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HARBOR PORPOISE (*Phocoena phocoena*): Washington Inland Waters Stock

STOCK DEFINITION AND GEOGRAPHIC RANGE

In the eastern North Pacific Ocean, harbor porpoise are found in coastal and inland waters from Point Barrow, along the Alaskan coast, and down the west coast of North America to Point Conception, California (Gaskin 1984). Harbor porpoise are known to occur year-round in the inland trans-boundary waters of Washington and British Columbia, Canada (Osborne et al. 1988), and along the Oregon/Washington coast (Barlow 1988, Barlow et al. 1988, Green et al. 1992). Aerial survey data from coastal Oregon and Washington, collected during all seasons, suggest that harbor porpoise distribution varies by depth (Green et al. 1992). Although distinct seasonal changes in abundance along the west coast have been noted, and attributed to possible shifts in distribution to deeper offshore waters during late winter (Dohl et al. 1983, Barlow 1988), seasonal movement patterns are not fully understood.

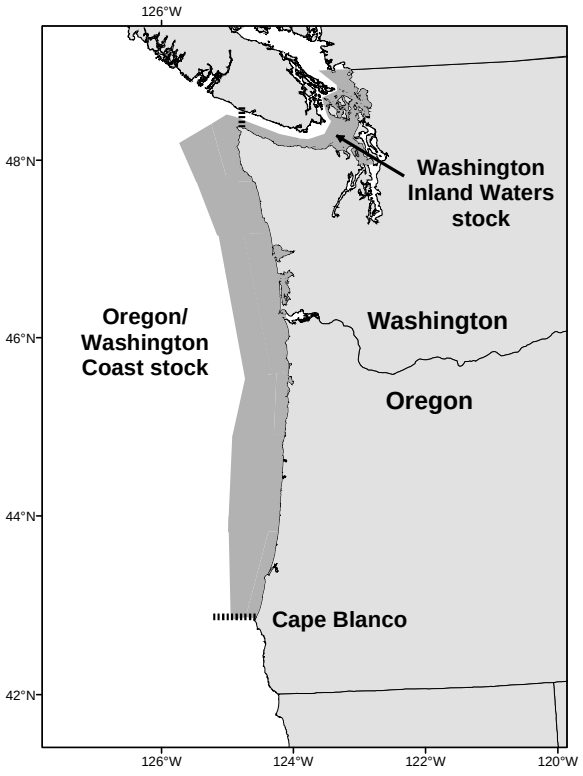

Figure 1. Stock boundaries (dashed lines) and approximate distribution (shaded areas) of harbor porpoise along the coasts of Washington and northern Oregon.

Investigation of pollutant loads in harbor porpoise ranging from California to the Canadian border suggests restricted harbor porpoise movements (Calambokidis and Barlow 1991). Stock discreteness in the eastern North Pacific was analyzed using mitochondrial DNA from samples collected along the west coast (Rosel 1992) and is summarized in Osmek et al. (1994). Two distinct mtDNA groupings or clades exist. One clade is present in California, Washington, British Columbia, and Alaska (no samples were available from Oregon), while the other is found only in California and Washington. Although these two clades are not geographically distinct by latitude, the results may indicate a low mixing rate for harbor porpoise along the west coast of North America. Further genetic testing of the same data, along with additional samples, found significant genetic differences for four of the six pair-wise comparisons between the four areas investigated: California, Washington, British Columbia, and Alaska (Rosel et al. 1995). These results demonstrate that harbor porpoise along the west coast of North America are not panmictic or migratory and that movement is sufficiently restricted that genetic differences have evolved. Recent preliminary genetic analyses of samples ranging from Monterey Bay, California, to Vancouver Island, British Columbia, indicate that there is small-scale subdivision within the U.S. portion of this range (Chivers et al. 2002). This is consistent with low movement suggested by genetic analysis of harbor porpoise specimens from the North Atlantic, where numerous stocks have been delineated with clinal differences over areas as small as the waters surrounding the British Isles.

