DALL'S PORPOISE (*Phocoenoides dalli*): Alaska Stock

STOCK DEFINITION AND GEOGRAPHIC RANGE

Dall's porpoise are widely distributed across the entire North Pacific Ocean (Fig. 26). They are found over the continental shelf adjacent to the slope and over deep (2,500+m) oceanic waters (Hall 1979). They have been sighted throughout the North Pacific as far north as 65/N (Buckland et al. 1993), and as far south as 28/N in the eastern North Pacific (Leatherwood and Fielding 1974). The only apparent distribution gaps in Alaska waters are upper Cook Inlet and the shallow eastern flats of the Bering Sea. Throughout most of the eastern North Pacific they are present during all months of the year, although there may be seasonal onshore-offshore movements along the west coast of the continental United States (Loeb 1972, Leatherwood and Fielding 1974), and winter movements of populations out of Prince William Sound (Hall 1979) and areas in the Gulf of Alaska and Bering Sea (NMFS unpubl. data, National Marine Mammal Laboratory, 7600 Sand Point Way, NE, Seattle, WA 98115).

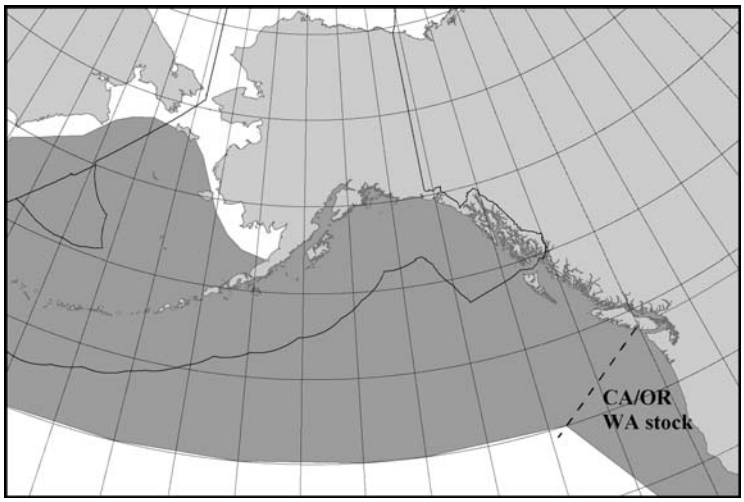

Figure 26. Approximate distribution of Dall's porpoise in the eastern North Pacific (shaded area).

Recent surveys in the central-eastern and southeastern Bering Sea in 1999 and 2000 (see Fig. 35 for locations of surveys) resulted in new information about the distribution and relative abundance of Dall's porpoise in these areas (Moore et al. 2002). Dall's porpoise were abundant in both areas, were consistently found in deeper water (286 m, SE = 23 m) than harbor porpoise (67 m; SE = 3 m; t-test, $p<0.0001$) and were particularly clustered around the shelf break in the central-eastern Bering Sea (Moore et al. 2002).

The following information was considered in classifying stock structure based on the Dizon et al. (1992) phylogeographic approach: 1) Distributional data: geographic distribution continuous, 2) Population response data: differential timing of reproduction between the Bering Sea and western North Pacific; 3) Phenotypic data: unknown; and 4) Genotypic data: unknown. The stock structure of eastern North Pacific Dall's porpoise is not adequately understood at this time, but based on patterns of stock differentiation in the western North Pacific, where they have been more intensively studied, it is expected that separate stocks will emerge when data become available (Perrin and Brownell 1994). Based primarily on the population response data (Jones et al. 1986) and preliminary genetics analyses Winans and Jones (1988), a delineation between Bering Sea and western North Pacific stocks has been recognized. However, similar data are not available for the eastern North Pacific, thus one stock of Dall's porpoise is recognized in Alaska waters. Dall's porpoise along the west coast of the continental U. S. from California to Washington comprise a separate stock and are reported separately in the Stock Assessment Reports for the Pacific Region.

POPULATION SIZE

Data collected from vessel surveys, performed by both U. S. fishery observers and U. S. researchers from 1987 to 1991, were analyzed to provide population estimates of Dall's porpoise throughout the North Pacific and the Bering Sea (Hobbs and Lerczak 1993). The quality of data used in analyses was determined by the procedures recommended by Boucher and Boaz (1989). Survey effort was not well distributed throughout the U. S. Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) in Alaska, and as a result, Bristol Bay and the north Bering Sea received little survey effort. Only 3 sightings were reported in this area by Hobbs and Lerczak (1993), resulting in an estimate of 9,000 (CV = 0.91). In the U. S. EEZ north and south of the Aleutian Islands, Hobbs and Lerczak (1993) reported an estimated abundance of 302,000 (CV = 0.11), whereas for the Gulf of Alaska EEZ, they reported 106,000 (CV = 0.20) . Combining these three estimates (9,000 + 302,000 + 106,000) results in a total abundance estimate of 417,000 (CV = 0.097) for the Alaska stock of Dall's

porpoise. Turnock and Quinn (1991) estimate that abundance estimates of Dall's porpoise are inflated by as much as 5 times because of vessel attraction behavior. Therefore, a corrected population estimate is 83,400 (417,000 × 0.2) for this stock. No reliable abundance estimates for British Columbia are currently available.

