island, Nova Scotia.

STATUS OF STOCK

The status of striped dolphins, relative to OSP, in the USA Atlantic EEZ is unknown. The species is not listed as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act. There are insufficient data to determine the population trends for this species. The total fishery-related mortality and serious injury for this stock is less than 10% of the calculated PBR, therefore can be considered to be insignificant and approaching zero mortality and serious injury rate. Average annual fishery-related mortality and serious injury does not exceed the PBR; therefore, this is not a strategic stock.

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