Using the 1990-1991 aerial survey data of Calambokidis et al. (1993) for water depths <50 fathoms, Osmek et al. (1996) found significant differences in harbor porpoise mean densities ($z=5.9$, $p<0.01$) between the waters of coastal Oregon/Washington and inland Washington/southern British Columbia, Canada (i.e., Strait of Juan de Fuca/San Juan Islands). Although differences in density exist between coastal Oregon/Washington and inland Washington waters, a specific stock boundary line cannot be identified based upon biological or genetic differences. However, harbor porpoise movements and rates of intermixing within the eastern North Pacific are restricted, and there has been a significant decline in harbor porpoise sightings within southern Puget Sound since the 1940s; therefore, following a risk averse management strategy, two stocks are recognized: the Oregon/Washington Coast stock (between Cape Blanco, OR, and Cape Flattery, WA) and the Washington Inland Waters stock (in waters east

of Cape Flattery) (see Fig. 1). Recent genetic evidence suggests that the population of eastern North Pacific harbor porpoise is more finely structured than is currently recognized (Chivers et al. 2002). All relevant data (e.g., genetic samples, contaminant studies, and satellite tagging) will be reviewed to determine whether to adjust the stock boundaries for harbor porpoise in Oregon and Washington waters.

In their assessment of California harbor porpoise, Barlow and Hanan (1995) recommended two stocks be recognized in California, with the stock boundary at the Russian River. Based on recent genetic findings (Chivers et al. 2002), California coast stocks were re-evaluated and significant genetic differences were found among four identified sampling sites. Revised stock boundaries, based on these genetic data and density discontinuities identified from aerial surveys, resulted in six California/Oregon/Washington stocks where previously there had been four (Carretta et al. 2001): 1) the Washington Inland Waters stock, 2) the Oregon/Washington Coast stock, 3) the Northern California/Southern Oregon stock, 4) the San Francisco-Russian River stock, 5) the Monterey Bay stock, and 6) the Morro Bay stock. The stock boundaries for animals that occur in Washington/northern Oregon waters are shown in Figure 1. This report considers only the Washington Inland Waters stock. Stock assessment reports for Oregon/Washington Coast, Northern California/Southern Oregon, San Francisco-Russian River, Monterey Bay, and Morro Bay harbor porpoise also appear in this volume. Stock assessment reports for the three harbor porpoise stocks in the inland and coastal waters of Alaska, including 1) the Southeast Alaska stock, 2) the Gulf of Alaska stock, and 3) the Bering Sea stock, are reported separately in the Stock Assessment Reports for the Alaska Region. The harbor porpoise occurring in British Columbia have not been included in any of the U.S. stock assessment reports.

POPULATION SIZE

Aerial surveys of the inside waters of Washington and southern British Columbia were conducted during August of 2002 and 2003 (J. Laake, unpubl. data). These aerial surveys included the Strait of Juan de Fuca, San Juan Islands, Gulf Islands, and Strait of Georgia, which includes waters inhabited by the Washington Inland Waters stock of harbor porpoise as well as harbor porpoise from British Columbia. An average of the 2002 and 2003 estimates of abundance in U.S. waters results in an uncorrected abundance of 3,123 (CV= 0.10) harbor porpoise in Washington inland waters (J. Laake, unpubl. data). When corrected for availability and perception bias, using a correction factor of 3.42 (1/g(0); g(0)=0.292, CV=0.366) (Laake et al. 1997), the estimated abundance for the Washington Inland Waters stock of harbor porpoise is 10,682 (CV=0.38) animals (J. Laake, unpubl. data).

Minimum Population Estimate

The minimum population estimate for this stock is calculated as the lower 20th percentile of the log-normal distribution (Wade and Angliss 1997) of the average of the 2002 and 2003 population estimates (10,682), which is 7,841 harbor porpoise.

Current Population Trend

There are no reliable data on long-term population trends of harbor porpoise for most waters of Oregon, Washington, or British Columbia, however, the uncorrected estimate of abundance in Washington inland waters was significantly greater in 2002/2003 than in 1996 (3,123 vs. 1,025; $Z=6.16$, $P<0.0001$) (Calambokidis et al. 1997; J. Laake, unpubl. data).

