

PACIFIC WHITE-SIDED DOLPHIN (*Lagenorhynchus obliquidens*): California/Oregon/Washington, Northern and Southern Stocks

STOCK DEFINITION AND GEOGRAPHIC RANGE

Pacific white-sided dolphins are endemic to temperate waters of the North Pacific Ocean, and are common both on the high seas and along the continental margins. Off the U.S. west coast, Pacific white-sided dolphins have been seen primarily in shelf and slope waters (Figure 1). Sighting patterns from recent aerial and shipboard surveys conducted in California, Oregon and Washington at different times of the year (Green et al. 1992; 1993; Barlow 1995; Forney et al. 1995) suggest seasonal north-south movements, with animals found primarily off California during the colder water months and shifting northward into Oregon and Washington as water temperatures increase in late spring and summer (Green et al. 1992; Forney 1994).

Stock structure throughout the North Pacific is poorly understood, but based on morphological evidence, two forms are known to occur off the California coast (Walker et al. 1986; Chivers et al. 1993). Specimens belonging to the northern form were collected from north of about 33°N, (Southern California to Alaska), and southern specimens were obtained from about 36°N southward along the coasts of California and Baja California. Samples of both forms have been collected in the Southern California Bight, but it is unclear whether this indicates sympatry in this region or whether they may occur there at different times (seasonally or interannually). Recent genetic analyses have confirmed the distinctness of animals found off Baja California from animals occurring in U.S. waters north of Point Conception, California and in the high seas of the North Pacific (Lux et al. 1997). Based on these genetic data, an area of mixing between the two forms appears to be located off Southern California (Lux et al. 1997).

Although there is clear evidence that two forms of Pacific white-sided dolphins occur along the U.S. west coast, there are no known differences in color pattern, and it is not currently possible to distinguish animals without genetic or morphometric analyses. Geographic stock boundaries appear dynamic and are poorly understood, and therefore cannot be used to differentiate the two forms. Until means of differentiating the two forms for abundance and mortality estimation are developed, these two stocks must be managed as a single unit; however, this is an undesirable management situation. Furthermore, Pacific white-sided dolphins are not restricted to U.S. territorial waters, but cooperative management agreements with Mexico exist only for the tuna purse seine fishery and not for other fisheries which may take this species (e.g. gillnet fisheries). Additional means of differentiating the two types must be found, and cooperative management with Mexico is particularly important for this species, given the apparently dynamic nature of geographical stock boundaries. Until these goals are accomplished, the management stock includes animals of both forms. For the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) stock assessment reports, Pacific white-sided dolphins within the Pacific U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone are divided into two discrete, non-contiguous areas: 1) waters off California, Oregon and Washington (this report), and 2) Alaskan waters.

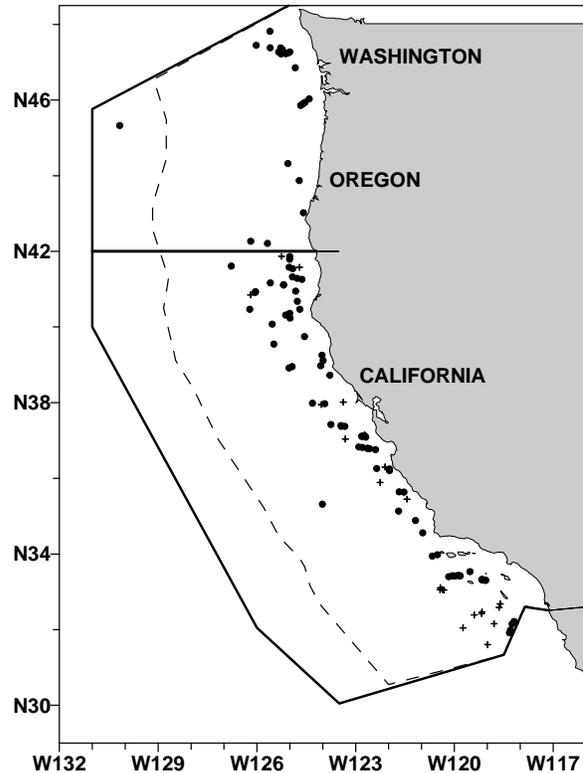


Figure 1. Pacific white-sided dolphin sightings based on aerial and shipboard surveys off California, Oregon, and Washington, 1991-2001 (see Appendix 2 for data sources and information on timing and location of survey effort). Dashed line represents the U.S. EEZ, thick line indicates the outer boundary of all surveys combined. ● = summer/autumn ship-based sightings; + = winter/spring aerial-based sightings.