Results of the surveys in 1999 and 2000 in the central-eastern Bering Sea and southeastern Bering Sea provided provisional estimates of 14,312 (CV = 0.26) and 9,807 (CV = 0.20) Dall's porpoise, respectively (Moore et al. 2002). These estimates are considered provisional because they have not been corrected for animals missed on the trackline, animals submerged when the ship passed, and responsive movement. However, because these surveys did not cover the entire range of Dall's porpoise, they cannot be used to determine a minimum population estimate.

Minimum Population Estimate

The minimum population estimate (N_{MIN}) for this stock is calculated using Equation 1 from the PBR Guidelines (Wade and Angliss 1997): $N_{MIN} = N/\exp(0.842*[\ln(1+[CV(N)]^2)]^{½})$. Using the population estimate (N) of 83,400 and its associated CV of 0.097, N_{MIN} for the Alaska stock of Dall's porpoise is 76,874.

Current Population Trend

At present, there is no reliable information on trends in abundance for the Alaska stock of Dall's porpoise.

CURRENT AND MAXIMUM NET PRODUCTIVITY RATES

A reliable estimate of the maximum net productivity rate is not currently available for the Alaska stock of Dall's porpoise. Hence, until additional data become available, it is recommended that the cetacean maximum theoretical net productivity rate (R_{MAX}) of 4% be employed for the Alaska stock of Dall's porpoise (Wade and Angliss 1997). However, based on life history analyses in Ferrero and Walker (1999), Dall's porpoise reproductive strategy is not consistent with the delphinid pattern on which the default R_{MAX} for cetaceans is based. In contrast to the delphinids, Dall's porpoise mature earlier and reproduce annually which suggest that a higher R_{MAX} may be warranted, pending further analyses.

POTENTIAL BIOLOGICAL REMOVAL

Under the 1994 reauthorized Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA), the potential biological removal (PBR) is defined as the product of the minimum population estimate, one-half the maximum theoretical net productivity rate, and a recovery factor: $PBR = N_{MIN} \times 0.5R_{MAX} \times F_R$. As this stock is considered to be within optimum sustainable population (Buckland et al. 1993), the recovery factor (F_R) for this stock is 1.0 (Wade and Angliss 1997). The PBR reported in the previous SAR was 1,537 animals (76,874 × 0.02 × 1.0). The estimate of abundance for Dall's porpoise is now more than 8 years old; Wade and Angliss (1997) recommend that abundance estimates older than 8 years no longer be used to calculate a PBR level. However, recent estimates of abundance are available for a portion of this stock's range (Moore et al. 2002) and new estimates of abundance will be developed from 1997 to 1999 aerial surveys within the next few months. Thus, because some information is available and new information is forthcoming, the PBR level will not be designated as undetermined.

ANNUAL HUMAN-CAUSED MORTALITY AND SERIOUS INJURY

Fisheries Information

Six different commercial fisheries operating within the range of the Alaska stock of Dall's porpoise were monitored for incidental take by NMFS observers during 1997-01: Bering Sea (and Aleutian Islands) groundfish trawl, longline, and pot fisheries, and Gulf of Alaska groundfish trawl, longline, and pot fisheries. No mortalities of Dall's porpoise were observed by NMFS observers in either pot fishery or the Gulf of Alaska longline fishery. For the fisheries with observed takes, the range of observer coverage over the 5-year period, as well as the annual observed and estimated mortalities are presented in Table 20. The mean annual (total) mortality was 5.4 (CV = 0.18) for the Bering Sea groundfish trawl fishery, 0.3 (CV = 0.61) for the Gulf of Alaska groundfish trawl fishery, and 0.2 (CV = n/a) for the Bering Sea groundfish longline fishery.

The Alaska Peninsula and Aleutian Island salmon driftnet fishery was monitored in 1990. Observers boarded 59 (38.3%) of the 154 vessels participating in the fishery, monitoring a total of 373 sets, or less than 4% of the estimated number of sets made by the fleet (Wynne et al. 1991). One Dall's porpoise mortality was observed which extrapolated to an annual (total) incidental mortality rate of 28 Dall's porpoise. Combining the estimates from the Bering Sea and Gulf of Alaska fisheries presented above (5.4 + 0.3 + 0.2 =5.9) with the estimate from the Alaska Peninsula and Aleutian

Island salmon drift gillnet fishery (28) results in an estimated annual incidental kill rate in observed fisheries of 33.9 porpoise per year from this stock.

