

DWARF SPERM WHALE (*Kogia simus*): Northern Gulf of Mexico Stock

STOCK DEFINITION AND GEOGRAPHIC RANGE

The dwarf sperm whale appears to be distributed worldwide in temperate to tropical waters (Caldwell and Caldwell 1994). Sightings of these animals in the northern Gulf of Mexico occur primarily along the continental shelf edge and over the deeper waters off the continental shelf (Mullin et al. 1991; Southeast Fisheries Science Center, SEFSC, unpublished data). Dwarf sperm whales and pygmy sperm whales (*Kogia breviceps*) are difficult to distinguish and sightings of either species are often categorized as *Kogia* spp. Sightings of this category were documented in all seasons during recent seasonal GulfCet aerial surveys of the northern Gulf of Mexico during 1993-1995 (Hansen *et al.* 1996). There is no information on stock differentiation.

POPULATION SIZE

Estimates of abundance of *Kogia* spp. were derived through the application of distance sampling analysis (Buckland et al. 1993) and the computer program DISTANCE (Laake et al. 1993) to sighting data collected during 1991-1994 spring-summer, visual sampling, line-transect vessel surveys of the northern Gulf of Mexico (Hansen et al. 1995) (Fig. 1), which includes data collected as part of the GulfCet program (Hansen *et al.* 1996). These surveys were conducted throughout the area from approximately the 200 m isobath along the U.S. coast to the seaward extent of the U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone. The seasonal GulfCet aerial surveys included only a small portion of the stock range and these data were not used for abundance estimation. Estimated abundance of *Kogia* spp. by survey year [coefficient of variation (CV) in parentheses] was 109 in 1991 (0.68), 1,010 in 1992 (0.40), 580 in 1993 (0.45), and 162 in 1994 (0.61) (Hansen et al. 1995). Survey effort-weighted estimated average abundance of *Kogia* spp. for all surveys combined was 547 (CV = 0.28) (Hansen et al. 1995). Estimates of dwarf sperm whale abundance cannot be provided due to uncertainty of species identification at sea.

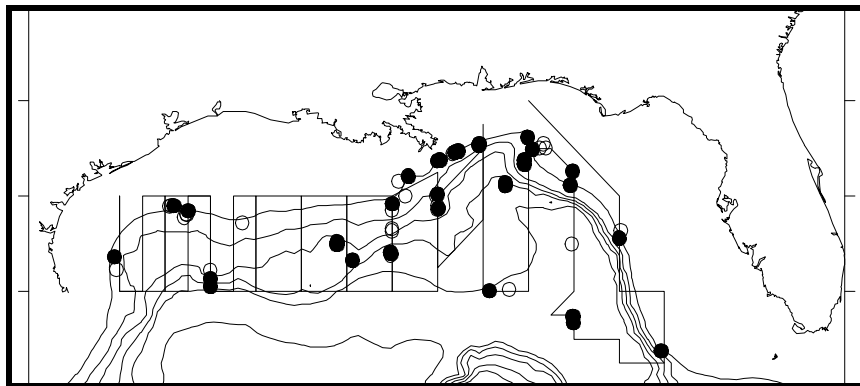


Figure 1. Distribution of all *Kogia* sightings (unfilled circles) and sightings identified as dwarf sperm whales (filled circles) during NOAA Ship Oregon II marine mammal surveys in 1991-1994. The straight lines show transects during two surveys and are examples of typical survey transects. Isobaths are in 183 m (100 fm) intervals.

Minimum Population Estimate

A minimum population estimate was not calculated because of uncertainty of species identification at sea.

Current Population Trend

A declining trend is evident in the annual abundance estimates since 1992; however, the 1991, 1993 and 1994 abundance estimates were not significantly different using the criteria of no overlap of log-normal 95% confidence intervals. The apparent differences in abundance estimates may have been caused by lower sampling effort during 1991, and by low sampling intensity relative to population size (Hansen et al. 1995), or by inter-annual variation in distribution patterns, rather than changes in population size.

CURRENT AND MAXIMUM NET PRODUCTIVITY RATES

Current and maximum net productivity rates are not known for this stock. The maximum net productivity rate was assumed to be 0.04. This value is based on theoretical modeling showing that cetacean populations may not grow at rates much greater than 4% given the constraints of their reproductive life history (Barlow *et al.* 1995).

POTENTIAL BIOLOGICAL REMOVAL

Potential Biological Removal (PBR) is the product of the minimum population size, one half the maximum net productivity rate, and a “recovery” factor (Wade and Angliss 1997). The “recovery” factor, which accounts for endangered, depleted, and threatened stocks, or stocks of unknown status relative to optimum sustainable population (OSP) is assumed to be 0.5 because this stock is of unknown status. PBR for the dwarf sperm whale is unknown because the minimum population estimate cannot be estimated.

ANNUAL HUMAN-CAUSED MORTALITY AND SERIOUS INJURY

The level of past or current, direct, human-caused mortality of dwarf sperm whales in the northern Gulf of Mexico is unknown. Available information indicates there likely is little, if any, fisheries interaction with dwarf sperm whales in the northern Gulf of Mexico. There have been no logbook reports of fishery-related mortality or serious injury and no fishery-related mortality or serious injury has been observed.

