

BOTTLENOSE DOLPHIN (*Tursiops truncatus*): Western North Atlantic Offshore Stock

STOCK DEFINITION AND GEOGRAPHIC RANGE

There are two hematologically and morphologically distinct bottlenose dolphin ecotypes (Duffield *et al.* 1983; Duffield 1986) which correspond to a shallow water ecotype and a deep water ecotype; both ecotypes have been shown to inhabit waters in the western North Atlantic Ocean (Hersh and Duffield 1990; Mead and Potter 1995; Curry and Smith 1997).

Bottlenose dolphins which had stranded alive in the western North Atlantic in areas with direct access to deep oceanic waters had hemoglobin profiles which matched that of the deep, cold water ecotype (Hersh and Duffield 1990). Hersh and Duffield (1990) also described morphological differences between the deep, cold water ecotype dolphins and dolphins with hematological profiles matching the shallow, warm water ecotype which had stranded in the Indian/Banana River in Florida. Based on the distribution of sightings during ship-based surveys (Figure 1) and survey personnel observations (NMFS unpublished data), the western North Atlantic offshore stock is believed to consist of bottlenose dolphins corresponding to the hematologically and morphologically distinct deep, cold water ecotype.

Extensive aerial surveys in 1979-1981 indicated that the stock extended along the entire continental shelf break from Georges Bank to Cape Hatteras during spring and summer (CETAP 1982; Kenney 1990). The distribution of sightings contracted towards the south in the fall and the central portion of the survey area was almost devoid of sightings in the winter, although there were still sightings as far north as the southern edge of Georges Bank. The offshore stock is concentrated along the continental shelf break in waters of depths >25 m and extends beyond the continental shelf into continental slope waters in lower concentration (Figure 1) consistent with Kenney 1990. In Canadian waters, bottlenose dolphins have occasionally been sighted on the Scotian Shelf, particularly in the Gully (Gowans and Whitehead 1995; NMFS unpublished data). Recent information from Wells *et al.* (1999) indicates that the range of the offshore bottlenose dolphin may include waters beyond the continental slope and that offshore bottlenose dolphins may move between the Gulf of Mexico and the Atlantic. Dolphins with characteristics of the offshore type have been stranded as far south as the Florida Keys, but there are no abundance or distribution estimates available for this stock in USA Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) waters south of Cape Hatteras.

POPULATION SIZE

An abundance of 16,689 (CV=0.32) for bottlenose dolphins was estimated from a line transect sighting survey conducted during July 6 to September 6, 1998 by a ship and plane that surveyed 15,900 km of track line in

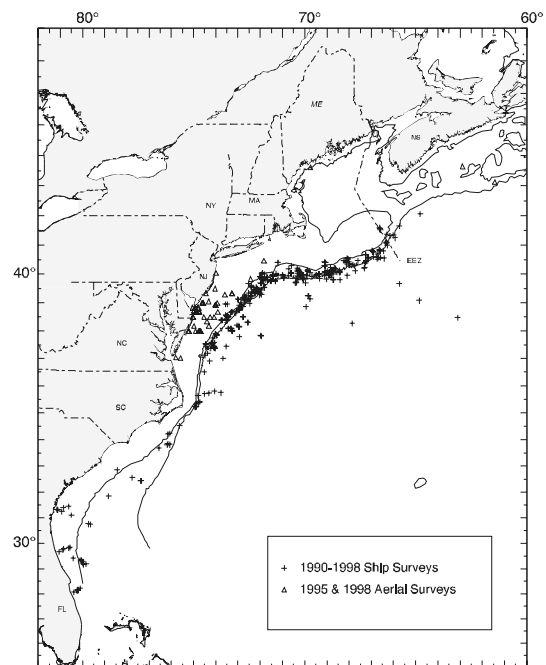


Figure 1. Distribution of bottlenose dolphin sightings from NEFSC and SEFSC shipboard and aerial surveys during the summer in 1990-1998. Isobaths are at 100 m and 1,000 m.

waters north of Maryland (38° N) (Figure 1; Palka *et al.* in review). Shipboard data were analyzed using the modified direct duplicate method (Palka 1995) that accounts for school size bias and $g(0)$, the probability of detecting a group on the track line. Aerial data were not corrected for $g(0)$.