The Prince William Sound salmon drift gillnet fishery was also monitored by observers during 1990 and 1991, with no incidental mortality of Dall's porpoise reported. In 1990, observers boarded 300 (57.3%) of the 524 vessels that fished in the Prince William Sound salmon drift gillnet fishery, monitoring a total of 3,166 sets, or roughly 4% of the estimated number of sets made by the fleet (Wynne et al. 1991). In 1991, observers boarded 531 (86.9%) of the 611 registered vessels and monitored a total of 5,875 sets, or roughly 5% of the estimated sets made by the fleet (Wynne et al. 1992). The low level of observer coverage for this fishery apparently missed interaction with Dall's porpoise which had occurred, as logbook mortalities were reported in 1991 (see Table 24) which were not recorded by the observer program.

An additional source of information on the number of Dall's porpoise killed or injured incidental to commercial fishery operations is the self-reported fisheries information required of vessel operators by the MMPA. During the period between 1990and 2001, fisher self-reports from 4 unobserved fisheries (see Table 24) resulted in an estimated annual mean of 3.6 mortalities from interactions with commercial fishing gear. In 1990, logbook records from the Cook Inlet set and drift gillnet fisheries were combined. As a result, the Dall's porpoise mortality reported in 1990 may have occurred in the Cook Inlet set gillnet fishery and not in the drift gillnet fishery as reported in Table 24. However, because logbook records are most likely negatively biased (Credle et al. 1994), these are considered to be minimum estimates. These estimates are based on all available fisher self-reports for Alaska fisheries, except for those fisheries which observer data were presented above. The Southeast Alaska salmon drift gillnet fishery accounted for the majority of the reported incidental take in unobserved fisheries. Logbook data are available for part of 1989-1994, after which incidental mortality reporting requirements were modified. Under the new system, logbooks are no longer required; instead, fishers provide self-reports. Data for the 1994-95 phase-in period is fragmentary. After 1995, the level of reporting dropped dramatically, such that the records are considered incomplete and estimates of mortality based on them represent minimums (see Appendix 7 for details).

Table 24. Summary of incidental mortality of Dall's porpoise (Alaska stock) due to commercial fisheries from 1997to 2001 and calculation of the mean annual mortality rate. Mean annual mortality in brackets represents a minimum estimate from logbook reports. Data from 1997 to 2001 are used in the mortality calculation when more than 5 years of data are provided for a particular fishery. n/a indicates that data were not available.

Fishery name	Years	Data type	Range of observer coverage	Observed mortality (in given yrs.)	Estimated morality (in given yrs.)	Mean annual mortality
Bering Sea/Aleutian Is. (BSAI) groundfish trawl	97-01	obs data	62-77%	5, 3, 2, 3, 2	8, 4, 5, 4, 3	5.4 (CV = 1.8)
Gulf of Alaska (GOA) groundfish trawl	97-01	obs data	27-32%	0, 1, 0, 0, 0	0, 3, 0, 0, 0	0.3 (CV = 0.61)
BSAI groundfish longline (incl. misc finfish and sablefish fisheries)	97-01	obs data	30-31%	1, 1, 0, 0, 0	4, 4, 1, 0, 0	0.2 (CV = n/a)
AK Peninsula/ Aleutian Island salmon drift gillnet	90	obs data	4%	1	28	28 (CI 1-81)
Observer program total						33.9
				Reported mortalities		

Fishery name	Years	Data type	Range of observer coverage	Observed mortality (in given yrs.)	Estimated morality (in given yrs.)	Mean annual mortality
Prince William Sound salmon drift gillnet	90-01	logbooks/ self-reports	n/a	0, 2, 0, 0, n/a, n/a, n/a, n/a, n/a, n/a, n/a, n/a	n/a	[$0.5]
Southeast Alaska salmon drift gillnet	90-01	logbooks/ self-reports	n/a	6, 6, 4, 6, n/a, n/a, n/a, 1, n/a, 1, n/a, 1	n/a	[$2.6]
Cook Inlet set and drift gillnet fisheries	90-01	logbooks/ self-reports	n/a	1, 0, 1, 0, n/a, n/a, n/a, n/a, n/a, n/a, n/a, n/a	n/a	[$0.5]
Minimum total annual mortality						$37.5

Note that no observers have been assigned to several of the gillnet fisheries that are known to interact with this stock, making the estimated mortality unreliable. However, due to the large stock size it is unlikely that unreported mortalities from those fisheries are a significant source of mortality. The estimated minimum annual mortality rate incidental to commercial fisheries (rounded to 38 animals; based on observer data (rounded to 34) and logbook reports (rounded to 4) where observer data were not available) is not known to exceed 10% of the PBR (154) and, therefore can be considered to be insignificant and approaching zero mortality and serious injury rate.

Subsistence/Native Harvest Information

There are no reports of subsistence take of Dall's porpoise in Alaska.

STATUS OF STOCK

Dall's porpoise are not listed as "depleted" under the MMPA or listed as "threatened" or "endangered" under the Endangered Species Act. Based on currently available data, the level of human-caused mortality and serious injury (38) does not exceed the PBR (1,537). Therefore, the Alaska stock of Dall's porpoise is not classified as a strategic stock. Population trends and status of this stock relative to OSP are currently unknown.

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