

SHORT-FINNED PILOT WHALE (*Globicephala macrorhynchus*): Western North Atlantic Stock

STOCK DEFINITION AND GEOGRAPHIC RANGE

There are two species of pilot whales in the Western Atlantic: the Atlantic or long-finned pilot whale, *Globicephala melas*, and the short-finned pilot whale, *G. macrorhynchus*. These species are difficult to identify to the species level at sea; therefore, some of the descriptive material below refers to *Globicephala* spp. and is identified as such. The species boundary is considered to be in the New Jersey to Cape Hatteras area. Sightings north of this area are likely *G. melas*.

The short-finned pilot whale is distributed worldwide in tropical to warm temperate waters (Leatherwood and Reeves 1983). The northern extent of the range of this species within the U.S. Atlantic Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) is generally thought to be Cape Hatteras, North Carolina (Leatherwood and Reeves 1983). Sightings of these animals in U.S. Atlantic EEZ occur primarily within the Gulf Stream [Southeast Fisheries Science Center (SEFSC) unpublished data], and primarily along the continental shelf and continental slope in the northern Gulf of Mexico (Mullin et al. 1991; SEFSC unpublished data). There is no information on stock differentiation for the Atlantic population.

POPULATION SIZE

Estimates of abundance 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 a 1992 winter, visual sampling, line-transect vessel survey of the U.S. Atlantic EEZ waters between Miami, Florida, and Cape Hatteras, North Carolina. The estimated abundance of short-finned pilot whales for the 1992 survey was 749 (coefficient of variation, $CV = 0.64$) (Hansen et al. 1994).

Minimum Population Estimate

The minimum population estimate is the lower limit of the two-tailed 60% confidence interval of the log-normal distributed abundance estimate, which is equivalent to the 20th percentile of the log-normal distributed average abundance estimate (Hansen et al. 1994) as specified by NMFS (Anon. 1994). The minimum population estimate was based on the 1992 survey abundance estimate of 749 short-finned pilot whales ($CV = 0.64$) (Hansen et al. 1994) and was 457.

Current Population Trend

There are insufficient data to determine the population trends for this species.

CURRENT AND MAXIMUM NET PRODUCTIVITY RATES

Current and maximum net productivity rates are not known for this stock; therefore, the default maximum net productivity rate of 0.04 (Anon. 1994) was used for purposes of this assessment.

POTENTIAL BIOLOGICAL REMOVAL

Potential biological removal level (PBR) was specified as the product of the minimum population size, one half the maximum net productivity rate, and a recovery factor for endangered, threatened, or depleted stocks, or

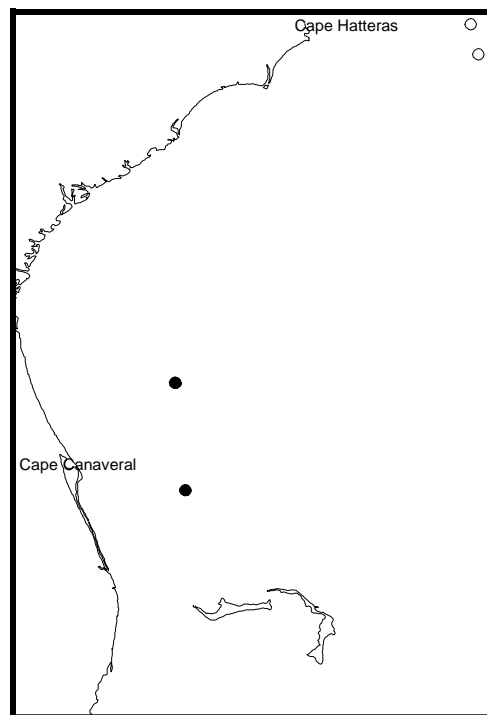


Figure 1. Sightings of short-finned pilot whales (filled circles) and unidentified pilot whales (unfilled circles) during NOAA Ship Oregon II marine mammal survey cruise in winter 1992.

stocks of unknown status relative to optimum sustainable population (OSP) (Anon. 1994). The recovery factor was set at 0.40 because of the high variance associated with the estimate of total annual fishery-related mortality and serious injury for *Globicephala* spp. PBR for this stock is 3.7 short-finned pilot whales.

ANNUAL HUMAN-CAUSED MORTALITY AND SERIOUS INJURY

The level of past or current, direct, human-caused mortality of short-finned pilot whales in the U.S. Atlantic EEZ is unknown. The short-finned pilot whale has been taken in the U.S. longline swordfish/tuna fishery in Atlantic waters off the southeastern U.S. (Lee et al. 1994; SEFSC unpublished data). Pilot whales have been taken in fisheries operating in the deeper, offshore waters off the northeastern U.S. waters north of the presumed range of this stock. The pilot whales taken in these fisheries may have been the long-finned pilot whale, *G. melas* (Waring 1990); however, total fishery-related mortality and serious injury cannot be estimated separately for the two species of pilot whales because of the uncertainty in species identification by fishery observers.

There were 101 short-finned pilot whale strandings documented during 1987-1993 along the U.S. Atlantic coast between Cape Hatteras, North Carolina, and Miami, Florida; two of these were classified as likely caused by fishery interactions.

