

KILLER WHALE (*Orcinus orca*): Eastern North Pacific Offshore Stock

STOCK DEFINITION AND GEOGRAPHIC RANGE

Killer whales have been observed in all oceans and seas of the world (Leatherwood and Dahlheim 1978). Although reported from tropical and offshore waters, killer whales prefer the colder waters of both hemispheres, with greatest abundances found within 800 km of major continents (Mitchell 1975). Along the west coast of North America, killer whales occur along the entire Alaskan coast (Braham and Dahlheim 1982), in British Columbia and Washington inland waterways (Bigg et al. 1990), and along the outer coasts of Washington, Oregon and California (Green et al. 1992; Barlow 1995, 1997; Forney et al. 1995; Barlow and Forney 2007). Seasonal and year-round occurrence have been noted for killer whales throughout Alaska (Braham and Dahlheim 1982) and in the intracoastal waterways of British Columbia and Washington, where pods have been labeled as 'resident', 'transient' and 'offshore' (Bigg et al. 1990, Ford et al. 1994) based on aspects of morphology, ecology, genetics and behavior (Ford and Fisher 1982; Baird and Stacey 1988; Baird et al. 1992, Hoelzel et al. 1998). Through examination of photographs of recognizable individuals and pods, movements of whales between geographical areas have been documented. For example, whales identified in Prince William Sound have been observed near Kodiak Island (Heise et al. 1991) and whales identified in Southeast Alaska have been observed in Prince William Sound, British Columbia, and Puget Sound (Leatherwood et al. 1990, Dahlheim et al. 1997). Movements of killer whales between the waters of Southeast Alaska and central California have also been documented (Goley and Straley 1994).

Offshore killer whales have more recently also been identified off the coasts of California, Oregon, and rarely, in Southeast Alaska (Ford et al. 1994, Black et al. 1997, Dahlheim et al. 1997). They apparently do not mix with the transient and resident killer whale stocks found in these regions (Ford et al. 1994, Black et al. 1997). Studies indicate the 'offshore' type, although distinct from the other types ('resident' and 'transient'), appears to be more closely related genetically, morphologically, behaviorally, and vocally to the 'resident' type killer whales (Black et al. 1997, Hoelzel et al. 1998; J. Ford, pers. comm.; L. Barrett-Lennard, pers. comm.). Based on data regarding association patterns, acoustics, movements, genetic differences, and potential fishery interactions, five killer whale stocks are recognized within the Pacific U.S. EEZ 1) the Eastern North Pacific Northern Resident stock - occurring from British Columbia

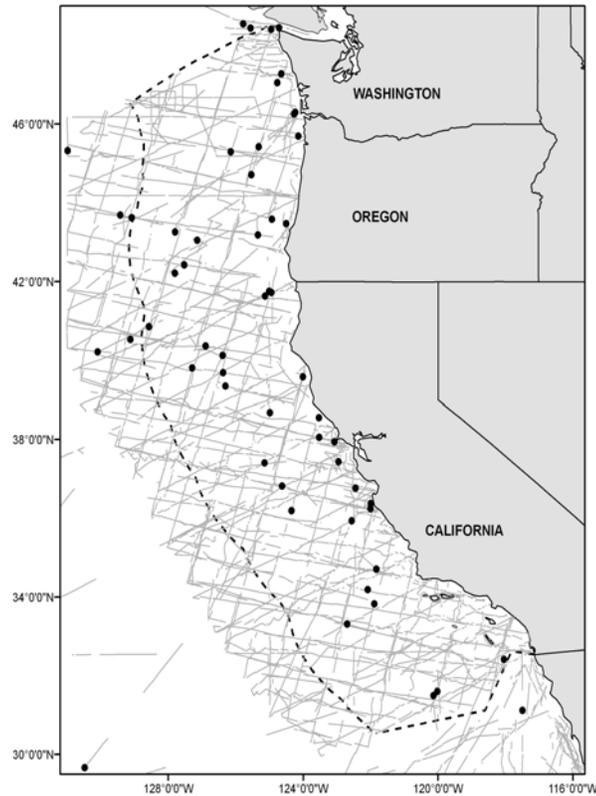


Figure 1. Killer whale sightings based on shipboard surveys off California, Oregon and Washington, 1991-2008 (see Appendix 2 for data sources and information on timing and location of survey effort). Sightings include killer whales from all stocks found in this region. Dashed line represents the U.S. EEZ, thin lines indicate completed transect effort of all surveys combined.

