Revised 12/30/2015

HUMPBACK WHALE (*Megaptera novaeangliae*): Western North Pacific Stock

NOTE – December 2015: NMFS has conducted a global Status Review of humpback whales (Bettridge et al. 2015) and has proposed revisions to the ESA listing of the species (80 FR 22303, April 21, 2015).

STOCK DEFINITION AND GEOGRAPHIC RANGE

The humpback whale is distributed worldwide in all ocean basins. In winter, most humpback whales occur in the subtropical and tropical waters of the Northern and Southern Hemispheres. Humpback whales in the high latitudes of the North Pacific are seasonal migrants that feed on euphausiids and small schooling fishes (Nemoto 1957, 1959; Clapham and Mead 1999). The humpback whale population was considerably reduced as a result of intensive commercial exploitation during the 20th century.

A large-scale study of humpback whales throughout the North Pacific was conducted in 2004-2006 (the Structure of Populations, Levels of Abundance, and Status of Humpbacks (SPLASH) project). Initial results from this project (Calambokidis et al. 2008, Barlow et al. 2011), including abundance estimates and movement information, have been reported in Baker et al. (2008, 2013) and are also summarized in Fleming and Jackson (2011); however, these results are still being considered for stock structure analysis.

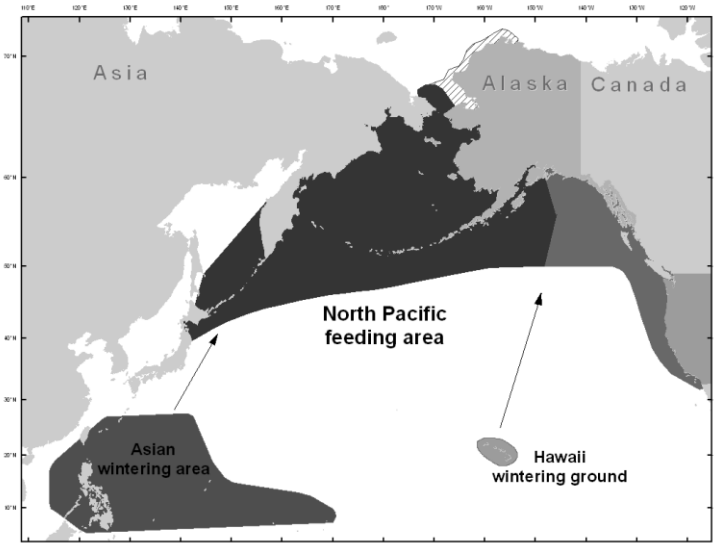

Figure 1. Approximate distribution of humpback whales in the western North Pacific (dark shaded areas). Feeding and wintering grounds are presented above (see text). Area within the hash lines is a probable distribution area based on sightings in the Beaufort Sea (Hashagen et al. 2009). See Figure 1 in the Central North Pacific humpback whale Stock Assessment Report for humpback whale distribution in the eastern North Pacific.

The historical summer feeding range of humpback whales in the North Pacific encompassed coastal and inland waters around the Pacific Rim from Point Conception, California, north to the Gulf of Alaska and the Bering Sea, and west along the Aleutian Islands to the Kamchatka Peninsula and into the Sea of Okhotsk and north of the Bering Strait (Zenkovich 1954, Nemoto 1957, Tomlin 1967, Johnson and Wolman 1984). Historically, the Asian wintering area extended from the South China Sea east through the Philippines, Ryukyu Retto, Ogasawara Gunto, Mariana Islands, and Marshall Islands (Rice 1998). Humpback whales are currently found throughout this historical range (Clarke et al. 2013b), with sightings during summer months occurring as far north as the Beaufort Sea (Hashagen et al. 2009). Most of the current winter range of humpback whales in the North Pacific is relatively well known, with aggregations of whales in Japan, the Philippines, Hawaii, Mexico, and Central America. The winter range includes the main islands of the Hawaiian archipelago, with the greatest concentration along the west side of Maui. In Mexico, the winter breeding range includes waters around the southern part of the Baja California peninsula, the central portions of the Pacific coast of mainland Mexico, and the Revillagigedo Islands off the mainland coast. The winter range also extends from southern Mexico into Central America, including Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica (Calambokidis et al. 2008).

