Revised 12/15/2000

FIN WHALE (*Balaenoptera physalus*): Hawaiian Stock

STOCK DEFINITION AND GEOGRAPHIC RANGE

Fin whales are found throughout all oceans and seas of the world from tropical to polar latitudes. They are rare in Hawaiian waters. Balcomb (1987) observed 8-12 fin whales in a multispecies feeding assemblage on 20 May 1966 approx. 250 mi. south of Honolulu. Additional sightings were reported north of Oahu in May 1976 and in the Kauai Channel in February 1979 (Shallenberger 1981). More recently, a single fin whale was observed north of Kauai in February 1994 (Mobley et al. 1996). A single stranding has been reported on Maui (Shallenberger 1981). Thompson and Friedl (1982; and see Northrop et al. 1968) suggested that fin whales migrate into Hawaiian waters mainly in fall and winter, based on acoustic recordings off Oahu and Midway Islands. Although the exact positions of the whales producing the sounds could not be determined, at least some of them were almost certainly within the U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone. More recently, McDonald and Fox (1999) reported an average of 0.027 calling fin whales per 1000^2 km (grouped by 8-hr periods) based on passive acoustic recordings within about 16 km of the north shore of Oahu.

The International Whaling Commission (IWC) recognized two stocks of fin whales in the North Pacific: the East China Sea and the rest of the North Pacific (Donovan 1991). Mizroch et al. (1984) cites evidence for additional fin whale subpopulations in the North Pacific. There is still insufficient information to accurately determine population structure, but from a conservation perspective it may be risky to assume panmixia in the entire North Pacific. In the North Atlantic, fin whales were locally depleted in some feeding areas by commercial whaling (Mizroch et al. 1984), in part because subpopulations were not recognized. The Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) stock assessment reports recognize three stocks of fin whales in the North Pacific: 1) the Hawaii stock (this report), 2) the California/Oregon/Washington stock, and 3) the Alaska stock.

POPULATION SIZE

No data are available to estimate population size. As part of the Marine Mammal Research Program of the Acoustic Thermometry of Ocean Climate (ATOC) study, a total of twelve aerial surveys were conducted within about 25 nmi of the main Hawaiian Islands in 1993-98 (Mobley et al. 2000). Only one sighting of a single fin whale was made (Mobley et al. 1996), and therefore no meaningful abundance estimate could be calculated. Using passive acoustic detections from a hydrophone north of Oahu, MacDonald and Fox (1999) estimate an average density of 0.027 calling fin whales per 1000 km^2 within about 16 km from shore. However, the relationship between the number of whales present and the number of calls detected is not known, and therefore this acoustic method does not provide an estimate of absolute abundance for fin whales.

Minimum Population Estimate

No data are available to provide a minimum population estimate.

Current Population Trend

No data are available on current population trend.

CURRENT AND MAXIMUM NET PRODUCTIVITY RATES

No data are available on current or maximum net productivity rate.

POTENTIAL BIOLOGICAL REMOVAL

No PBR can be calculated for this stock at this time.

HUMAN-CAUSED MORTALITY AND SERIOUS INJURY

Fishery Information

No estimate of annual human-caused mortality and serious injury is available as there are no reports of recent direct or incidental takes of fin whales in Hawaiian waters. However, mortality of other cetacean species has been observed in Hawaiian fisheries, and the gear types used in these fisheries are responsible for marine mammal mortality and serious injury in other fisheries throughout U.S. waters. Gillnets are used in Hawaiian waters and appear to capture marine mammals wherever they are used, and float lines from lobster traps and longlines can be expected to occasionally entangle whales (Perrin et al. 1994).

Interactions with dolphins are reported for all pelagic fisheries, and humpback whales have been entangled in

longlines off the Hawaiian Islands (Nitta and Henderson 1993), but no takes of fin whales have been documented. None were observed hooked or entangled in the Hawaiian longline fishery between 1994 and 1998, with approximately 4.4% of all effort (measured as the number of hooks fished) observed (Kleiber 1999).

Historical Mortality

Large numbers of fin whales were taken by commercial whalers throughout the North Pacific from the early 20th century until the 1970s (Tønnessen and Johnsen 1982). Approximately 46,000 fin whales were taken from the North Pacific by commercial whalers between 1947 and 1987 (C. Allison, IWC, pers. comm.). Some of the whales taken may have been from a population or populations that migrate seasonally into the Hawaiian EEZ. The species has been protected in the North Pacific by the IWC since 1976.

STATUS OF STOCK

The status of fin whales in Hawaiian waters relative to OSP is unknown, and there are insufficient data to evaluate trends in abundance. Fin whales are formally listed as "endangered" under the Endangered Species Act (ESA), and consequently the Hawaiian stock is automatically considered as a "depleted" and "strategic" stock under the MMPA. The total fishery mortality and serious injury for fin whales is zero and therefore can be considered to be insignificant and approaching zero mortality and serious injury rate. The increasing levels of anthropogenic noise in the world's oceans has been suggested to be a habitat concern for whales.

REFERENCES

Allison, C. International Whaling Commission. The Red House, 135 Station Road, Impington, Cambridge, UK CB4 9NP.

Balcomb, K. C., III. 1987. The Whales of Hawaii. Marine Mammal Fund, 99 pp.

Donovan, G. P. 1991. A review of IWC stock boundaries. Rept. Int. Whal. Commn., Special Issue 13:39-68.

Kleiber, P. 1999. Estimates of marine mammal takes in the Hawaiian longline fishery. (Unpublished). Southwest Fisheries Science Center, NMFS, 2570 Dole St, Honolulu, HI, 96822-2396.

McDonald, M. A., and C. G. Fox. 1999. Passive acoustic methods applied to fin whale population density estimation. J. Acoust. Soc. Am. 105: 2643-2651.

Mizroch, S. A., D. W. Rice, and J. M. Breiwick. 1984. The fin whale, *Balaenoptera physalus* Mar. Fish. Rev. 46(4):20-24.

Mobley, J. R., Jr., M. Smultea, T. Norris, and D. Weller. 1996. Fin whale sighting north of Kaua'i, Hawai'i. Pacific Science 50:230-233.

Mobley, J. R., Jr, S. S. Spitz, K. A. Forney, R. A. Grotefendt, and P. H. Forestall. 2000. Distribution and abundance of odontocete species in Hawaiian waters: preliminary results of 1993-98 aerial surveys Admin. Rep. LJ-00-14C. Southwest Fisheries Science Center, National Marine Fisheries Service, P.O. Box 271, La Jolla, CA 92038. 26 pp.

Nitta, E. and J. R. Henderson. 1993. A review of interactions between Hawaii's fisheries and protected species. Mar. Fish. Rev. 55(2):83-92.

Northrop, J., W. C. Cummings, and P. O. Thompson. 1968. 20-Hz signals observed in the central Pacific. J. Acoust. Soc. Am. 43:383-384.

Perrin, W.F., G. P. Donovan and J. Barlow. 1994. Gillnets and Cetaceans. Rep. Int. Whal. Commn., Special Issue 15, 629 pp.

Shallenberger, E.W. 1981. The status of Hawaiian cetaceans. Final report to U.S. Marine Mammal Commission. MMC-77/23, 79pp.

Thompson, P. O. and W. A. Friedl. 1982. A long term study of low frequency sound from several species of whales off Oahu, Hawaii. Cetology 45:1-19.

Tønnessen, J. N. and A. O. Johnsen. 1982. The History of Modern Whaling. Hurst, 789 pp.