An abundance of 13,944 (CV=0.38) for bottlenose dolphins was estimated from a shipboard line transect sighting survey conducted between 8 July and 17 August 1998 that surveyed 5,570 km of track line in waters south of Maryland (38°N) (Figure 1; Mullin in review). Abundance estimates were made using the program DISTANCE (Buckland *et al.* 1993; Laake *et al.* 1993) where school size bias and ship attraction were accounted for.

The best available abundance estimate for bottlenose dolphins is the sum of the estimates from the two 1998 USA Atlantic surveys, 30,633 (CV=0.25), where the estimate from the northern USA Atlantic is 16,689 (CV=0.32) and from the southern USA Atlantic is 13,944 (CV=0.38). This joint estimate is considered best because together these two surveys have the most complete coverage of the species' habitat.

Minimum Population Estimate

The minimum population estimate is the lower limit of the two-tailed 60% confidence interval of the log-normally distributed best abundance estimate. This is equivalent to the 20th percentile of the log-normal distribution as specified by Wade and Angliss (1997). The best estimate of abundance for offshore bottlenose dolphins is 30,633 (CV=0.25). The minimum population estimate for the western North Atlantic offshore bottlenose is 24,897.

Current Population Trend

The data are insufficient to determine population trends. Previous estimates cannot be applied to this process because previous survey coverage of the species' habitat was incomplete.

CURRENT AND MAXIMUM NET PRODUCTIVITY RATES

Current and maximum net productivity rates are unknown for this stock. For purposes of this assessment, 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 minimum population size, one-half the maximum productivity rate, and a "recovery" factor (MMPA Sec. 3. 16 U.S.C. 1362; Wade and Angliss 1997). The minimum population size for offshore bottlenose dolphins is 24,897. The maximum productivity rate is 0.04, the default value for cetaceans. The "recovery" factor, which accounts for endangered, depleted, 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 western North Atlantic offshore bottlenose dolphin is 249.

ANNUAL HUMAN-CAUSED MORTALITY AND SERIOUS INJURY

Total estimated mean annual fishery-related mortality to this stock during 1996-2000 was 27 (CV=1.12) bottlenose dolphins.

Fishery Information

There was no documentation of marine mammal mortality or serious injury in distant-water fleet (DWF) activities off the northeast coast of the USA prior to 1977. A fisheries observer program which recorded fishery data and information on incidental bycatch of marine mammals was established with implementation of the Magnuson Fisheries Conservation and Management Act (MFCMA) in 1977. DWF effort in the US Atlantic EEZ under MFCMA was directed primarily towards Atlantic mackerel and squid. An average of 120 different foreign vessels per year (range 102-161) operated within the US Atlantic EEZ from 1977 through 1982. In 1982, the first year that NMFS Northeast Regional Observer Program assumed responsibility for observer coverage of the longline vessels, there were 112 different foreign vessels, eighteen (16%) of which were Japanese tuna longline vessels operating along the USA east coast. Between 1983 and 1991, the number of foreign fishing vessels operating within the US Atlantic EEZ each year declined from 67 to 9. Between 1983 and 1988, the numbers of DWF vessels included 3, 5, 7, 6, 8, and 8, respectively, Japanese longline vessels. Observer coverage on DWF vessels was 25-35% during 1977-82, and increased to 58%, 86%, 95%, and 98%, respectively, in 1983-86. From 1987-91, 100% observer

coverage was maintained. Foreign fishing operations for squid ceased at the end of the 1986 fishing season and for mackerel at the end of the 1991 season. Observers in this program recorded 9 bottlenose dolphin mortalities in foreign-fishing activities during 1977-1988 (Waring *et al.* 1990). Seven takes occurred in the mackerel fishery, and 1 bottlenose dolphin each was caught in both the squid and hake trawl fisheries.

Data on current incidental takes in USA fisheries are available from several sources. In 1986, NMFS established a mandatory self-reported fisheries information system for large pelagic fisheries. Data files are maintained at the Southeast Fisheries Science Center (SEFSC). The Northeast Fisheries Science Center (NEFSC) Sea Sampling Observer Program was initiated in 1989, and since that year several fisheries have been covered by the program. In late 1992 and in 1993, the SEFSC provided observer coverage of pelagic longline vessels fishing off the Grand Banks (Tail of the Banks) and provides observer coverage of vessels fishing south of Cape Hatteras.

Bycatch has been observed by NMFS Sea Samplers in the pelagic drift gillnet, pelagic pair trawl, New England multispecies sink gillnet, North Atlantic bottom trawl fisheries, and pelagic longline fisheries.