Photo-identification data, distribution information, and genetic analyses have indicated that in the North Pacific there are at least three breeding populations (Asia, Hawaii, and Mexico/Central America) that all migrate between their respective winter/spring calving and mating areas and their summer/fall feeding areas (Calambokidis et al. 1997, Baker et al. 1998). Calambokidis et al. (2001) further suggested that there may be as many as six subpopulations on the wintering grounds. From photo-identification and Discovery tag mark information there are

known connections between Asia and Russia, between Hawaii and Alaska, and between Mexico/Central America and California (Darling 1991, Darling and Cerchio 1993, Calambokidis et al. 1997, Baker et al. 1998). This information led to the designation of three stocks of humpback whales in the North Pacific: 1) the California/Oregon/Washington and Mexico stock, consisting of winter/spring populations in coastal Central America and coastal Mexico which migrate to the coast of California to southern British Columbia in summer/fall (Calambokidis et al. 1989, Steiger et al. 1991, Calambokidis et al. 1993); 2) the Central North Pacific stock, consisting of winter/spring populations of the Hawaiian Islands which migrate primarily to northern British Columbia/Southeast Alaska, the Gulf of Alaska, and the Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands (Baker et al. 1990, Perry et al. 1990, Calambokidis et al. 1997); and 3) the Western North Pacific stock, consisting of winter/spring populations off Asia which migrate primarily to Russia and the Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands.

Information from the SPLASH project mostly confirms this view of humpback whale distribution and movements in the North Pacific. For example, the SPLASH results confirm low rates of interchange between the three principal wintering regions (Asia, Hawaii, and Mexico). However, the full SPLASH results suggest the current view of population structure is incomplete. The overall pattern of movements is complex but indicates a high degree of population structure. Whales from wintering areas at the extremes of their range on both sides of the Pacific migrate to coastal feeding areas that are on the same side of the Pacific: whales from Asia in the west migrate to Russia and whales from mainland Mexico and Central America in the east migrate to coastal waters off California/Oregon.

The SPLASH data now show the Revillagigedo whales are seen in all sampled feeding areas except northern California/Oregon and the south side of the Aleutians and are primarily distributed in the Bering Sea, Gulf of Alaska, and Southeast Alaska/northern British Columbia, but are also found in Russia and southern British Columbia/Washington. The migratory destinations of humpback whales from Hawaii were found to be quite similar, and a number of matches (14) were seen during SPLASH between Hawaii and the Revillagigedos (Calambokidis et al. 2008). This suggests a need for some modification to the current view of winter breeding populations. After a Status Review under the Endangered Species Act (ESA), NMFS has proposed designating four Distinct Population Segments (DPSs) of humpback whales in the North Pacific: Western North Pacific, Hawaii, Mexico, and Central America (https://www.federalregister.gov/articles/2015/04/21/2015-09010/endangered-and-threatened-species-humpback-whale-megaptera-novaeangliae-identification-of-14). If this proposed rule results in the designation of DPSs in the North Pacific, a parallel revision of Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) population structure in the North Pacific will be considered.

The winter distribution of humpback whales in the Western stock includes several island chains in the western North Pacific. In the Ogasawara Islands, humpback sampling during SPLASH was conducted at the three main island groups of Chichi-jima, Haha-jima, and Muko-jima, separated from each other by ~50-70 km. SPLASH sampling in Okinawa (southwest of Honshu) occurred at the Okinawa mainland and Zamami in the Kerama Islands (40 km from the Okinawa mainland), and in the Philippines SPLASH sampling occurred only at the northern tip of the archipelago around the Babuyan Islands. Humpback whales are reported to also occur in the South China Sea north of the Philippines near Taiwan, and east of Ogasawara in the Marshall and Mariana Islands (Rice 1998), but as yet there are no known areas of high density in these regions that could be efficiently sampled.

A relevant finding from the SPLASH project is that whales from the Aleutian Islands, and perhaps also the Gulf of Anadyr in Russia and the Bering Sea, have an unusually low resighting rate in winter areas compared to whales from other feeding areas. One explanation for this result could be that some of these whales have a winter migratory destination that was not sampled during the SPLASH project. Given the location of these feeding areas, the most parsimonious explanation would be that some of these whales winter somewhere between Hawaii and Asia, which would include the possibility of the Marianas Islands (southwest of the Ogasawara Islands), the Marshall Islands (approximately half-way between the Marianas and Hawaiian Islands), and the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands. Indeed, humpback whales have been found to occur in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands, though apparently at relatively low density (Johnston et al. 2007), but no other areas with high densities of humpback whales are known between the Hawaiian main islands and Ogasawara.