through Alaska, 2) the Eastern North Pacific Southern Resident stock - occurring within the inland waters of Washington and southern British Columbia, 3) the Eastern North Pacific Transient stock - occurring from Alaska through California, 4) the Eastern North Pacific Offshore stock - occurring from Southeast Alaska through California (this report), and 5) the Hawaiian stock. 'Offshore' whales in Canadian waters are considered part of the Eastern North Pacific Offshore stock. The Stock Assessment Reports for the Alaska Region contain assessments of the Eastern North Pacific Northern Resident and transient stocks, and the most recent assessment for the Hawaii Stock is included in this volume.

POPULATION SIZE

Off British Columbia, approximately 200 offshore killer whales were identified between 1989 and 1993 (Ford et al. 1994), and 20 of these individuals have also been seen off California (Black et al. 1997). Using only good quality photographs that clearly show characteristics of the dorsal fin and saddle patch region, an additional 11 offshore killer whales that were not previously known have been identified off the California coast, bringing the total number of known individuals in this population to 211. This is certainly an underestimate of the total population size, because not all animals in this population have been photographed. In the future, it may be possible estimate the total abundance of this transboundary stock using mark-recapture analyses based on individual photographs. Based on summer/fall shipboard line-transect surveys in 2005 (Forney 2007) and 2008 (Barlow 2010), the total number of killer whales within 300 nmi of the coasts of California, Oregon and Washington is estimated to be 691 animals (CV=0.49). There is currently no way to reliably distinguish the different stocks of killer whales from sightings at sea, but photographs of individual animals can provide a rough estimate of the proportion of whales in each stock. A total of 161 individual killer whales photographed off California and Oregon have been determined to belong to the transient (105 whales) and offshore (56 whales) stocks (Black et al. 1997). Using these proportions to prorate the line transect abundance estimate yields an estimate of $56/161 * 691 = 240$ offshore killer whales along the U.S. west coast. This is expected to be a conservative estimate of the number of offshore killer whales, because offshore whales apparently are less frequently seen near the coast (Black et al. 1997), and therefore photographic sampling may be biased towards transient whales. For stock assessment purposes, this combined value is currently the best available estimate of abundance for offshore killer whales off the coasts of California, Oregon and Washington.

Minimum Population Estimate

The total number of known offshore killer whales along the U.S. West coast, Canada and Alaska is 211 animals, but it is not known what proportion of time this transboundary stock spends in U.S. waters, and therefore this number is difficult to work with for PBR calculations. A minimum abundance estimate for all killer whales along the coasts of California, Oregon and Washington can be estimated from the 2005-2008 line-transect surveys as the 20th percentile of the geometric mean 2005-2008 abundance estimate, or 466 killer whales. Using the same prorating as above, a minimum of $56/161 * 466 = 162$ offshore killer whales are estimated to be in U.S. waters off California, Oregon and Washington.

Current Population Trend

No information is available regarding trends in abundance of Eastern North Pacific offshore killer whales.

CURRENT AND MAXIMUM NET PRODUCTIVITY RATES

No information on current or maximum net productivity rates is available for killer whales in this region.

POTENTIAL BIOLOGICAL REMOVAL

The potential biological removal (PBR) level for this stock is calculated as the minimum population size (162) times one half the default maximum net growth rate for cetaceans ($1/2$ of 4%) times a recovery factor of 0.50 (for a species of unknown status with no known fishery mortality; Wade and Angliss 1997), resulting in a PBR of 1.6 offshore killer whales per year.

