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# COMMON BOTTLENOSE DOLPHIN (*Tursiops truncatus truncatus*): California/Oregon/Washington Offshore Stock

## STOCK DEFINITION AND GEOGRAPHIC RANGE

Bottlenose dolphins are distributed world-wide in tropical and warm-temperate waters. In many regions, including California, separate coastal and offshore populations are known (Walker 1981; Ross and Cockcroft 1990; Van Waerebeek et al. 1990; Lowther 2006; Lowther et al. in prep.). On surveys conducted off California, offshore bottlenose dolphins have been found at distances greater than a few kilometers from the mainland and throughout the Southern California Bight. They have also been documented in offshore waters as far north as about 41°N (Figure 1), and they may range into Oregon and Washington waters during warm-water periods. Sighting records off California and Baja California (Lee 1993; Mangels and Gerrodette 1994) suggest that offshore bottlenose dolphins have a continuous distribution in these two regions. Based on aerial surveys conducted during winter/spring 1991-92 (Forney et al. 1995) and shipboard surveys conducted in summer/fall 1991 (Barlow 1995), no seasonality in distribution is apparent (Forney and Barlow 1998). Offshore bottlenose dolphins are not restricted to U.S. waters, but cooperative management agreements with Mexico exist only for the tuna purse seine fishery and not for other fisheries which may take this species (e.g. gillnet fisheries). Therefore, the management stock includes only animals found within U.S. waters. For the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) stock assessment reports, bottlenose dolphins within the Pacific U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone are divided into three stocks: 1) California coastal stock, 2) California, Oregon and Washington offshore stock (this report), and 3) Hawaiian stock.

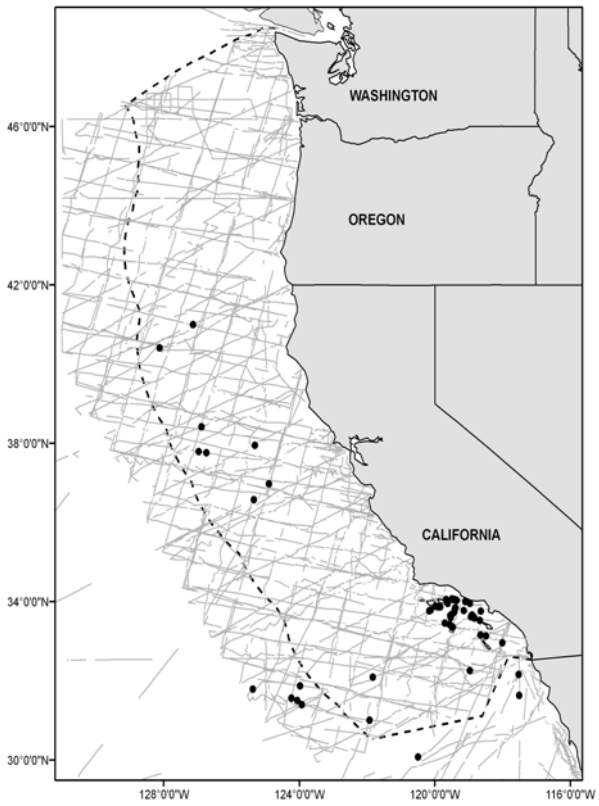


**Figure 1.** Offshore bottlenose dolphin sightings based on shipboard surveys off California, Oregon, and Washington, 1991-2008 (see Appendix 2 for data sources and information on timing and location of survey effort). Dashed line represents the U.S. EEZ, thin lines indicate completed transect effort of all surveys combined.

## POPULATION SIZE

The most recent shipboard surveys conducted within 300 nmi of the coasts of California, Oregon, and Washington were in 2005 (Forney 2007) and 2008 (Barlow 2010). Because the distribution of bottlenose dolphins appears to vary interannually and they may spend time outside the U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone, a multi-year average abundance estimate is the most appropriate for management within U.S. waters. The most comprehensive multi-year average abundance is the geometric mean abundance estimate for California, Oregon and Washington waters based on the 2005 and 2008 ship surveys, or 1,006 (CV=0.48) offshore bottlenose dolphins (Forney 2007, Barlow 2010).

**Minimum Population Estimate**

The log-normal 20th percentile of the 2005-2008 average abundance estimate is 684 offshore bottlenose dolphins.

**Current Population Trend**

No information on trends in abundance of offshore bottlenose dolphins is available.

**CURRENT AND MAXIMUM NET PRODUCTIVITY RATES**

No information on current or maximum net productivity rates is available for this population of offshore bottlenose dolphins.