The migratory destination of Western North Pacific humpbacks is not completely known. Discovery tag recaptures have indicated movement of whales between Ogasawara and Okinawa and feeding areas in the Bering Sea, on the southern side of the Aleutian Islands, and in the Gulf of Alaska (Omura and Ohsumi 1964, Nishiwaki 1966, Ohsumi and Masaki 1975). Research on humpback whales at the Ogasawara Islands has documented recent movements of whales between there and British Columbia (Darling et al. 1996), the Kodiak Archipelago in the central Gulf of Alaska (Calambokidis et al. 2001), and the Shumagin Islands in the western Gulf of Alaska (Witteveen et al. 2004), but no photo-identification studies had previously been conducted in Russia. Individual movement information from the SPLASH study documents that Russia is likely the primary migratory destination

for whales in Okinawa and the Philippines but also reconfirms that some Asian whales go to Ogasawara, the Aleutian Islands, Bering Sea, and Gulf of Alaska (Calambokidis et al. 2008). A small amount of inter-yearly interchange was also found between the wintering areas (Philippines, Okinawa, and Ogasawara).

During the SPLASH study in Russia, humpback whales were primarily found along the Pacific east side of the Kamchatka Peninsula, near the Commander Islands between Kamchatka and the Aleutian Islands, and in the Gulf of Anadyr just southwest of the Bering Strait. Analysis of whaling data shows historical catches of humpback whales well into the Bering Sea and catches in the Bering Strait and Chukchi Sea in August-October in the 1930s (Mizroch and Rice 2007), but no survey effort occurred during SPLASH north of the Bering Strait. Humpback whales are increasingly seen north of the Bering Strait into the northeastern Chukchi Sea (Clarke et al. 2013a, 2013b), with some indication that more humpback whales are seen on the Russian side north of the Bering Strait (Clarke et al. 2013b). Humpback whales are the most commonly recorded cetacean on hydrophones just north of the Bering Strait and occurred from September into early November from 2009 to 2012 (K. Stafford, Applied Physics Laboratory-University of Washington, Seattle, WA, pers. comm.). Other locations in the far western Pacific where humpback whales have been seen in summer include the northern Kuril Islands (V. Burkanov, NMFS-AFSC-NMML, pers. comm.), far offshore southeast of the Kamchatka Peninsula and south of the Commander Islands (Miyashita 2006), and along the north coast of the Chukotka Peninsula in the Chukchi Sea (Melnikov 2000).

These results indicate humpback whales from the Western North Pacific (Asian) breeding stock overlap broadly on summer feeding grounds with whales from the Central North Pacific breeding stock, as well as with whales that winter in the Revillagigedos in Mexico. Given the relatively small size of the Asian population, Asian whales probably represent a small fraction of all the whales found in the Aleutian Islands, Bering Sea, and Gulf of Alaska, which are primarily whales from Hawaii and the Revillagigedos. The only feeding area that appears to be primarily (or exclusively) composed of Asian whales is along the Kamchatka Peninsula in Russia. The initial SPLASH abundance estimates for Asia ranged from about 900 to 1,100, and the estimates for Kamchatka in Russia ranged from about 100 to 700, suggesting a large portion of the Asian population migrates to Kamchatka. This also shows that Asian whales that migrate to feeding areas besides Russia would be only a small fraction of the total number of whales in those areas, given the much larger abundance estimates for the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands (6,000-14,000) and the Gulf of Alaska (3,000-5,000) (Calambokidis et al. 2008). A full description of the distribution and density of humpback whales in the Aleutian Islands, Bering Sea, and Gulf of Alaska is in the Stock Assessment Report for the Central North Pacific stock of humpback whales.

In summary, information from a variety of sources indicates that humpback whales from the Western and Central North Pacific stocks mix to a limited extent on summer feeding grounds ranging from British Columbia through the central Gulf of Alaska and up to the Bering Sea.

