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HARBOR PORPOISE (*Phocoena phocoena*): Gulf of Alaska Stock

STOCK DEFINITION AND GEOGRAPHIC RANGE

In the eastern North Pacific Ocean, the harbor porpoise ranges from Point Barrow, along the Alaska coast, and down the west coast of North America to Point Conception, California (Gaskin 1984). The harbor porpoise primarily frequents coastal waters, and in the Gulf of Alaska and Southeast Alaska, they occur most frequently in waters less than 100 m in depth (Hobbs and Waite in review). The average density of harbor porpoise in Alaska appears to be less than that reported off the west coast of the continental U.S., although areas of high densities do occur in Glacier Bay, Yakutat Bay, Copper River Delta, and Sitkalidak Strait. Stock discreteness in the eastern North Pacific was analyzed using mitochondrial DNA from samples collected along the West Coast (Rosel 1992) and is summarized in Osmek et al. (1994). Two distinct mitochondrial DNA groupings or clades exist. One clade is present in California, Washington, British Columbia and Alaska (no samples were available from Oregon), while the other is found only in California and Washington. Although these two clades are not geographically distinct by latitude, the results may indicate a low mixing rate for harbor porpoise along the west coast of North America. Investigation of pollutant loads in harbor porpoise ranging from California to the Canadian border also suggests restricted harbor porpoise movements (Calambokidis and Barlow 1991). Further genetic testing of the same data mentioned above along with additional samples found significant genetic differences for four of the six pair-wise comparisons between the four areas investigated: California, Washington, British Columbia, and Alaska (Rosel et al. 1995). These results demonstrate that harbor porpoise along the west coast of North America are not panmictic or migratory, and that movement is sufficiently restricted to evolve genetic differences. This is consistent with low movement suggested by genetic analysis of harbor porpoise specimens from the North Atlantic. Numerous stocks have been delineated with clinal differences over areas as small as the waters surrounding the British Isles. Unfortunately, no conclusions can be drawn about the genetic structure of harbor porpoise within Alaska because of insufficient samples. Only 19 samples are available from Alaska porpoise and 12 of these come from a single area (Copper River Delta). Accordingly, harbor porpoise stock structure in Alaska remains unknown at this time.

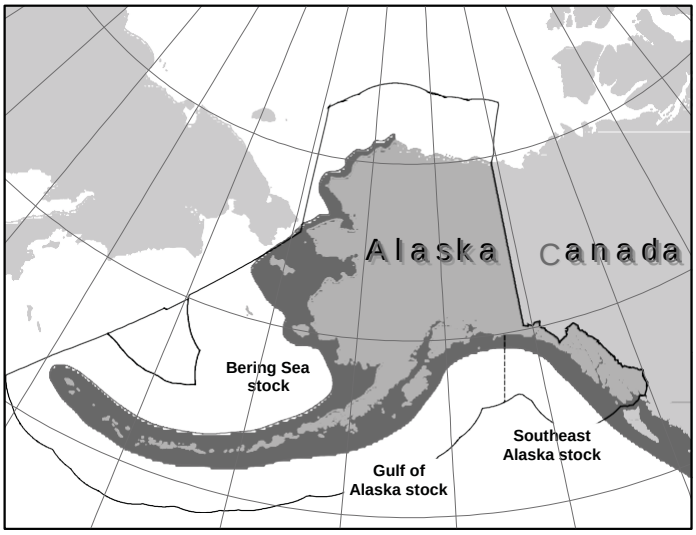

Figure 28. Approximate distribution of harbor porpoise in Alaska waters (shaded area).

Although it is difficult to determine the true stock structure of harbor porpoise populations in the northeast Pacific, from a management standpoint, it would be prudent to assume that regional populations exist and that they should be managed independently (Rosel et al. 1995, Taylor et al. 1996). The Alaska Scientific Review Group (SRG) concurred that while the available data were insufficient to justify recognizing three biological stocks of harbor porpoise in Alaska, it did not recommend against the establishment of three management units in Alaska (DeMaster 1996, 1997). Accordingly, from the above information, three separate harbor porpoise stocks in Alaska are recommended, recognizing that the boundaries were set arbitrarily: 1) the Southeast Alaska stock - occurring from the northern border of British Columbia border to Cape Suckling, Alaska, 2) the Gulf of Alaska stock - occurring from Cape Suckling to Unimak Pass, and 3) the Bering Sea stock - occurring throughout the Aleutian Islands and all waters north of Unimak Pass (Fig. 28). Information concerning the four harbor porpoise stocks occurring along the west coast of the continental United States (Central California, Northern California, Oregon/Washington Coast, and Inland Washington) is in the Stock Assessment Reports for the Pacific Region.