POPULATION SIZE

The previous best estimates of abundance for Pacific white-sided dolphins were based on three summer/autumn shipboard surveys conducted within 300 nmi of the coasts California in 1991 and 1993 (Barlow and Gerrodette 1996) and California, Oregon, and Washington in 1996 (Barlow 1997). More recently, a shipboard survey within 300 nmi of the coasts of California, Oregon, and Washington was conducted in summer/autumn of 2001 (Barlow 2003). The distribution of Pacific white-sided dolphins throughout this region is highly variable, apparently in response to oceanographic changes on both seasonal and interannual time scales (Forney and Barlow 1998). As oceanographic conditions vary, Pacific white-sided dolphins may spend time outside the U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone, and therefore a multi-year average abundance estimate including California, Oregon and Washington is the most appropriate for management within U.S. waters. The 1996-2001 weighted average abundance estimate for California, Oregon and Washington waters based on the two most recent ship surveys is 59,274 (CV =0.50) Pacific white-sided dolphins (Barlow 2003).

Minimum Population Estimate

The log-normal 20th percentile of the 1996-2001 weighted average abundance estimate is 39,822 Pacific white-sided dolphins.

Current Population Trend

No long-term trends in the abundance of Pacific white-sided dolphins in California, Oregon and Washington are suggested based on historical and recent surveys (Dohl et al. 1980; 1983; Green et al. 1992; 1993; Barlow 1995; Forney et al. 1995, Barlow 2003).

CURRENT AND MAXIMUM NET PRODUCTIVITY RATES

No information on current or maximum net productivity rates is available for Pacific white-sided dolphins off the U.S. west coast.

POTENTIAL BIOLOGICAL REMOVAL

The potential biological removal (PBR) level for this stock is calculated as the minimum population size (39,822) times one half the default maximum net growth rate for cetaceans ($\frac{1}{2}$ of 4%) times a recovery factor of 0.48 (for a species of unknown status with a mortality rate $CV \geq 0.30$ and ≤ 0.60 ; Wade and Angliss 1997), resulting in a PBR of 382 Pacific white-sided dolphins per year.

HUMAN-CAUSED MORTALITY AND SERIOUS INJURY

Fishery Information

A summary of recent fishery mortality and injury for this stock of Pacific white-sided dolphin is shown in Table 1. More detailed information on these fisheries is provided in Appendix 1. Mortality estimates for the California drift gillnet fishery are included for the five most recent years of monitoring, 1997-2001 (Cameron and Forney 1999, 2000; Carretta 2001, 2002). After the 1997 implementation of a Take Reduction Plan, which included skipper education workshops and required the use of pingers and minimum 6-fathom extenders, overall cetacean entanglement rates in the drift gillnet fishery dropped considerably (Barlow and Cameron 2003). However, because of interannual variability in entanglement rates and the relative rarity of Pacific white-sided dolphin entanglements, additional years of data will be required to fully evaluate the effectiveness of pingers for reducing mortality of this particular species. Mean annual takes in Table 1 are based on 1997-2001 data. This results in an average estimate of 5.9 (CV = 0.42) Pacific white-sided dolphins taken annually.