POPULATION SIZE

In the SPLASH study, fluke photographs were collected by over 400 researchers in all known feeding areas from Russia to California and in all known wintering areas from Okinawa and the Philippines to the coast of Central America and Mexico during 2004-2006. Over 18,000 fluke identification photographs were collected, and these have been used to estimate the abundance of humpback whales in the entire North Pacific Basin. A total of 566 unique individuals were seen in the Asian wintering areas during the 2-year period (3 winter field seasons) of the SPLASH study. Based on a comparison of all winter identifications to all summer identifications, the Chapman-Petersen estimate of abundance is 21,808 (CV=0.04) (Barlow et al. 2011). A simulation study identifies significant biases in this estimate from violations of the closed population assumption (+5.3%), exclusion of calves (-10.3%), failure to achieve random geographic sampling (+1.5%), and missed matches (+9.8%) (Barlow et al. 2011). Sex-biased sampling favoring males in wintering areas does not add significant bias if both sexes are proportionately sampled in the feeding areas. The bias-corrected estimate is 20,800 after accounting for a net positive bias of 4.8%. This estimate is likely to be lower than the true abundance due to two additional sources of bias: individual heterogeneity in the probability of being sampled (unquantified) and the likely existence of an unknown and unsampled wintering area (-7.2%).

During the SPLASH study, surveys were conducted in three winter field seasons (2004-2006). The total numbers of unique individuals found in each area during the study were 77 in the Philippines, 215 in Okinawa, and 294 in the Ogasawara Islands. There was a total of 20 individuals seen in more than one area, leaving a total of 566 unique individuals seen in the Asian wintering areas (Calambokidis et al. 2008). For abundance in winter or summer areas, a multistrata Hilborn mark-recapture model was used, which is a form of a spatially-stratified model that explicitly estimates movement rates between winter and summer areas. Two broad categories of models were used making different assumptions about the movement rates, and four different models were used for capture probability. Point estimates of abundance for Asia (combined across the three areas) were relatively consistent

across models, ranging from 938 to 1,107. The model that fit the data the best (as selected by AICc) gave an estimate of 1,107 for the Ogasawara Islands, Okinawa, and the Philippines. Confidence limits or CVs have not yet been calculated for the SPLASH abundance estimates. Although no other high density aggregations of humpback whales are known on the Asian wintering ground, whales have been seen in other locations, indicating this is likely to represent an underestimate of the stock's true abundance to an unknown degree.

On the summer feeding grounds, the initial SPLASH abundance estimates for Kamchatka in Russia ranged from about 100 to 700, suggesting a large portion of the Asian population occurs near Kamchatka. No separate estimates are available for the other areas in Russia, the Gulf of Anadyr and the Commander Islands; abundance from those areas is included in the estimate of abundance for the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands, which ranged from about 6,000 to 14,000. Abundance estimates for the Gulf of Alaska and for Southeast Alaska/northern British Columbia both ranged from 3,000 to 5,000 (Calambokidis et al. 2008).

Minimum Population Estimate

As discussed above, point estimates of abundance for Asia ranged from 938 to 1,107 (for 2004-2006), but no associated CV has yet been calculated. The 1991-1993 abundance estimate for Asia using similar (though likely less) data had a CV of 0.084. Therefore, it is unlikely the CV of the SPLASH estimate, once calculated, would be greater than 0.300. The minimum population estimate (N_{MIN}) for this stock is calculated according to Equation 1 from the potential biological removal (PBR) guidelines (Wade and Angliss 1997): $N_{MIN} = N/\exp(0.842\times[\ln(1+[CV(N)]^2)]^{½})$. Using the SPLASH population estimate (N) of 1,107 from the best fit model and an assumed conservative CV(N) of 0.300 would result in an N_{MIN} for this humpback whale stock of 865.

Current Population Trend

The SPLASH abundance estimate for Asia represents a 6.7% annual rate of increase over the 1991-1993 abundance estimate (Calambokidis et al. 2008). However, the 1991-1993 estimate was for Ogasawara and Okinawa only, whereas the SPLASH estimate includes the Philippines, so the annual rate of increase is biased high to an unknown degree.