POPULATION SIZE

In June and July of 1998 an aerial survey covering the waters of the western Gulf of Alaska from Cape Suckling to Sutwik Island, offshore to the 1,000 fathom depth contour resulted in an uncorrected abundance estimate

for the Gulf of Alaska harbor porpoise stock of 10,306 (CV = 0.115) animals (Hobbs and Waite in review). The uncorrected abundance estimate was multiplied by correction factors for availability bias (to correct for animals not available to be seen because they were diving) and perception bias (to correct for animals not seen because they were missed) to obtain a corrected abundance estimate. Laake et al. (1997) estimated the availability bias for aerial surveys of harbor porpoise in Puget Sound to be 2.96 (CV = 0.180); the use of this correction factor is preferred to other published correction factors (e.g., Barlow et al. 1988; Calambokidis et al. 1993) because it is an empirical estimate of availability bias. A second independent observer was used to estimate the average perception bias as 1.372 (CV = 0.066). The estimated corrected abundance estimate from this survey is 41,854 (10,306 H 2.96 H 1.372 = 41,854; CV = 0.224).

The latest estimate of abundance (41,854; CV = 0.224) is based on surveys conducted in 1998, and is considerably higher than the previous estimate in the 1999 stock assessment (8,271; CV = 0.309). This disparity largely stems from changes in the area covered by the two surveys and differences in harbor porpoise density encountered in areas added to, or dropped from, the 1998 survey, relative to the 1991-93 surveys. The survey area in 1998 (119,183 km^2) was greater than the area covered in the composited portions of the 1991, 1992 and 1993 surveys (106,600 km^2). The 1998 survey included the waters of Prince William Sound, the bays, channels, and inlets of the Kenai Peninsula, the Alaska Peninsula and Kodiak Archipelago whereas the earlier survey included only open water areas. Several of the bays and inlets covered by the 1998 survey had higher harbor porpoise densities than observed in the open waters. In addition, the 1998 estimate provided by Hobbs and Waite (in review) empirically estimates the perception bias, and use this in addition to the correction factor for availability bias. And finally, the 1998 estimate extrapolates available densities to estimate the number of porpoise which would likely be found in unsurveyed inlets within the study area. The 1998 survey result is probably more representative of the size of the Gulf of Alaska harbor porpoise stock since it included more of the inshore habitat commonly used by harbor porpoise.

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 41,854 and its associated CV of 0.224, N_{MIN} for the Gulf of Alaska stock of harbor porpoise is 34,740.

Current Population Trend

At present, there is no reliable information on trends in abundance for the Gulf of Alaska stock of harbor porpoise.

CURRENT AND MAXIMUM NET PRODUCTIVITY RATES

A reliable estimate of the maximum net productivity rate (R_{MAX}) is not currently available for the Gulf of Alaska stock of harbor porpoise. Hence, until additional data become available, it is recommended that the cetacean maximum theoretical net productivity rate of 4% be employed (Wade and Angliss 1997).

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: $PBR = N_{MIN} H 0.5R_{MAX} H F_R$. The recovery factor ($F_R$) for this stock is 0.5, the value for cetacean stocks with unknown population status (Wade and Angliss 1997). Thus, for the Gulf of Alaska stock of harbor porpoise, PBR = 347 animals (34,740 H 0.02 H 0.5).

