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DALL'S PORPOISE (*Phocoenoides dalli dalli*): California/Oregon/Washington Stock

STOCK DEFINITION AND GEOGRAPHIC RANGE

Dall's porpoises are endemic to temperate waters of the North Pacific Ocean. Off the U.S. west coast, they are commonly seen in shelf, slope and offshore waters (Figure 1; Morejohn 1979). Sighting patterns from aerial and shipboard surveys conducted in California, Oregon and Washington at different times (Green et al. 1992, 1993; Mangels and Gerrodette 1994; Barlow 1995; Forney et al. 1995) suggest that north-south movement between these states occurs as oceanographic conditions change, both on seasonal and inter-annual time scales. The southern end of this population's range is not well-documented, but they are commonly seen off Southern California in winter, and during cold-water periods they probably range into Mexican waters off northern Baja California. The stock structure of eastern North Pacific Dall's porpoises is not known, 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). Although Dall's porpoises are not restricted to U.S. territorial waters, there are no cooperative management agreements with Mexico or Canada for fisheries which may take this species (e.g. gillnet fisheries). For the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) stock assessment reports, Dall's porpoises 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.

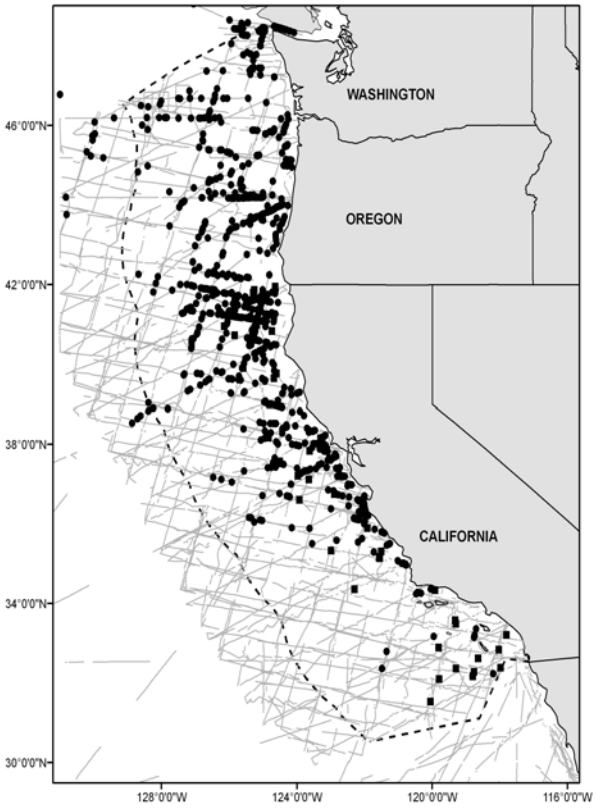

Figure 1. Dall's porpoise sightings based on aerial and shipboard surveys off California, Oregon, and Washington, 1991-2008 (see Appendix 2 for data sources and information on timing and location of survey effort). Dashed line represents the U.S. EEZ, thin lines represent completed transect effort of all surveys combined. Key: ● = summer/autumn ship-based sightings; ■ = winter/spring aerial-based sightings.

POPULATION SIZE

Dall's porpoise distribution in this region is highly variable between years and appears to be affected by oceanographic conditions (Forney 1997; Forney and Barlow 1998). Because animals may spend time outside the U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone as oceanographic conditions change, a multi-year average abundance estimate is the most appropriate for management within U.S. waters. The most recent estimate of Dall's porpoise abundance is the geometric mean of estimates from 2005 (Forney 2007) and 2008 (Barlow 2010) summer/autumn vessel-based line transect surveys of California, Oregon, and Washington waters, or 42,000 (CV = 0.33) animals. Additional numbers of Dall's porpoises occur in the inland waters of Washington state, but the most recent abundance estimate obtained in 1996 (900 animals,

CV=0.40) is over 8 years old (Calambokidis et al. 1997) and is not included in the overall estimate of abundance for this stock.

Minimum Population Estimate

The log-normal 20th percentile of the 2005-2008 average abundance estimate for the outer coast of California, Oregon and Washington waters is 32,106 Dall's porpoises.

Current Population Trend

No information is available regarding trends in abundance of Dall's porpoises in California, Oregon and Washington. Their distribution and abundance in this region varies considerably at both seasonal and interannual time scales as oceanographic conditions vary (Forney 1997; Forney and Barlow 1998).

CURRENT AND MAXIMUM NET PRODUCTIVITY RATES

No information on current or maximum net productivity rates is available for Dall's porpoise 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 (32,106) times one half the default maximum net growth rate for cetaceans (½ of 4%) times a recovery factor of 0.40 (for a species of unknown status and mortality rate CV; Wade and Angliss 1997), resulting in a PBR of 257 Dall's porpoises per year.

HUMAN-CAUSED MORTALITY AND SERIOUS INJURY

Fishery Information

A summary of recent fishery mortality and injury for this stock of Dall's porpoises is given in Table 1. More detailed information on these fisheries is provided in Appendix 1. Mean annual takes for all fisheries for which mortality data are available are ≥0.4 animals per year. Mortality estimates for the California drift gillnet fishery are included for the five most recent years of monitoring, 2004-2008 (Carretta et al. 2005, Carretta and Enriquez 2006, 2007, 2009a, 2009b). 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 Dall's porpoise entanglements, additional years of data will be required to fully evaluate the effectiveness of pingers for reducing mortality of this particular species.

Mortality of Dall's porpoises has also been documented in the California/Oregon/Washington domestic groundfish trawl fisheries (Perez and Loughlin 1991; Perez 2003). Between 2002 and 2006 with 100% of the fishing effort observed, one Dall's porpoise was reported killed in the at-sea processing portion of the Pacific hake trawl fishery. 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 of Dall's porpoises (California/ Oregon/Washington Stock) in commercial fisheries that might take this species. Coefficients of variation for mortality estimates are provided in parentheses; n/a = not available. Mean annual takes are based on 2004-2008 data for the CA/OR swordfish drift gillnet fishery and 2002-2006 for groundfish fisheries.

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	2004 2005 2006 2007 2008	20.6% 20.9% 18.5% 16.4% 13.5%	0 0 0 0 0	0 0 0 0 0	0 (n/a)
WA/OR/CA domestic groundfish trawl (At-sea processing Pacific hake fishery).	observer	2002 2003 2004 2005 2006	100% 100% 100% 100% 100%	1 0 0 0 0	1 0 0 0 0	0.2 (n/a)
Puget Sound salmon drift gillnet (tribal fishery, Area 5, Strait of Juan de Fuca)	MMAP	2000-2004	n/a	1	1	≥0.2 (n/a)
Minimum total annual takes						≥0.4 (n/a)

STATUS OF STOCK

The status of Dall's porpoises in California, Oregon and Washington relative to OSP is not known, and there are insufficient data to evaluate potential trends in abundance. No habitat issues are known to be of concern for this species. It is not listed as "threatened" or "endangered" under the Endangered Species Act nor as "depleted" under the MMPA. The average annual human-caused mortality (≥0.4 animals) is estimated to be less than the PBR (257), 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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