CURRENT AND MAXIMUM NET PRODUCTIVITY RATES

Utilizing a birth-interval model, Barlow and Clapham (1997) have estimated a population growth rate of 6.5% (SE = 1.2%) for the well-studied humpback whale population in the Gulf of Maine, although there are indications that this rate has slowed in recent years (Clapham et al. 2003). Mobley et al. (2001) estimated a trend of 7% for 1993-2000 using data from aerial surveys that were conducted in a consistent manner for several years across all of the Hawaiian Islands and were developed specifically to estimate a trend for the Central North Pacific stock. Mizroch et al. (2004) estimated survival rates for North Pacific humpback whales using mark-recapture methods, and a Pradel model fit to data from Hawaii for the years 1980-1996 resulted in an estimated rate of increase of 10% per year (95% CI: 3-16%). For shelf waters of the northern Gulf of Alaska, Zerbini et al. (2006) estimated an annual rate of increase for humpback whales from 1987 to 2003 of 6.6% (95% CI: 5.2-8.6%). The SPLASH abundance estimate for the total North Pacific represents an annual increase of 4.9% over the most complete estimate for the North Pacific for 1991-1993. Comparisons of SPLASH abundance estimates for Hawaii to estimates for 1991-1993 gave estimates of annual increase that ranged from 5.5 to 6.0% (Calambokidis et al. 2008). No confidence limits were calculated for these rates of increase from SPLASH data.

Estimates of observed rates of increase can be used to estimate maximum net productivity rates, although in most cases these estimates may be biased low, as maximum net productivity rates are only achieved at very low population sizes. However, if the observed rates of increase are greater than the default value recommended for R_{MAX}, it would be reasonable to use a higher value based on those observations. The rates of increase summarized above include estimates for the North Pacific of 7%, 10%, and 6.6%. Although there is no estimate of the maximum net productivity rate for just the Western stock (i.e., from trends in abundance in the Asia breeding areas), it is reasonable to assume that R_{MAX} for this stock would be at least 7% based on the other observations from the North Pacific. Hence, until additional data become available for the Western North Pacific humpback whale stock, it is recommended that 7% be employed as the maximum net productivity rate (R_{MAX}) for this stock (Wade and Angliss 1997).

POTENTIAL BIOLOGICAL REMOVAL

Under the 1994 reauthorized MMPA, the PBR is defined as the product of the minimum population estimate, one-half the maximum theoretical net productivity rate, and a recovery factor: $PBR = N_{MIN} \times 0.5R_{MAX} \times F_R$. The recovery factor ($F_R$) for this stock is 0.1, the value for cetacean stocks listed as "endangered" under the ESA

(Wade and Angliss 1997). Using the N_{MIN} of 865, calculated from the SPLASH abundance estimate for 2004-2006 of 1,107 with an assumed CV of 0.300, the PBR is calculated to be 3.0 animals (865 × 0.035 × 0.1).

ANNUAL HUMAN-CAUSED MORTALITY AND SERIOUS INJURY

Fisheries Information

Detailed information on U.S. commercial fisheries in Alaska waters (including observer programs, observer coverage, and observed incidental takes of marine mammals) is presented in Appendices 3-6 of the Alaska Stock Assessment Reports.

Between 2009 and 2013, there were two known mortalities of humpback whales in the Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands pollock trawl fishery and one in the Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands flatfish trawl fishery (Table 1). Since the stock identification of these whales is unknown, and the events occurred within the area where the Western North Pacific and Central North Pacific stocks are known to overlap, the mortality in these fisheries is assigned to both stocks of humpback whales. The minimum average annual mortality and serious injury rate from observed U.S. commercial fisheries is 0.6 humpbacks from the Western North Pacific stock in 2009-2013 (Table 1).

Table 1. Summary of incidental mortality and serious injury of the Western North Pacific stock of humpback whales due to observed U.S. commercial fisheries from 2009 to 2013 and calculation of the mean annual mortality and serious injury rate (Breiwick 2013; NMML, unpubl. data). Methods for calculating percent observer coverage are described in Appendix 6 of the Alaska Stock Assessment Reports. N/A indicates that data are not available.