A different situation exists in southern Puget Sound where harbor porpoise are rarely observed, in contrast to 1942 when they were common in those waters (Scheffer and Slipp 1948). Although quantitative data for this area are lacking, marine mammal survey effort (Everitt et al. 1980), stranding records since the early 1970s (Osmek et al. 1995), and the results of harbor porpoise surveys of 1991 (Calambokidis et al. 1992) and 1994 (Osmek et al. 1995) indicate that harbor porpoise abundance has declined in southern Puget Sound. In 1994, a total of 769 km of vessel survey effort and 492 km of aerial survey effort conducted during favorable sighting conditions produced no sightings of harbor porpoise in southern Puget Sound. Reasons for the apparent decline are unknown, but it may be related to fishery interactions, pollutants, vessel traffic, or other factors (Osmek et al. 1995). Recently, however, there have been confirmed sightings of harbor porpoise in central Puget Sound (R. DeLong, pers. comm.).

CURRENT AND MAXIMUM NET PRODUCTIVITY RATES

A reliable estimate of the maximum net productivity rate is not currently available for harbor porpoise. Hence, until additional data become available, it is recommended that the cetacean maximum theoretical net productivity rate (R_{MAX}) of 4% (Wade and Angliss 1997) be employed for the Washington Inland Waters harbor porpoise stock.

POTENTIAL BIOLOGICAL REMOVAL

The potential biological removal (PBR) level for this stock is calculated as the minimum population size (7,841) times one-half the default maximum net growth rate for cetaceans (½ of 4%) times a recovery factor of 0.40 (for a stock of unknown status with a mortality rate CV≥0.80, Wade and Angliss 1997), resulting in a PBR of 63 harbor porpoise per year.

HUMAN-CAUSED MORTALITY AND SERIOUS INJURY

Fisheries Information

Fishing effort in the northern Washington marine set gillnet fishery (areas 4, 4A, 4B, and 5) is conducted within the range of both harbor porpoise stocks (Oregon/Washington Coast and Washington Inland Waters) occurring in Washington State waters. Some movement of harbor porpoise between Washington's coastal and inland waters is likely, but it is currently not possible to quantify the extent of such movements. For the purposes of this stock assessment report, the animals taken in waters east of Cape Flattery (areas 4B and 5) are assumed to have belonged to the Washington Inland Waters stock, and Table 1 includes data only from that portion of the fishery. NMFS observers monitored 58% of the 36 net days (1 net day equals a 100-fathom length net set for 24 hours) of fishing effort in inland waters in 2000. There was no observer program in 1999 or 2001-2003 in inland waters; fishing effort was 4, 46, 4.5, and 7 net days (respectively) in those years, and no harbor porpoise takes were reported (Gearin et al. 1994; 2000; P. Gearin, unpubl. data). No mortalities were reported in the inland portion of the fishery between 1999 and 2003, thus, the mean estimated mortality for this fishery is zero harbor porpoise per year from this stock.

In 1993, as a pilot for future observer programs, NMFS in conjunction with the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) monitored non-treaty components (areas 7, 7A, 7B/7C, 8A/8D, 10/11, and 12/12A/12B) of the Washington Puget Sound Region salmon gillnet fishery (Pierce et al. 1994). Observer coverage was 1.5% overall, ranging from 0.9% to 7.3% for the various components of the fishery. No harbor porpoise mortalities were reported (Table 1). Pierce et al. (1994) cautioned against extrapolating these mortalities to the entire Puget Sound fishery due to the low observer coverage and potential biases inherent in the data. The area 7/7A sockeye landings represented the majority of the non-treaty salmon landings in 1993, approximately 67%. Results of this pilot study were used to design the 1994 observer programs discussed below.

In 1994, NMFS in conjunction with WDFW conducted an observer program during the Puget Sound non-treaty chum salmon gillnet fishery (areas 10/11 and 12/12B). A total of 230 sets were observed during 54 boat trips, representing approximately 11% observer coverage of the 500 fishing boat trips comprising the total effort in this fishery, as estimated from fish ticket landings (Erstad et al. 1996). No harbor porpoise were reported within 100 m of observed gillnets. The Puget Sound treaty chum salmon gillnet fishery in Hood Canal (areas 12, 12B, and 12C) and Puget Sound treaty sockeye/chum gillnet fishery in the Strait of Juan de Fuca (areas 4B, 5, and 6C) were also monitored in 1994 (NWIFC 1995). No harbor porpoise mortalities were reported in the observer programs covering these treaty salmon gillnet fisheries, where observer coverage was estimated at 2.2% (based on % of total catch observed) and approximately 7.5% (based on % of observed trips to total landings), respectively.