Pelagic Longline

The pelagic longline fishery operates in the USA Atlantic (including Caribbean) and Gulf of Mexico EEZ (SEFSC unpublished data). Interactions between the pelagic longline fishery and bottlenose dolphins have been reported; however, a vessel may fish in more than one statistical reporting area and it is not possible to separate estimates of fishing effort other than to subtract Gulf of Mexico effort from Atlantic fishing effort, which includes the Caribbean Sea. Total effort, excluding the Gulf of Mexico, for the pelagic longline fishery, based on mandatory self-reported fisheries information, was 11,279 sets in 1991, 9,869 sets in 1992, 9,862 sets in 1993, 9,481 sets in 1994, 10,129 sets in 1995, 9,885 sets in 1996, 8,023 sets in 1997, 6,765 in 1998, 6770 sets in 1999, and 6,582 sets in 2000 (Cramer 1994; Scott and Brown 1997; Johnson *et al.* 1999; Yeung 1999a; and Yeung, 2001). Since 1992, this fishery has been monitored with about 5% observer coverage, in terms of trips observed, within every statistical reporting area within the US Atlantic EEZ and beyond. Off the USA Atlantic coast, the fishery has been observed from January to March off Cape Hatteras, in May and June in the entire mid-Atlantic, and in July through December in the mid-Atlantic Bight and off Nova Scotia. Yeung (1999a) provides estimates of mortality for 1998, based on a treatment which includes seriously injured animals as mortalities, following guidelines proposed by the NOAA Fisheries Office of Protected Resources (Federal Register Docket No., I.D. 051398C). Yeung (1999b) provides revised estimates of mortality for 1993-1997. These estimates, which treat seriously injured animals as mortalities, replace the 1993-1997 estimates which were based on a revised analysis of the observed incidental take and self-reported incidental take and effort data (Johnson *et al.* 1999), and which replaced previous estimates for the 1992-1993 (Cramer 1994) and 1994-1995 periods (Scott and Brown 1997). Most of the estimated marine mammal bycatch was from US Atlantic EEZ waters between South Carolina and Cape Cod (Johnson *et al.* 1999). During 1993-1998, in waters not including the Gulf of Mexico, 1 bottlenose dolphin was caught and released alive during 1993, and 1 was caught and released alive during 1998.

Pelagic Drift Gillnet

The estimated total number of hauls in the pelagic drift gillnet fishery increased from 714 in 1989 to 1,144 in 1990; thereafter, with the introduction of quotas, effort was severely reduced. The estimated number of hauls in 1991, 1992, 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, and 1998 were 233, 243, 232, 197, 164, 149, and 113, respectively. In 1996 and 1997, NMFS issued management regulations which prohibited the operation of this fishery in 1997. Further, in January 1999 NMFS issued a Final Rule to prohibit the use of driftnets (*i.e.*, permanent closure) in the North Atlantic swordfish fishery (50 CFR Part 630). Fifty-nine different vessels participated in this fishery at one time or another between 1989 and 1993. Since 1994, between 10- 13 vessels have participated in the fishery (Table 1). Observer coverage, expressed as percent of sets observed, was 8% in 1989, 6% in 1990, 20% in 1991, 40% in 1992, 42% in 1993, 87% in 1994, 99% in 1995, 64% in 1996, no fishery in 1997, and 99% in 1998.

Effort was concentrated along the southern edge of Georges Bank and off Cape Hatteras. Examination of the species composition of the catch and locations of the fishery throughout the year, suggested that the pelagic drift gillnet fishery be stratified into two strata, a southern or winter stratum, and a northern or summer stratum. Estimates of the total bycatch, from 1989 to 1993, were obtained using the aggregated (pooled 1989-1993) catch rates, by strata (Northridge 1996). Estimates of total annual bycatch for 1994 and 1995 were estimated from the sum of the observed caught and the product of the average bycatch per haul and the number of unobserved hauls as recorded in self-reported fisheries information. Variances were estimated using bootstrap re-sampling techniques. Sixty bottlenose dolphin mortalities have been observed between 1989 and 1998. Estimated bottlenose dolphin mortalities (CV in parentheses) extrapolated for each year were 72 in 1989 (0.18), 115 in 1990 (0.18), 26 in 1991

(0.15), 28 in 1992 (0.10), 22 in 1993 (0.13), 14 in 1994 (0.04), 5 in 1995 (0), 0 in 1996, and 3 in 1998 (0). Since this fishery no longer exists, it has been excluded from Table 1.

