

## INTRODUCTION

Section 117 of the U. S. Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972 (MMPA), as Amended through 1997, requires that a stock assessment be prepared for each marine mammal stock that occurs in waters under USA jurisdiction in consultation with regional Scientific Review Groups (SRGs). The SRGs consist of individuals with expertise in marine mammal biology and ecology, population dynamics and modeling, and commercial fishing technology and practices and are mandated to review the marine mammal stock assessments and provide advice to the Secretary of Commerce. The reports are then made available on the *Federal Register* for public review and comment before final publication.

The MMPA requires that each stock assessment contain several items, including: (1) a description of the stock, including its geographic range; (2) a minimum population estimate, current and maximum net productivity rates and current population trend, including a description upon which these are based; (3) an estimate of the annual human-caused mortality and serious injury of the stock by source and, for a strategic stock, other factors that may be causing a decline or impeding recovery of the stock, including effects on marine mammal habitat and prey; (4) a description of the commercial fisheries that interact with the stock, including the approximate number of vessels actively participating in the fishery and the estimated level of incidental mortality and serious injury of the stock by each fishery on an annual basis; (5) a statement categorizing the stock as strategic or not, and why; and (6) an estimate of the potential biological removal (PBR) level for the stock, describing the information used to calculate it including the recovery factor. The MMPA also requires that stock assessments be updated at least annually for stocks specified as strategic stocks, or for which significant new information is available, and at least once every three years for non-strategic stocks.

Following enactment of the 1994 amendments to the MMPA, the NMFS and USFWS held a series of workshops to develop guidelines for preparing the stock assessment reports (SARs). The first set of assessments for the Atlantic Coast marine mammal stocks (including the Gulf of Mexico) were published in July 1995 in the *NOAA Technical Memorandum* series (Blaylock *et al.* 1995). In April 1996, the NMFS held a workshop to review proposed additions and revisions to the guidelines for preparing SARs (Wade and Angliss 1997). Guidelines developed at the workshop were followed in preparing the 1996 (Waring *et al.* 1997), 1998 (Waring *et al.* 1999a), 1999 (Waring *et al.* 1999b), 2000 (Waring *et al.* 2000), 2001 (Waring *et al.* 2001), and 2002 (Waring *et al.* 2002) reports. A 1997 SAR was not produced.

In this document, major revisions and updating of the SARs were completed for ten Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico strategic stocks and for 33 other stocks for which significant new information was available (Table 1). The revised assessments are identified by December 2003 date-stamp at the top right corner on the first page of each report.

## REFERENCES

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