Also in 1994, NMFS in conjunction with WDFW and the Tribes conducted an observer program to examine seabird and marine mammal interactions with the Puget Sound treaty and non-treaty sockeye salmon gillnet fishery (areas 7 and 7A). During this fishery, observers monitored 2,205 sets, representing approximately 7% of the estimated 33,086 sets occurring in the fishery (Pierce et al. 1996). There was one observed harbor porpoise mortality (one other was entangled and released alive with no indication that it was injured), resulting in a mortality rate of 0.00045 harbor porpoise per set, which extrapolates to 15 mortalities (CV=1.0) for the entire fishery.

In 1996, Washington Sea Grant Program conducted a test fishery in the non-treaty sockeye salmon gillnet fishery (area 7) to compare entanglement rates of seabirds and marine mammals and catch rates of salmon using three experimental gears and a control (monofilament mesh net). The experimental nets incorporated highly visible mesh in the upper quarter (50 mesh gear) or upper eighth (20 mesh gear) of the net or had low-frequency sound emitters attached to the corkline (Melvin et al. 1997). In 642 sets during 17 vessel trips, 2 harbor porpoise were killed in the 50 mesh gear.

Table 1. Summary of incidental mortality and serious injury of harbor porpoise (Washington Inland Waters stock) due to commercial and tribal fisheries and calculation of the mean annual mortality rate; n/a indicates that data are not available. Mean annual takes are based on 2000-2004 data unless noted otherwise.

Fishery name	Years	Data type	Percent observer coverage	Observed mortality	Estimated mortality	Mean annual takes (CV in parentheses)
Northern WA marine set gillnet (tribal fishery in inland waters: areas 4B and 5)	1999 2000 2001 2002 2003	observer	0% 58% 0% 0% 0%	n/a 0 n/a n/a n/a	n/a 0 n/a n/a n/a	0[1]
WA Puget Sound Region salmon set/drift gillnet (observer programs listed below covered segments of this fishery):	-	-	-	-	-	-
Puget Sound non-treaty salmon gillnet (all areas and species)	1993	observer	1.3%	0	0	see text
Puget Sound non-treaty chum salmon gillnet (areas 10/11 and 12/12B)	1994	observer	11%	0	0	0
Puget Sound treaty chum salmon gillnet (areas 12, 12B, and 12C)	1994	observer	2.2%	0	0	0
Puget Sound treaty chum and sockeye salmon gillnet (areas 4B, 5, and 6C)	1994	observer	7.5%	0	0	0
Puget Sound treaty and non-treaty sockeye salmon gillnet (areas 7 and 7A)	1994	observer	7%	1	15	15 (1.0)
Unknown Puget Sound fishery	2000-2004	stranding		1, 0, 0, 0, 0		≥0.2 (n/a)
Minimum total annual takes						≥15.2 (1.0)

[1]Only the 2000 mortality estimate is included in the average.

Combining the estimates from the 1994 observer programs (15) with the northern Washington marine set gillnet fishery (zero) results in an estimated mean mortality rate in observed fisheries of 15 harbor porpoise per year from this stock. It should be noted that the 1994 observer programs did not sample all segments of the entire Washington Puget Sound Region salmon set/drift gillnet fishery and, further, the extrapolation of total kill did not include effort for the unobserved segments of this fishery. Therefore, 15 is an underestimate of the harbor porpoise mortality due to the entire fishery. Although the percentage of the overall Washington Puget Sound Region salmon set/drift gillnet fishery effort that was observed in 1994 was not quantified, the observer programs covered those segments of the fishery which had the highest salmon catches, the majority of vessel participation, and the highest likelihood of interaction with harbor porpoise (J. Scordino, pers. comm.). Since the Washington Inland Waters stock of harbor porpoise occurs primarily in the Strait of Juan de Fuca and the San Juan Islands, it is unlikely that many harbor porpoise are taken in other areas of the Washington Puget Sound Region salmon gillnet fishery (i.e., Hood Canal and southern Puget Sound). Harbor porpoise takes in the Washington Puget Sound Region salmon drift gillnet fishery are unlikely to have increased since the fishery was last observed in 1994, due to reductions in the number of participating vessels and available fishing time (see details in Appendix 1). Fishing effort and catch have declined throughout all salmon fisheries in the region due to management efforts to recover ESA-listed salmonids.