Pelagic Pair Trawl

Effort in the pelagic pair trawl fishery increased during the period 1989 to 1993, from zero hauls in 1989 and 1990, to an estimated 171 hauls in 1991, and then to an estimated 536 hauls in 1992, 586 in 1993, 407 in 1994, and 440 in 1995, respectively. This fishery ceased operations in 1996, when NMFS rejected a petition to consider pair trawl gear as an authorized gear type in Atlantic tunas fishery. The fishery operated from August-November in 1991, from June-November in 1992, from June-October in 1993 (Northridge 1996), and from mid-summer to November in 1994 and 1995. Sea sampling began in October 1992 (Gerrior *et al.* 1994), and 48 sets (9% of the total) were sampled in that season, 102 hauls (17% of the total) were sampled in 1993. In 1994 and 1995, 52% and 55%, respectively, of the sets were observed. Nineteen vessels have operated in this fishery. The fishery extends from 35°N to 41°N, and from 69°W to 72°W. Approximately 50% of the total effort was within a one degree square at 39°N, 72°W, around Hudson Canyon. Examination of the 1991-1993 locations and species composition of the bycatch, showed little seasonal change for the six months of operation and did not warrant any seasonal or areal stratification of this fishery (Northridge 1996). Thirty-two bottlenose dolphin mortalities were observed between 1991 and 1995. Estimated annual fishery-related mortality (CV in parentheses) was 13 dolphins in 1991 (0.52), 73 in 1992 (0.49), 85 in 1993 (0.41), 4 in 1994 (0.40) and 17 in 1995 (0.26). Since this fishery no longer exists, it has been excluded from Table 1. During the 1994 and 1995 experimental fishing seasons, fishing gear experiments were conducted to collect data on environmental parameters, gear behavior, and gear handling practices to evaluate factors affecting catch and bycatch (Goudey 1995, 1996). Results of these studies have been presented at Offshore Cetacean Take Reduction Team Meetings.

North Atlantic Bottom Trawl:

Vessels in the North Atlantic bottom trawl fishery, a Category III fishery under the MMPA, were observed in order to meet fishery management needs, rather than marine mammal management needs. An average of 970 (CV=0.04) vessels (full and part time) participated annually in the fishery during 1989-1993. The fishery is active in New England waters in all seasons. One bottlenose dolphin mortality was documented in 1991 and the total estimated mortality in this fishery in 1991 was 91 (CV=0.97). Since 1992 there were no bottlenose mortalities observed in this fishery.

Squid, Mackerel and Butterfish:

The mid-Atlantic mackerel and squid trawl fisheries were combined into the Atlantic squid, mackerel and butterfish trawl fishery in 1996. These fisheries operate seasonally, principally in the USA mid-Atlantic and southern New England continental shelf region. The mackerel trawl fishery was classified as a Category II fishery since 1990 and the squid fishery was originally classified as a Category II fishery in 1990, but was reclassified as a Category III fishery in 1992. The combined fishery has been proposed for classification as a Category II fishery. In 1996, mackerel, squid, and butterfish trawl fisheries were combined into the Atlantic squid, mackerel, and butterfish trawl fishery, and maintained a Category II classification. Although there were reports of bottlenose dolphin mortalities in the foreign fishery during 1977-1988, there were no fishery-related mortalities of bottlenose dolphins reported in the self-reported fisheries information from the mackerel trawl fishery between 1990-1992.

New England Multispecies Sink Gillnet

In 1993, there were approximately 349 full and part-time vessels in the Northeast multispecies sink gillnet fishery, which covered the Gulf of Maine and southern New England (Table 1). An additional 187 vessels were reported to occasionally fish with gillnets in the Gulf of Maine for bait or personal use; however these vessels were not covered by the observer program (Walden 1996) and their fishing effort was not used in estimating mortality. Observer coverage in terms of trips has been 1%, 6%, 7%, 5%, 7%, 5%, 4%, 6%, 5%, 6%, and 6% for 1990 to 2000 respectively. The fishery has been observed in the Gulf of Maine and in Southern New England. In 2000, the first observed mortality of bottlenose dolphins was recorded. This was genetically identified as an offshore, deep-water ecotype. The estimated annual fishery-related serious injury and mortality attributable to this fishery (CV in parentheses) was 0 from 1996-1999, and 132 (CV=1.16) in 2000 (Table 1).