Fishery name	Years	Data type	Percent observer coverage	Observed mortality	Estimated mortality	Mean estimated annual mortality
Bering Sea/Aleutian Is. flatfish trawl[a]	2009 2010 2011 2012 2013	obs data	99 99 99 99 99	0 0 (+1)[b] 0 0 0	0 0 (+1)[c] 0 0 0	0.2 (CV = N/A)
Bering Sea/Aleutian Is. pollock trawl[a]	2009 2010 2011 2012 2013	obs data	86 86 98 98 97	0 1 0 1 0	0 1.0 0 1.0 0	0.4 (CV = 0.68)
Minimum total estimated annual mortality						0.6 (CV = 0.45)

[a]Mortality and serious injury in this fishery is assigned to both the Western North Pacific and Central North Pacific stocks of humpback whales, since the stock identification is unknown and the two stocks overlap within the area of operation of the fishery.
[b]Total mortality and serious injury observed in 2010: 0 in sampled hauls + 1 in an unsampled haul.
[c]Since the total known mortality and serious injury (0 observed in sampled hauls + 1 in an unsampled haul) exceeds the estimated mortality and serious injury (0) for the fishery in 2010, the observed mortality and serious injury (in sampled + unsampled hauls) will be used as a minimum estimate for that year.

One entanglement in the ground tackle of a commercial cod jig fishery vessel was reported to the NMFS Alaska Region in 2013 (Table 2; Helker et al. 2015). Since observer data are not available for this fishery, this mortality results in a mean annual mortality and serious injury rate of 0.2 humpback whales in 2009-2013 (Table 2) and, since the event occurred in the area where the two stocks overlap, the mortality is assigned to both the Western North Pacific and Central North Pacific stocks of humpback whales.

The estimated mean annual mortality and serious injury rate incidental to U.S. commercial fisheries is 0.8 (0.6 based on observed fisheries + 0.2 based on stranding data) Western North Pacific humpback whales; however, this estimate is considered a minimum because there are no data concerning fishery-related mortality and serious injury in Japanese, Russian, or international waters.

Reports of swimming, floating, or beachcast humpback whales entangled in fishing gear or with injuries caused by interactions with gear, which may be from commercial, recreational, or subsistence fisheries, are another source of fishery-related mortality and serious injury data. However, very few stranding reports are received from areas west of Kodiak. The estimated mean annual mortality and serious injury rate from fishery-related gear entanglements and interactions reported to the NMFS Alaska Region stranding database in 2009-2013, in which the

events have not been attributed to a specific fishery listed on the MMPA List of Fisheries (76 FR 73912; 29 November 2011), is 0.4 humpbacks (Table 2). Since these events occurred in the area where the two stocks overlap, this mortality is assigned to both the Western North Pacific and Central North Pacific stocks of humpback whales. These estimates are considered a minimum because not all entangled animals strand and not all stranded animals are found, reported, or have the cause of death determined. The estimated average annual mortality and serious injury rate due to interactions with all fisheries in 2009-2013 is 1.2 (0.8 in commercial fisheries + 0.4 in unknown fisheries) Western North Pacific humpback whales.

Table 2. Summary of mortality and serious injury of Western North Pacific humpback whales, by year and type, reported to the NMFS Alaska Region marine mammal stranding database in 2009-2013 (Helker et al. 2015). Injury events lacking detailed injury information are assigned prorated values following injury determination guidelines described in NOAA (2012). All events occurred within the area of known overlap between the Western North Pacific and Central North Pacific humpback whale stocks. Since the stock identification is unknown, the mortality and serious injury is reflected in both Stock Assessment Reports. A summary of information used to determine whether an injury was serious or non-serious, as well as a table of prorate values used for large whale reports with incomplete information, is reported in Helker et al. (2015).

Cause of injury	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	Mean annual mortality
Entangled in ground tackle of commercial cod jig vessel	0	0	0	0	1	0.2
Entangled in unspecified pot gear	0	0	0.75	0	0	0.2
Entangled in unspecified set net gear	0	0	0.75	0	0	0.2
Ship strike (charter)	0	0	0	0.2	0	0.04
Ship strike (whale watch)	0	0	0	1	0	0.2
Entangled in unknown marine debris/gear	0.75	0	2.5	0.75	0	0.8