Drift gillnet fisheries for swordfish and sharks exist along the entire Pacific coast of Baja California, Mexico and may take animals from this population. Quantitative data are available only for the Mexican swordfish drift gillnet fishery, which uses vessels, gear, and operational procedures similar to those in the U.S. drift gillnet fishery, although nets may be up to 4.5 km long (Holts and Sosa-Nishizaki 1998). The fleet increased from two vessels in 1986 to 31 vessels in 1993 (Holts and Sosa-Nishizaki 1998). The total number of sets in this fishery in 1992 can be estimated from data provided by these authors to be approximately 2700, with an observed rate of marine mammal bycatch of 0.13 animals per set (10 marine mammals in 77 observed sets; Sosa-Nishizaki et al. 1993). This overall mortality rate is similar to that observed in California driftnet fisheries during 1990-95 (0.14 marine mammals per set; Julian and Beeson, 1998), but species-specific information is not available for the Mexican fisheries. Previous efforts to convert the

Mexican swordfish driftnet fishery to a longline fishery have resulted in a mixed-fishery, with 20 vessels alternately using longlines or driftnets, 23 using driftnets only, 22 using longlines only, and seven with unknown gear type (Berdegué 2002).

Table 1. Summary of available information on the incidental mortality and injury of Pacific white-sided dolphins (California/ Oregon/Washington Stock) in commercial fisheries that might take this species. All observed entanglements of Pacific white-sided dolphins resulted in the death of the animal. Coefficients of variation for mortality estimates are provided in parentheses; n/a = not available. Mean annual takes are based on 1997-2001 data unless noted otherwise.

Fishery Name	Data Type	Year(s)	Percent Observer Coverage	Observed Mortality	Estimated Annual Mortality	Mean Annual Takes (CV in parentheses)
CA/OR thresher shark/swordfish drift gillnet fishery	observer data	1997	23.0%	3	12 (0.68)	5.2 (0.44)
		1998	20.0%	0	0	
		1999	20.0%	0	0	
		2000	22.9%	2	5 (1.02)	
		2001	20.4%	2	9 (0.69)	
WA/OR/CA domestic groundfish trawl fisheries (At-sea processing Pacific whiting fishery only).	observer data	1997	65.7%	0	0	0.2 (0.48)
		1998	77.3%	1	1 (0.48)	
		1999	68.6%	0	0	
		2000	80.6%	0	0	
		2001	96.2%	0	0	
Minimum total annual takes						5.4 (0.42)

Low levels of mortality for Pacific white-sided dolphins have also been documented in the California/Oregon/Washington domestic groundfish trawl fisheries (Perez and Loughlin 1991; Perez, in prep;). Between 1997 and 2001, with 66%-96% of the fishing effort observed, one Pacific white-sided dolphin was reported killed in the at-sea processing portion of the Pacific whiting trawl fishery, and three additional animals were reported in unmonitored hauls. Based only on the systematically observed hauls, mortality was estimated to be one Pacific white-sided dolphin (CV=0.48, Perez, in prep) in 1998. Combining this estimate with the three additional reported mortalities for 1996 that are not accounted for in the estimate, the minimum average annual mortality for 1997-2001 is 0.8 (CV=0.48) Pacific white-sided dolphins.

Other removals

Additional removals of Pacific white-sided dolphins from the wild have occurred in live-capture fisheries off California. Brownell et al. (1999) estimate a minimum total live capture of 128 Pacific white-sided dolphins between the late 1950s and 1993. The most recent capture was in November 1993, when three animals were taken for public display (Forney 1994). No MMPA permits are currently active for live-captures of Pacific white-sided dolphins.

STATUS OF STOCK

The status of Pacific white-sided dolphins in California, Oregon and Washington relative to OSP is not known, and there is no indication of a trend in abundance for this stock. No habitat issues are known to be of concern for this species. They are not listed as "threatened" or "endangered" under the Endangered Species Act nor as "depleted" under the MMPA. Including driftnet mortality only for years after implementation of the Take Reduction Plan (1997-98), the average annual human-caused mortality in 1997-2001 (5.4 animals) is estimated to be less than the PBR (382), and therefore they are not classified as a "strategic" stock under the MMPA. The total fishery mortality and serious injury for this stock is less than 10% of the calculated PBR and, therefore, can be considered to be insignificant and approaching zero mortality and serious injury rate.

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