The Marine Mammal Authorization Program (MMAP) fisher self-reports, required of commercial vessel operators by the MMPA, are an additional source of information on the number of harbor porpoise killed or seriously injured incidental to commercial fishery operations. Between 2000 and 2004, there were no fisher self-reports of harbor porpoise mortalities from any MMAP-listed Washington Puget Sound Region salmon set/drift gillnet fishery. Unlike the 1994 observer program data, the self-reported fisheries data cover the entire fishery. Although these reports are considered incomplete (see details in Appendix 1), they represent a minimum mortality.

Strandings of harbor porpoise wrapped in fishing gear or with serious injuries caused by interactions with gear are a final source of fishery-related mortality information. According to Northwest Marine Mammal Stranding Network records, maintained by the NMFS Northwest Region, one fishery-related stranding of a harbor porpoise occurred in 2000 in Bellingham Harbor. As the stranding could not be attributed to a particular fishery, it has been included in Table 1 as occurring in an unknown Puget Sound fishery. Fishery-related strandings during 2000-2004 resulted in an estimated annual mortality of 0.2 harbor porpoise from this stock. This estimate is considered a minimum because not all stranded animals are found, reported, or examined for cause of death (via necropsy by trained personnel).

Although, commercial gillnet fisheries in Canadian waters are known to have taken harbor porpoise in the past (Barlow et al. 1994, Stacey et al. 1997), few data are available because the fisheries were not monitored. In 2001, the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, Canada, conducted a federal fisheries observer program and a survey of license holders to estimate the incidental mortality of harbor porpoise in selected salmon fisheries in southern British Columbia (Hall et al. 2002). Based on the observed bycatch of porpoise (2 harbor porpoise mortalities) in the 2001 fishing season, the estimated mortality for southern British Columbia in 2001 was 20 porpoise per 810 boat days fished or a total of 80 harbor porpoise. However, it is not known how many harbor porpoise from the Washington Inland Waters stock are currently taken in the waters of southern British Columbia.

The minimum estimated fishery mortality and serious injury for this stock is 15.2 harbor porpoise per year, based on observer program data (15) and stranding data (0.2) in U.S. waters.

Other Mortality

According to Northwest Marine Mammal Stranding Network records, maintained by the NMFS Northwest Region, one human-caused harbor porpoise mortality was reported from non-fisheries sources in 2000-2004. An animal was struck by a ship in 2001, resulting in an estimated mortality of 0.2 harbor porpoise per year from this stock.

STATUS OF STOCK

Harbor porpoise are not listed as "depleted" under the MMPA or listed as "threatened" or "endangered" under the Endangered Species Act. Based on currently available data, the total level of human-caused mortality and serious injury (15.2 + 0.2 = 15.4) is not known to exceed the PBR (63). Therefore, the Washington Inland Waters harbor porpoise stock is not classified as "strategic." The minimum total fishery mortality and serious injury for this stock (15.2) exceeds 10% of the calculated PBR (6.3) and, therefore, cannot be considered to be insignificant and approaching zero mortality and serious injury rate. The status of this stock relative to its Optimum Sustainable Population (OSP) level and population trends is unknown, although harbor porpoise sightings in southern Puget Sound have declined since the 1940s.

This stock is not recognized as "strategic," however, the mortality rate is based on observer data from a subset of the Washington Puget Sound Region salmon set/drift gillnet fishery that was last observed in 1994. Evaluation of the estimated take level is complicated by a lack of knowledge about the extent to which harbor porpoise from U.S. waters frequent the waters of British Columbia and are, therefore, subject to fishery-related mortality. Given that the estimated take level is from 1994, it is appropriate to consider whether the current take level is different. No new information is available about mortality per set, but 1) fishing effort has decreased in recent years and 2) analysis of data from aerial surveys in 2002 and 2003 indicates that abundance has increased since 1996.

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