HUMAN-CAUSED MORTALITY AND SERIOUS INJURY

Fishery Information

A summary of information on fisheries that may take animals from this killer whale stock is shown in Table 1 (Carretta et al. 2005, Carretta and Enriquez 2006, 2007, 2009a, 2009b). More detailed information on these fisheries is provided in Appendix 1. In the California drift gillnet fishery, no offshore killer whales have been observed entangled (Julian 1997; Julian and Beeson 1998; Cameron and Forney 1999, 2000; Carretta and Chivers 2004, Carretta et al. 2005a, 2005b, Carretta and Enriquez 2006, 2007, 2009a, 2009b), but one killer whale from the Eastern North Pacific Transient Stock was observed taken in 1995, and offshore killer whales may also occasionally be entangled. Additional potential sources of killer whale mortality are set gillnets and longlines. In California, an observer program between July 1990 and December 1994 and additional observations between 2000 and 2008 monitored 5-15% of all sets in the large mesh (>3.5") set gillnet fishery for halibut, and no killer whales were observed taken. Based on observations for longline fisheries in other regions (i.e. Alaska; Yano and Dahlheim 1995), fishery interactions may also occur with U.S. West coast pelagic longline fisheries, but no such interactions have been documented to date.

Table 1. Summary of available information on the incidental mortality and injury of killer whales (Eastern North Pacific Offshore Stock) in commercial fisheries that might take this species. Mean annual takes are based on 2004-2008 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	2004	20.6%	0	0	0
		2005	20.9%	0	0	
		2006	18.5%	0	0	
		2007	16.4%	0	0	
		2008	13.5%	0	0	
Minimum total annual takes						0

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).

STATUS OF STOCK

The status of killer whales in California in relation to OSP is unknown, and there are insufficient data to evaluate trends in abundance. No habitat issues are known to be of concern for this stock. They are not listed as "threatened" or "endangered" under the Endangered Species Act nor as "depleted" under the MMPA. There has been no documented human-caused mortality of this stock, and therefore they are not classified as a "strategic" stock under the MMPA. The total fishery mortality and serious injury for offshore killer whales is zero and can be considered to be insignificant and approaching zero mortality and serious injury rate.