Brownell et al. (2000) compiled records of bycatch in Japanese and Korean commercial fisheries between 1993 and 2000. During the period 1995-1999, there were six humpback whales indicated as "bycatch." In addition, two strandings were reported during this period. Furthermore, analysis of four samples from meat found in markets indicated that humpback whales are being sold. At this time, it is not known whether any or all strandings were caused by incidental interactions with commercial fisheries; similarly, it is not known whether the humpback whales identified in market samples were killed as a result of incidental interactions with commercial fisheries. It is also not known which fishery may be responsible for the bycatch. Regardless, these data indicate a minimum mortality level of 1.1 per year (using bycatch data only) to 2.4 per year (using bycatch, stranding, and market data) in the waters of Japan and Korea. Because many mortalities pass unreported, the actual rate in these areas is likely much higher. An analysis of entanglement rates from photographs collected for SPLASH found a minimum entanglement rate of 31% for humpback whales from the Asia breeding grounds (Cascadia Research NFWF Report #2003-0170-019).

Alaska Native Subsistence/Harvest Information

There are no reported takes of humpback whales from this stock by Native subsistence hunters in Alaska or Russia in 2009-2013.

Other Mortality

Other sources of human-caused mortality and serious injury include ship strikes and entanglement in unknown marine debris/gear. The minimum mean annual mortality and serious injury rate of one Western North Pacific humpback whale per year in 2009-2013 is based on ship strikes (0.2) and entanglement in unknown marine debris/gear (0.8) reported to the NMFS Alaska Region stranding database (Table 2). Since these events occurred in the area where the stocks overlap, this mortality is assigned to both the Western North Pacific and Central North Pacific stocks of humpback whales.

HISTORICAL WHALING

Rice (1978) estimated that the number of humpback whales in the North Pacific may have been approximately 15,000 individuals prior to exploitation; however, this was based upon incomplete data and, given the level of known catches (legal and illegal) since World War II, may be an underestimate. Intensive commercial whaling removed more than 28,000 animals from the North Pacific during the 20th century (Rice 1978). A total of 3,277 reported catches occurred in Asia between 1910 and 1964, with 817 catches from Ogasawara between 1924 and 1944 (Nishiwaki 1966, Rice 1978). After World War II, substantial catches occurred in Asia near Okinawa (including 970 between 1958 and 1961), as well as around the main islands of Japan and the Ogasawara Islands. On the feeding grounds, substantial catches occurred around the Commander Islands and western Aleutian Islands, as well as in the Gulf of Anadyr (Springer et al. 2006).

Humpback whales in the North Pacific were theoretically fully protected in 1965, but illegal catches by the U.S.S.R. continued until 1972 (Ivashchenko et al. 2007). From 1961 to 1971, 6,793 humpback whales were killed illegally by the U.S.S.R. Many animals during this period were taken from the Gulf of Alaska and Bering Sea (Doroshenko 2000); however, additional illegal catches were made across the North Pacific, from the Kuril Islands to the Queen Charlotte Islands, and other takes in earlier years may have gone unrecorded.

STATUS OF STOCK

NMFS recently concluded a global humpback whale Status Review (Bettridge et al. 2015). The estimated mean annual human-caused mortality and serious injury rate of 2.2 (1.2 from fishery-related interactions + 1 from other interactions) Western North Pacific humpback whales is less than the calculated conservative PBR level for this stock (3.0). The minimum estimate of the mean annual U.S. commercial fishery-related mortality and serious injury rate for this stock (0.8) exceeds 10% of the PBR (0.3) and cannot be considered insignificant and approaching zero. In addition, there is a lack of information about fisheries bycatch from Russia, Japan, Korea, and international waters, as well as earlier evidence of bycatch in Japan and Korea (1.1 to 2.4 whales per year based on bycatch, stranding, and market data: Brownell et al. 2000). The humpback whale is listed as "endangered" under the Endangered Species Act and, therefore, designated as "depleted" under the MMPA. As a result, the Western North Pacific stock of humpback whale is classified as a strategic stock. The status of this stock relative to its Optimum Sustainable Population is currently unknown.

HABITAT CONCERNS

Elevated levels of sound from anthropogenic sources (e.g., shipping, military sonars) are a potential concern for humpback whales in the North Pacific, but no specific habitat concerns have been identified for this stock. Other potential impacts include possible changes in prey distribution with climate change, entanglement in fishing gear, ship strikes due to increased vessel traffic (e.g., from increased shipping in higher latitudes and through the Bering Sea with changes in sea-ice coverage), as well as oil and gas activities in the Chukchi and Beaufort seas.

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