

CUVIER'S BEAKED WHALE (*Ziphius cavirostris*): Hawaiian Stock

STOCK DEFINITION AND GEOGRAPHIC RANGE

Cuvier's beaked whales occur in all oceans and major seas (Heyning 1989). In Hawaii, five strandings have been reported from Midway Islands, Pearl and Hermes Reef, Oahu, and Hawaii Islands (Shallenberger 1981; Galbreath 1963; Richards 1952; Nitta 1991; Maldini 2005). Sightings have been reported off Lanai and Maui (Shallenberger 1981) and Hawaii, Ni'ihau, and Kauai (Mobley 2000, Baird et al. 2004). Four sightings were made during a 2002 shipboard survey of waters within the U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of the Hawaiian islands (Figure 1; Barlow 2003). While nothing is known about stock structure, some genetic samples have been collected recently from around the island of Hawaii, and there have been re-sightings of individuals from the island of Hawaii (R.W. Baird, pers. comm.). For the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) stock assessment reports, Cuvier's beaked whales within the Pacific U.S. EEZ are divided into three discrete, non-contiguous areas: 1) Hawaiian waters (this report), 2) Alaskan waters, and 3) waters off California, Oregon and Washington.

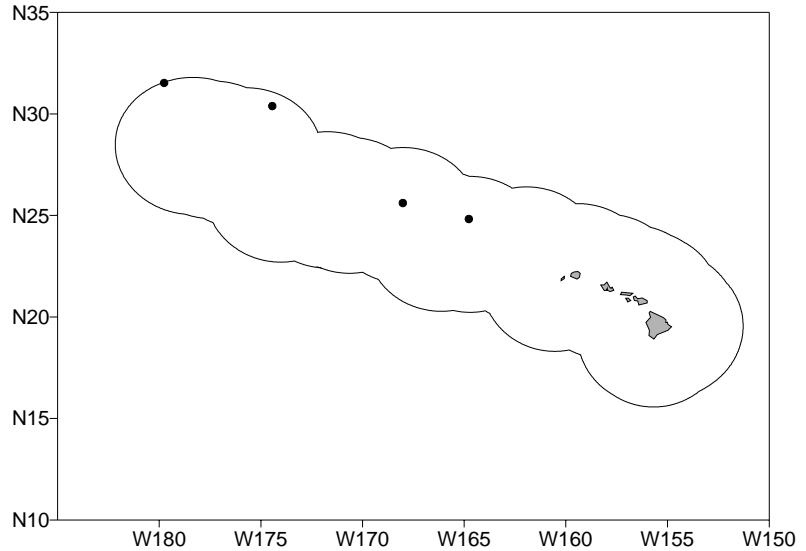


Figure 1. Cuvier's beaked whale sighting locations during the 2002 shipboard survey of U.S. EEZ waters surrounding the Hawaiian Islands (Barlow 2003; see Appendix 2 for details on timing and location of survey effort). Outer line represents approximate boundary of survey area and U.S. EEZ.

POPULATION SIZE

Wade and Gerrodette (1993) made an estimate for Cuvier's beaked whales in the eastern tropical Pacific, but it is not known whether any of these animals are part of the same population that occurs around the Hawaiian Islands. 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, 1995 and 1998. Seven sightings of Cuvier's beaked whales were made. An abundance estimate of 43 (CV=0.51) Cuvier's beaked whales was calculated from the combined survey data (Mobley et al. 2000). This study underestimated the total number of Cuvier's beaked whales within the U.S. EEZ off Hawaii, because areas around the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands (NWHI) and beyond 25 nautical miles from the main islands were not surveyed. Furthermore, this species is known to spend a large proportion of time diving, causing additional downward bias in the abundance estimate. The data on which this estimate was based are now over 5 years old. A 2002 shipboard line-transect survey of the entire Hawaiian Islands EEZ resulted in an abundance estimate of 12,728 (CV=0.83) Cuvier's beaked whales (Barlow 2003), including a correction factor for missed diving animals. This is currently the best available abundance estimate for this stock.

Minimum Population Estimate

The log-normal 20th percentile of the 2002 abundance estimate is 6,919 Cuvier's beaked whales.

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

The potential biological removal (PBR) level for this stock is calculated as the minimum population size (6,919) times one half the default maximum net growth rate for cetaceans (½ of 4%) times a recovery factor of 0.50 (for a species of unknown status with no known fishery mortality within the Hawaiian Islands EEZ; Wade and Angliss 1997), resulting in a PBR of 69 Cuvier's beaked whales per year.

HUMAN-CAUSED MORTALITY AND SERIOUS INJURY

Fishery Information

Information on fishery-related mortality of cetaceans in Hawaiian waters is limited, but the gear types used in Hawaiian fisheries are responsible for marine mammal mortality and serious injury in other fisheries throughout U.S. waters. Gillnets 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 cetaceans are reported for all pelagic fisheries (Nitta and Henderson 1993), but no takes of Cuvier's beaked whales have been documented. None were observed hooked or entangled in the Hawaii-based longline fishery between 1994 and 2002, with approximately 4-25% of all effort observed (Forney 2004). However, three unidentified cetaceans, which may have been Cuvier's beaked whales, were taken in this fishery (Figure 2, Forney 2004). Since 2001, the Hawaii-based longline fishery has undergone a series of regulatory changes, primarily to protect sea turtles (NMFS 2001). Potential impacts of these regulatory changes on the rate of Cuvier's beaked whale interactions are unknown.

Other Mortality

In recent years, there has been increasing concern that loud underwater sounds, such as active sonar and seismic operations, may be harmful to beaked whales (Malakoff 2002). The use of active sonar from military vessels has been implicated in mass strandings of beaked whales in the Mediterranean Sea during 1996 (Frantzis 1998), the Bahamas during 2000 (U.S. Dept. of Commerce and Secretary of the Navy 2001), and the Canary Islands 2002 (Martel 2002). Similar military active sonar operations occur around the Hawaiian islands. No estimates of potential mortality or serious injury are available for U.S. waters.

STATUS OF STOCK

The status of Cuvier's beaked whales in Hawaiian waters relative to OSP is unknown, and there are insufficient data to evaluate trends in abundance. They are not listed as "threatened" or "endangered" under the Endangered Species Act (1973), nor as "depleted" under the MMPA. The Hawaiian stock of Cuvier's beaked whales is not considered strategic under the 1994 amendments to the MMPA because there has been no reported fisheries related mortality within the Hawaiian Islands EEZ. However, the effect of potential interactions of unidentified beaked whales (which may have been Cuvier's beaked whales) with the Hawaii-based longline fishery in U.S. and international waters is not known. Insufficient information is available to determine whether the total fishery mortality and serious injury for Cuvier's beaked whales is 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 (Richardson et al. 1995), particularly for deep-diving whales like Cuvier's beaked whales that feed in the oceans' "sound channel".

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