ANNUAL HUMAN-CAUSED MORTALITY AND SERIOUS INJURY

Fisheries Information

Prior to 2003, three different commercial fisheries operating within the range of the Gulf of Alaska stock of harbor porpoise were monitored for incidental take by NMFS observers: Gulf of Alaska groundfish trawl, longline, and pot fisheries. As of 2003, changes in fishery definitions in the List of Fisheries resulted in separating these 3 GOA fisheries into 10 fisheries (69 FR 70094, 2 December 2004). This change does not represent a change in fishing effort, but provides managers with better information on the component of each fishery that is responsible for the incidental serious injury or mortality of marine mammal stocks in Alaska. No incidental mortality of harbor porpoise was observed in these fisheries. Observers also monitored the Prince William Sound salmon drift gillnet fishery in 1990 and 1991, recording one mortality in 1990 and three mortalities in 1991. These mortalities

extrapolated to eight (95% CI: 1-23) and 32 (95% CI: 3-103) kills for the entire fishery, resulting in a mean kill rate of 20 (CV = 0.60) animals per year for 1990 and 1991. 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 Prince William Sound salmon drift gillnet fishery has not been observed since 1991; therefore, no additional data are available for that fishery.

In 1999 and 2000, observers were placed on the Cook Inlet salmon set and drift gillnet vessels because of the potential for these fisheries to incur incidental mortalities of beluga whales. One harbor porpoise mortality was observed in 2000 (Manly in review). This single mortality extrapolates to an estimated mortality level of 31.2 for that year, and an average of 15.6 per year when averaged over the two years of observer data.

In 2002, observers were placed on Kodiak Island set gillnet vessels. Two harbor porpoise mortalities were observed in this fishery. These mortalities extrapolate to an estimated mortality level of 32.2 animals per year (Manly et al. 2003).

Table 30. Summary of incidental mortality of harbor porpoise (Gulf of Alaska stock) due to fisheries from 1990 through 2004 and calculation of the mean annual mortality rate. N/A indicates that data were not available.

Fishery name	Years	Data type	Range of observer coverage	Observed mortality (in given yrs.)	Estimated mortality (in given yrs.)	Mean annual mortality
Prince William Sound salmon drift gillnet	1990-1991	obs data	4-5%	1, 3	8, 32	20 (CV = 0.60)
Cook Inlet salmon drift gillnet	1999 2000	obs data	1.8% 3.7%	0 1	0 31.2	15.6
Cook Inlet salmon set gillnet	1999 2000	obs data	7.3% 8.3%	0 0	0 0	0
Kodiak Island set gillnet	2002	obs data	6.0%	2	32.2	32.2 (CV = 0.68)
Minimum total annual mortality						67.8

Strandings of marine mammals with fishing gear attached or with injuries caused by interactions with fishing gear are a final source of mortality data. In the period from 1990 to 1994, 12 harbor porpoise scarred with gillnet marks were discovered stranded in Prince William Sound (Copper River Delta). These stranding reports were likely the result of operations in the Prince William Sound salmon drift gillnet fishery. The extrapolated (estimated) observer mortality for this fishery accounts for these mortalities, so they do not appear in Table 30. There were no confirmed reports of strandings of harbor porpoise in this area from 1999-2003.

A reliable estimate of the mortality rate incidental to commercial fisheries is considered unavailable because of the absence of observer placements in several salmon gillnet fisheries. However, the estimated minimum annual mortality rate incidental to U. S. commercial fisheries is 68 (Table 30).

Subsistence/Native Harvest Information

Subsistence hunters in Alaska have not been reported to take from this stock of harbor porpoise.

Other Mortality

In 1995, two harbor porpoise were taken incidentally in subsistence gillnets, one near Homer Spit and the other near Port Graham.

STATUS OF STOCK

Harbor porpoise are not listed as "depleted" under the MMPA or listed as "threatened" or "endangered" under the Endangered Species Act. At present, U.S. commercial fishery-related annual mortality levels less than 34.7 animals per year (i.e., 10% of PBR) can be considered insignificant and approaching zero mortality and serious injury rate. Based on the best scientific information available, the estimated level of human-caused mortality and serious injury (70; 68 mortalities in commercial fisheries plus 2 in subsistence gillnets) is not known to exceed the PBR (347). However, because the abundance estimates are quite old and information on incidental harbor porpoise

mortality in commercial fisheries is not well understood, the Gulf of Alaska stock of harbor porpoise is classified as a strategic stock. Population trends and status of this stock relative to OSP are currently unknown.

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