Total fishery-related mortality and serious injury cannot be estimated separately for the two species of pilot whales in the U.S. Atlantic EEZ because of the uncertainty in species identification by fishery observers. The Atlantic Scientific Review Group advised adopting the risk-averse strategy of assuming that either species might have been subject to the observed fishery-related mortality and serious injury. Total estimated annual fishery-related mortality of pilot whales from NMFS-observed fisheries was the sum of the integer-rounded annual mortality estimates across the pelagic longline, drift gillnet, and groundfish trawl fisheries and was 109 pilot whales, *Globicephala* spp. (CV = 0.90).

Total fishery-related mortality and serious injury of pilot whales is not less than 10% of the calculated PBR for this stock and, therefore, cannot be considered to be insignificant and approaching zero mortality and serious injury rate. This determination cannot be made for specific fisheries until the implementing regulations for Section 118 of the MMPA have been reviewed by the public and finalized.

Fisheries Information

Data on current incidental takes in U.S. fisheries are available from several sources. In 1986, NMFS established a mandatory logbook 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.

The estimated total number of hauls in the Atlantic large 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, and 1993 were 233, 243, and 232 respectively. Fifty-nine different vessels participated in this fishery at one time or another between 1989 and 1993. Observer coverage, expressed as percent of sets observed, ranged from 8% in 1989, 6% in 1990, 20% in 1991, to 40% in 1992, and 42% in 1993. 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 drift gillnet fishery be stratified into two strata, a southern or winter stratum, and a northern or summer stratum. Estimates of the total by-catch, for each year, were obtained using the aggregated (pooled 1989-1993) catch rates, by strata (Northridge, in review). Forty-two pilot whale (*Globicephala* spp.) mortalities were observed between 1989 and 1993. Six animals were released alive but one was injured. The annual fishery-related mortality (CV in parentheses) was 77 in 1989 (1.1), 132 in 1990 (0.59), 30 in 1991 (0.76), 33 in 1992 (0.29), and 31 in 1993 (0.34); average annual mortality between 1989-1993 was 61 pilot whales (0.87). Because animals released alive may have subsequently died due to injuries received during entanglement, pilot whales that were released were included in the mortality estimates. Pilot whales were taken along the continental shelf edge, northeast of Cape Hatteras in January and February. Takes were recorded at the continental shelf edge east of Cape Charles, Virginia, in June. Pilot whales were taken from Hydrographer Canyon along the Great South Channel to Georges Bank from July-

November. Takes occurred at the Oceanographer Canyon continental shelf break and along the continental shelf northeast of Cape Hatteras in October-November.

Pelagic swordfish, tunas, and billfish are the targets of the U.S. longline fishery in the U.S. Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico EEZ (SEFSC unpublished logbook data). Interactions between the longline swordfish/tuna fishery and pilot whales 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. This fishery has been monitored with about 5% observer coverage, in terms of trips observed, since 1992. Total longline effort for the Atlantic pelagic fishery (including the Caribbean), based on mandatory logbook reporting, was 11,279 sets in 1991, 10,605 sets in 1992, and 11,538 in 1993 (Cramer 1994). 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. Twenty four animals were released alive, but two were injured. One mortality was observed between 1990 and 1993. January-March by-catch was concentrated on the continental shelf edge northeast of Cape Hatteras. By-catch was recorded in this area during April-June, and takes also occurred north of Hydrographer Canyon off the continental shelf in water over 1,000 fathoms during April-June. During the July-September period, takes occurred on the continental shelf edge east of Cape Charles, Virginia, and on Block Canyon slope in over 1,000 fathoms of water. October-December by-catch occurred along the 20 to 50 fathom contour lines between Barnegatt Bay and Cape Hatteras. Estimated take was based on a generalized linear model (Poisson error assumption) fit to the available observed incidental take and self-reported incidental take and effort data for the fishery (SEFSC unpublished data). The estimated fishery-related mortality to pilot whales in the U.S. Atlantic attributable to this fishery occurred in 1992 and was 22 (CV = 0.23); average annual mortality between 1992-1993 was eleven pilot whales (0.33).

Vessels in the New England groundfish multispecies 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 in all seasons. One mortality was documented between 1989 and 1993. Also, one animal was released alive. The estimated fishery-related mortality in 1990 was 184 (CV = 0.99); average annual fishery-related mortality during 1989-1993 was 37 pilot whales (2.21).

The mid-Atlantic mackerel and squid trawl fisheries were combined into the Atlantic mid-water trawl fishery in the revised proposed list of fisheries in 1995. The fishery occurs along the U.S. mid-Atlantic continental shelf region between New Brunswick, Canada, and Cape Hatteras year around. 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. Three fishery-related mortality of pilot whales were reported in logbook reports from the mackerel trawl fishery between 1990-1992.

STATUS OF STOCK

The status of the short-finned pilot whale relative to OSP in U.S. Atlantic coast waters is unknown. There are insufficient data to determine the population trends for this stock. They are not listed under the Endangered Species Act. This is a strategic stock because the 1989-93 estimated average annual fishery-related mortality to pilot whales, *Globicephala* spp., exceeds PBR for this stock.

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