REFERENCES

- Baird, R. W., and P. J. Stacey. 1988. Variation in saddle patch pigmentation in populations of killer whales (*Orcinus orca*) from British Columbia, Alaska, and Washington State. *Can. J. Zool.* 66:2582-2585.
- Baird, R. W., Abrams, P. A., and L. M. Dill. 1992. Possible indirect interactions between transient and resident killer whales: implications for the evolution of foraging specializations in the genus *Orcinus*. *Oecologia* 89:125-132.
- Barlow, J. 1995. The abundance of cetaceans in California waters. Part I: Ship surveys in summer and fall of 1991. *Fish. Bull.* 93:1-14.
- Barlow, J. 1997. Preliminary estimates of cetacean abundance off California, Oregon and Washington based on a 1996 ship survey and comparisons of passing and closing modes. Administrative Report LJ-97-11, Southwest Fisheries Science Center, National Marine Fisheries Service, P.O. Box 271, La Jolla, CA 92038. 25p.
- Barlow, J. 2010. Cetacean abundance in the California Current from a 2008 ship-based line-transect survey. NOAA Technical Memorandum, NMFS, NOAA-TM-NMFS-SWFSC-456. 19 p.
- Barlow, J. and K.A. Forney. 2007. Abundance and population density of cetaceans in the California Current ecosystem. *Fishery Bulletin* 105:509-526. Barrett-Lennard, L. Univ. of British Columbia, 6270 University Blvd., Vancouver, BC V6T1Z4.
- Berdegué, J. 2002. Depredación de las especies pelágicas reservadas a la pesca deportiva y especies en peligro de extinción con uso indiscriminado de artes de pesca no selectivas (palangres, FAD's, trampas para peces y redes de agallar fijas y a la deriva) por la flota palangrera Mexicana. Fundación para la conservación de los picudos. A.C. Mazatlán, Sinaloa, 21 de septiembre.
- Bigg, M. A., P. F. Olesiuk, G. M. Ellis, J. K. B. Ford, and K. C. Balcomb III. 1990. Social organization and genealogy of resident killer whales (*Orcinus orca*) in the coastal waters of British Columbia and Washington State. *Rep. int. Whal. Commn Special Issue* 12:386-406.
- Black, N. A., A. Schulman-Janiger, R. L. Ternullo, and M. Guerrero-Ruiz. 1997. Killer whales of California and western Mexico: A Catalog of photo-identified individuals. U.S. Dep. Commer., NOAA Tech. Memo. NMFS-SWFSC-247. 174p.
- Braham, H. W., and M. E. Dahlheim. 1982. Killer whales in Alaska documented in the Platforms of Opportunity Program. *Rep. Int. Whal. Commn.*, 32:643-646.
- Cameron, G., and K. A. Forney. 1999. Estimates of cetacean mortality in the California gillnet fisheries for 1997 and 1998. Paper SC/51/O4 presented to the International Whaling Commission, 1999 (unpublished). 14pp.
- Cameron, G.A. and K.A. Forney. 2000. Preliminary estimates of cetacean mortality in California/Oregon Gillnet Fisheries for 1999. Report SC/52/O24 presented to the Scientific Committee of the International Whaling Commission, June 2000 (unpublished). 12p. [Available from Southwest Fisheries Science Center, National Marine Fisheries Service, 8604 La Jolla Shores Drive, La Jolla, CA 92037, USA.]
- Carretta, J.V. and L. Enriquez. 2009a. Marine mammal and seabird bycatch observed in California commercial fisheries in 2007. Administrative Report LJ-09-01, available from Southwest Fisheries Science Center, 3333 North Torrey Pines Rd., La Jolla, CA 92037. 12 p.
- Carretta, J.V. and L. Enriquez. 2009b. Marine mammal bycatch observed in the California/Oregon swordfish and thresher shark drift gillnet fishery in 2008. Administrative Report LJ-09-03, available from Southwest Fisheries Science Center, 3333 North Torrey Pines Rd., La Jolla, CA 92037. 10 p .
- Carretta, J.V. and L. Enriquez. 2007. Marine mammal and sea turtle bycatch in the California/Oregon thresher shark and swordfish drift gillnet fishery in 2006. Administrative Report LJ-07-06, available from Southwest Fisheries Science Center, 8604 La Jolla Shores Drive, La Jolla, CA 92037. 9p.
- Carretta, J.V. and L. Enriquez. 2006. Marine mammal bycatch and estimated mortality in California commercial fisheries during 2005. Administrative Report LJ-06-07, available from Southwest Fisheries Science Center, 8604 La Jolla Shores Drive, La Jolla, CA 92037. 14p.
- Carretta, J.V. and S.J. Chivers. 2004. Preliminary estimates of marine mammal mortality and biological sampling of cetaceans in California gillnet fisheries for 2003. Paper SC/56/SM1 presented to the IWC Scientific Committee, June 2004 (unpublished). [Available from Southwest Fisheries

