

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Under the 1994 amendments to the U. S. Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972 (MMPA), the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) and the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) are required to generate stock assessment reports (SAR) for all marine mammal stocks in waters within the U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). The first reports for stocks in the Atlantic (including the Gulf of Mexico) were published in July 1995 (Blaylock *et al.* 1995). The MMPA requires NMFS and USFWS to review these reports at least annually for stocks which are specified as strategic¹ and at least once every 3 years for stocks determined to be non-strategic. The second edition of the SAR (1996 assessments) was published in October 1997 and contained all the previous reports, but major revisions and updating were completed only for strategic stocks (Waring *et al.* 1997). Updated reports were identified by a 1997 date-stamp at the top right corner of the first page of each report. The 3rd edition of the SAR (1998 assessments) only contained reports for Atlantic stocks, and updated reports were identified by a 1998 date-stamp (Waring *et al.* 1999a). The 4th edition of the SAR (1999 assessments) only contained reports for Atlantic stocks, with the updated reports identified by a 1999 date-stamp (Waring *et al.* 1999b). The 5th, 6th, and 7th editions of the SAR contained reports for the Atlantic stocks (including the Gulf of Mexico) as well as the USFWS West Indian manatee assessments. Updated reports were identified, respectively, by 2000, 2001, and 2002 date-stamps (Waring *et al.* 2000, 2001, 2002). The current report (2003) report contains updated assessments for Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico strategic stocks and for any additional stocks for which significant new information was available. These reports are identified by a December 2003 date-stamp on the first page of the report. Appendix I presents serious injury/mortality estimates of marine mammals in U. S. observed fisheries during 1997-2001. Appendix II summarizes NMFS records of large whale/human interactions (entanglements and vessel collisions) reported along the U.S. Atlantic and Gulf coasts and in the Canadian Maritimes during 1997-2001. Appendices III and IV, respectively, contain stock assessments not updated in the year 2002 and the West Indian Manatees stock assessments.

This report was prepared by staff of the Northeast Fisheries Science Center (NEFSC), Southeast Fisheries Science Center (SEFSC), and USFWS. NMFS and USFWS staff presented the reports at the November 2002 meeting of the Atlantic Scientific Review Group (ASRG), and subsequent revisions were based on the Group's contributions and constructive criticism.

Table 1 contains a summary, by species, of the information included in the stock assessments, and indicates those that have been revised (43 of the 60 Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico stocks) in this report. Most of the sections incorporate new information on population size and/or mortality estimates. The revised SAR includes 10 strategic and 33 non-strategic stocks. Information on human interactions (fishery and ship strikes) involving the right whale, humpback whale, fin whale, and minke whale stocks was re-reviewed and updated. The SAR is a working document and individual stock assessment reports will be updated as new information becomes available and as changes to marine mammal stocks and fisheries occur. The authors solicit any new information or comments which would improve future stock assessment reports.

¹ A strategic stock is defined as a marine mammal stock for
(a) which the level of direct human-caused mortality exceeds the potential biological removal (PBR) level;
(b) which, based on the best available scientific information, is declining and is likely to be listed as a threatened species under the U.S. Endangered Species Act of 1973 (ESA) within the foreseeable future; or
(c) which is listed as a threatened species or endangered species under the ESA, or is designated as depleted under the MMPA.