There were no documented strandings of dwarf sperm whales in the northern Gulf of Mexico during 1987-1994 which were classified as likely caused by fishery interactions, but there have been stranding investigation reports of dwarf sperm whales which may have died as a result of other human-related causes. Stranding data probably underestimate the extent of fishery-related mortality and serious injury because not all of the marine mammals which die or are seriously injured may wash ashore, nor will all of those that do wash ashore necessarily show signs of entanglement or other fishery-interaction. Finally, the level of technical expertise among stranding network personnel varies widely as does the ability to recognize signs of fishery interaction.

Fisheries Information

Pelagic swordfish, tunas, and billfish are the targets of the longline fishery operating in the U.S. Gulf of Mexico. Total longline effort for the Gulf of Mexico pelagic fishery, including OCS edge, continental slope, and Mexican territorial waters, based on mandatory logbook reporting, was 4,400 sets in 1991, 4,850 sets in 1992, and 3,260 sets in 1993 (Cramer 1994). This fishery has been monitored with about 5% observer coverage, in terms of trips observed, since 1992. There were no reports of mortality or serious injury of dwarf sperm whales by this fishery.

Pair trawl fishing gear has the potential to capture marine mammals, but there have been no reports of mortality or serious injury to marine mammals in the Gulf of Mexico. This fishery has not been observed by NMFS observers, and there are no other data available as to the extent of this fishery in the Gulf of Mexico. It is assumed that it is very limited in scope and duration.

Other Mortality

A total of at least nine dwarf sperm whale strandings were documented in the northern Gulf of Mexico from 1987-present; one of these animals had a plastic bag in its stomach.

STATUS OF STOCK

The status of this stock relative to OSP is unknown and there are insufficient data to determine population trends. This species is not listed under the Endangered Species Act. Although the PBR cannot be calculated, there is no known fishery-related mortality or serious injury to this stock and, therefore, total fishery-related mortality and serious injury can be considered insignificant and approaching zero mortality and serious injury rate. The total level of fishery-related mortality and serious injury is unknown, but it is believed to be insignificant. Upon the advice of the Atlantic Scientific Review Group this stock has been designated a strategic stock because PBR cannot be determined and there is an unknown amount of possible human-caused mortality from the ingestion of marine debris such as plastic bags.

REFERENCES

- Barlow, J., S.L. Swartz, T.C. Eagle, and P.R. Wade. 1995. U.S. Marine Mammal Stock Assessments: Guidelines for Preparation, Background and a Summary of the 1995 Assessments. U.S. Dep. Commer., NOAA Tech. Memo. NMFS-OPR-6, 73 pp.
- Buckland, S. T., D. R. Anderson, K. P. Burnham and J. L. Laake. 1993. Distance Sampling: estimating abundance of biological populations. Chapman & Hall, London, 446 pp.
- Caldwell, D. K. and M. C. Caldwell 1989. Pygmy sperm whale *Kogia breviceps* (de Blainville, 1838): dwarf sperm whale *Kogia simus* Owen, 1866. Pages 235-260 in S. H. Ridgway and R. Harrison (editors), Handbook of marine mammals, Vol. 4: River dolphins and the larger toothed whales. Academic Press, San Diego.
- Cramer, J. 1994. Large pelagic logbook newsletter - 1993. NOAA Tech. Mem. NMFS-SEFSC-352, 19 pp.
- Hansen, L.J., K.D. Mullin, T.A. Jefferson and G.P. Scott. 1996. Visual surveys aboard ships and aircraft. Pages 55-132. *In*: R.W. Davis and G.S. Fargion (editors). Distribution and abundance of marine mammals in the north-central and western Gulf of Mexico: Final Report. Volume II: Technical Report. OCS Study MMS 96-0027. Prepared by the Texas Institute of Oceanography and the National Marine Fisheries Service. U.S. Dept. of the Interior, Minerals Mgmt. Service, Gulf of Mexico OCS Region, New Orleans, LA. 357pp.
- Hansen, L. J., K. D. Mullin and C. L. Roden. 1995. Estimates of cetacean abundance in the northern Gulf of Mexico from vessel surveys. Southeast Fisheries Science Center, Miami Laboratory, Contribution No. MIA-94/95-25, 9 pp. + tables and figures.
- Laake, J. L., S. T. Buckland, D. R. Anderson, and K. P. Burnham. 1993. DISTANCE user's guide, V2.0. Colorado Cooperative Fish & Wildlife Research Unit, Colorado State University, Ft. Collins, Colorado, 72 pp.
- Mullin, K., W. Hoggard, C. Roden, R. Lohofener, C. Rogers and B. Taggart. 1991. Cetaceans on the upper continental slope in the north-central Gulf of Mexico. OCS Study/MMS 91-0027. U.S. Dept. of the Interior, Minerals Management Service, Gulf of Mexico OCS Regional Office, New Orleans, Louisiana 108 pp.
- Wade, P.R., and R.P. Angliss. 1997. Guidelines for assessing marine mammal stocks: Report of the GAMMS Workshop April 3-5, Seattle, Washington. U.S. Dep. Commer., NOAA Tech. Memo. NMFS-OPR-12, 93 pp.