- Science Center, National Marine Fisheries Service, 8604 La Jolla Shores Drive, La Jolla, CA 92037, USA].
- Carretta, J.V., S.J. Chivers, and K. Danil. 2005a. Preliminary estimates of marine mammal bycatch, mortality, and biological sampling of cetaceans in California gillnet fisheries for 2004. Administrative Report LJ-05-10, available from Southwest Fisheries Science Center, 8604 La Jolla Shores Drive, La Jolla, California, 92037. 17 p.
- Carretta, J.V., T. Price, D. Petersen, and R. Read. 2005b. Estimates of marine mammal, sea turtle, and seabird mortality in the California drift gillnet fishery for swordfish and thresher shark, 1996-2002. *Marine Fisheries Review* 66(2):21-30.
- Dahlheim, M. E., D. Ellifrit, and J. Swenson. 1997. Killer Whales of Southeast Alaska: A Catalogue of Photoidentified Individuals. Day Moon Press, Seattle, WA. 82 pp. + appendices.
- Ford, J. K. B., Vancouver Aquarium, P.O. Box 3232, Vancouver, BC V6B 3XB, Canada.
- Ford, J. K. B., G. M. Ellis, and K.C. Balcomb. 1994. Killer whales. The natural history and genealogy of *Orcinus orca* in British Columbia and Washington State. UBC Press, Vancouver, Canada
- Ford, J. K. B., and H. D. Fisher. 1982. Killer whale (*Orcinus orca*) dialects as an indicator of stocks in British Columbia. *Rep. Int. Whal. Commn* 32:671-679.
- Forney, K. A., J. Barlow and J. V. Carretta. 1995. The abundance of cetaceans in California waters. Part II: Aerial surveys in winter and spring of 1991 and 1992. *Fish. Bull.* 93:15-26.
- Forney, K.A. 2007. Preliminary estimates of cetacean abundance along the U.S. west coast and within four National Marine Sanctuaries during 2005. U.S. Department of Commerce, NOAA Technical Memorandum NMFS-SWFSC-406. 27p.
- Goley, P. D., and J. M. Straley. 1994. Attack on gray whales (*Eschrichtius robustus*) in Monterey Bay, California, by killer whales (*Orcinus orca*) previously identified in Glacier Bay, Alaska. *Can. J. Zool.* 72:1528-1530.
- Green, G., J. J. Brueggeman, R. A. Grotefendt, C. E. Bowlby, M. L. Bonnell, and K. C. Balcomb, III. 1992. Cetacean distribution and abundance off Oregon and Washington. Ch. 1. In: Oregon and Washington Marine Mammal and Seabird Surveys. OCS Study 91-0093. Final Report prepared for Pacific OCS Region, Minerals Management Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, Los Angeles, California.
- Heise, K., G. Ellis, and C. Matkin. 1991. A catalogue of Prince William Sound Killer Whales. North Gulf Oceanic Society, Homer, AK. Published for the National Marine Mammal Laboratory, 7600 Sand Point Way NE, Seattle, WA 98115.
- Hoelzel, A. R., M. E. Dahlheim, and S. J. Stern. 1998. Low genetic variation among killer whales (*Orcinus orca*) in the Eastern North Pacific, and genetic differentiation between foraging specialists. *J. Heredity* 89:121-128.
- Holts, D. and O. Sosa-Nishizaki. 1998. Swordfish, *Xiphias gladius*, fisheries of the eastern North Pacific Ocean. In: I. Barrett, O. Sosa-Nishizaki and N. Bartoo (eds.). Biology and fisheries of swordfish, *Xiphias gladius*. Papers from the International Symposium on Pacific Swordfish, Ensenada Mexico, 11-14 December 1994. U.S. Dep. Commer., NOAA Tech. Rep. NMFS 142, 276 p.
- Hoyt, E. 1981. The Whale Called Killer. E. P. Dutton, New York.
- Julian, F. 1997. Cetacean mortality in California gill net fisheries: Preliminary estimates for 1996. Paper SC/49/SM02 presented to the International Whaling Commission, 1997 (unpublished). 13 pp.
- Julian, F. and M. Beeson. 1998. Estimates of mammal, turtle and bird mortality for two California gillnet fisheries: 1990-1995. *Fishery Bulletin* 96:271-284.
- Leatherwood, J. S., and M. E. Dahlheim. 1978. Worldwide distribution of pilot whales and killer whales. Naval Ocean Systems Center, Tech. Rep. 443:1-39.
- Leatherwood, S., C. O. Matkin, J. D. Hall, and G. M. Ellis. 1990. Killer whales, *Orcinus orca*, photo identified in Prince William Sound, Alaska 1976 to 1987. *Can. Field Naturalist* 104:362-371.
- Mitchell, E. D. 1975. Report on the meeting on small cetaceans, Montreal, April 1-11, 1974. *J. Fish. Res. Board Canada*, 32:914-916.
- Rice, D. W. 1974. Whales and whale research in eastern North Pacific. p. 170-195 In: W. E. Schevill (ed.), The Whale Problem - A Status Report. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA.
- Sosa-Nishizaki, O., R. De la Rosa-Pacheco, R. Castro-Longoria, M. Grijalva Chon, and J. De la Rosa Velez. 1993. Estudio biologico pesquero del pez (*Xiphias gladius*) y otras especies de picudos (marlins y pez vela). *Rep. Int. CICESE, CTECT9306*.

- Yano, K. and M. E. Dahlheim. 1995. Killer whale, *Orcinus orca*, depredation on longline catches of bottomfish in the southeastern Bering Sea and adjacent waters. Fishery Bulletin 93:355-372.
- Wade, P. R. and R. P. Angliss. 1997. Guidelines for Assessing Marine Mammal Stocks: Report of the GAMMS Workshop April 3-5, 1996, Seattle, Washington. U. S. Dep. Commer., NOAA Tech. Memo. NMFS-OPR-12. 93 pp.