Mid-Atlantic Coastal Gillnet

Observer coverage of the USA Atlantic coastal gillnet fishery was initiated by the NEFSC Sea Sampling program in July 1993, and from July to December 1993, 20 trips were observed. During 1994 and 1995, 221 and 382 trips were observed, respectively. This fishery, which extends from North Carolina to New York, is actually a combination of small vessel fisheries that target a variety of fish species, some of which operate right off the beach.

The number of vessels in this fishery is unknown, because records which are held by both state and federal agencies have not been centralized and standardized. Observer coverage, expressed as percent of tons of fish landed, was 5%, 4%, 3%, 5%, 2%, and 2% for 1995, 1996, 1997, 1998, 1999 and 2000, respectively (Table 1).

Bottlenose dolphins were only reported during the trips in 1998, when 1 mortality was observed as a result of this fishery. Though this dolphin was not genetically identified, it is being treated as an offshore, deep-water ecotype because it was caught in the offshore habitat and statistical analyses of all biopsied bottlenose dolphins caught in this offshore habitat indicate this animal has a high probability of being the offshore ecotype. Observed effort was concentrated off NJ and scattered between DE and NC from 1 to 50 miles off the beach. All bycatches were documented during January to April. Using the observed takes, the estimated annual mortality attributed to this fishery was 0 in 1995 through 1997, 4 (CV=0.7) in 1998, and 0 from 1999 through 2000 (Table 1).

Table 1. Summary of the incidental mortality of bottlenose dolphins (*Tursiops truncatus*) by commercial fishery including the years sampled (Years), the number of vessels active within the fishery (Vessels), the type of data used (Data Type), the annual observer coverage (Observer Coverage), the mortalities recorded by on-board observers (Observed Mortality), the estimated annual mortality (Estimated Mortality), the estimated CV of the annual mortality (Estimated CVs) and the mean annual mortality (CV in parentheses).

Fishery	Years	Vessels	Data Type ¹	Observer Coverage ²	Observed Serious Injury	Observed Mortality	Estimated Mortality	Estimated CVs	Mean Annual Mortality
New England Multisp. Sink Gillnet	96-00	301	Obs. Data Dealer Reports, Logbooks	.04, .06, .05, .06, .06	0, 0, 0, 0, 0	0, 0, 0, 0, 1	0, 0, 0, 0, 132	0, 0, 0, 0, 1.16	26 (1.16)
mid-Atlantic Coastal Gillnet	96-00	Unk ³	Obs. Data Dealer Reports	.04, .03, .05, .02, .02	0, 0, 0, 0, 0	0, 0, 1, 0, 0	0, 0, 4, 0, 0	0, 0, 0.7, 0, 0	1 (0.7)
TOTAL									27 (1.12)

¹ Observer data (Obs. Data) are used to measure bycatch rates, and the data are collected within the Northeast Fisheries Science Center (NEFSC) Sea Sampling Program. Mandatory logbook (logbook) data collected by the Southeast Fisheries Science Center (SEFSC) are used to measure total effort for the pelagic drift gillnet fishery. The NEFSC collects landings data (Dealer Reports), and total landings are used as a measure of total effort for the gillnet fisheries. Mandatory vessel trip reports (Logbook) data are used to determine the spatial distribution of fishing effort in the Northeast multispecies sink gillnet fishery.

² Observer coverage of the Northeast multispecies sink gillnet fishery is measured as the percentage of trips observed. Observer coverage of the mid-Atlantic coastal gillnet fishery is measured as the percentage of tons of fish landed.

³ Number of vessels is not known.

Other Mortality

Bottlenose dolphins are one of the most frequently stranded small cetaceans along the Atlantic coast. Many of the animals show signs of human interaction (*i.e.*, net marks, mutilation, etc.). The estimated number of animals that represent the offshore stock is presently under evaluation.

STATUS OF STOCK

The status of this stock relative to OSP in the US Atlantic EEZ is unknown. The western North Atlantic offshore bottlenose dolphin is not listed as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act. There are insufficient data to determine the population trends for this species. This level is not less than 10% of the calculated

PBR and, therefore, cannot be considered to be insignificant and approaching zero mortality and serious injury rate. Average 1996-2000 annual fishery-related mortality and serious injury does not exceed the PBR; therefore, this is not a strategic stock.

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