**POTENTIAL BIOLOGICAL REMOVAL**

The potential biological removal (PBR) level for this stock is calculated as the minimum population size (684) times one half the default maximum net growth rate for cetaceans (½ of 4%) times a recovery factor of 0.40 (for a species of unknown status with an unknown fishery mortality CV ; Wade and Angliss 1997), resulting in a PBR of 5.5 offshore bottlenose dolphins per year.

**HUMAN-CAUSED MORTALITY AND SERIOUS INJURY**

**Fishery Information**

A summary of known fishery mortality and injury for this stock of bottlenose dolphin is shown in Table 1. More detailed information on these fisheries is provided in Appendix 1. Mortality estimates for the California drift gillnet fishery are included for the five most recent years of monitoring, 2004-2008 (Carretta et al. 2005, Carretta and Enriquez 2006, 2007, 2009a, 2009b). After the 1997 implementation of a Take Reduction Plan, which included skipper education workshops and required the use of pingers and minimum 6-fathom extenders, overall cetacean entanglement rates in the drift gillnet fishery dropped considerably (Barlow and Cameron 2003). However, because of interannual variability in entanglement rates and the rarity of bottlenose dolphin entanglements, additional years of data will be required to fully evaluate the effectiveness of pingers for reducing mortality of this particular species. In 2004, a bottlenose dolphin stranded dead near Newport Beach, California, with its flukes cut off, suggestive of an interaction with an entangling net fishery. The haplotype of this animal matched those of known *offshore* bottlenose dolphins (Lowther 2006, Lowther et al., in prep). Mean annual takes in Table 1 are based on 2004-2008 data. This results in an average estimate of 0.2 offshore bottlenose dolphins taken annually.

**Table 1.** Summary of available information on the incidental mortality and injury of bottlenose dolphins (California/ Oregon/Washington Offshore Stock) in commercial fisheries that might take this species. Mean annual takes are based on 2004-2008 data unless noted otherwise.

| Fishery Name | Data Type | Year(s) | Percent Observer Coverage | Observed Mortality | Estimated Annual Mortality | Mean Annual Takes (CV in parentheses) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **CA/OR thresher shark/swordfish drift gillnet fishery** | observer | 2004<br>2005<br>2006<br>2007<br>2008 | 20.6%<br>20.9%<br>18.5%<br>16.4%<br>13.5% | 0<br>0<br>0<br>0<br>0 | 0<br>0<br>0<br>0<br>0 | 0 |
| **Unknown fishery** | strandings | 2004-2008 | | 1 | ≥1 | ≥0.2 (n/a) |
| **Minimum total annual takes** | | | | | | ≥0.2 (n/a) |

Drift gillnet fisheries for swordfish and sharks exist along the entire Pacific coast of Baja California, Mexico and may take animals from this population. Quantitative data are available only for the Mexican swordfish drift gillnet fishery, which uses vessels, gear, and operational procedures similar to those in the U.S. drift gillnet fishery, although nets may be up to 4.5 km long (Holts and Sosa-Nishizaki 1998). The fleet increased from two vessels in 1986 to 31 vessels in 1993 (Holts and Sosa-Nishizaki 1998). The total number of sets in this fishery in 1992 can be estimated from data provided by these authors to be approximately 2700, with an observed rate of marine mammal bycatch of 0.13 animals per set (10 marine mammals in 77 observed sets; Sosa-Nishizaki et al. 1993). This overall mortality rate is similar to that observed in California driftnet fisheries during 1990-95 (0.14 marine mammals per set; Julian and Beeson,

1998), but species-specific information is not available for the Mexican fisheries. Previous efforts to convert the Mexican swordfish driftnet fishery to a longline fishery have resulted in a mixed-fishery, with 20 vessels alternately using longlines or driftnets, 23 using driftnets only, 22 using longlines only, and seven with unknown gear type (Berdegué 2002).

Offshore bottlenose dolphins are often associated with Risso's dolphins and pilot whales, for which mortality has been documented in the squid purse seine fishery off Southern California (Heyning et al. 1994). Based on this association, offshore bottlenose dolphins may also have experienced some mortality in this fishery. However these would probably represent animals killed intentionally to protect catch or gear, rather than incidental kills, and such intentional takes are now illegal under the 1994 Amendment to the MMPA.

**Other removals**

Twenty-seven bottlenose dolphins were captured off California between 1966 and 1982 (Walker 1975; Reeves and Leatherwood 1984). Based on the locations of capture activities, these animals probably were offshore bottlenose dolphins (Walker 1975). No additional captures of bottlenose dolphins off California have been documented since 1982, and no MMPA live-capture permits are currently active for this species.

**STATUS OF STOCK**

The status of offshore bottlenose dolphins in California relative to OSP is not known, and there are insufficient data to evaluate trends in abundance. No habitat issues are known to be of concern for this species. They are not listed as "threatened" or "endangered" under the Endangered Species Act nor as "depleted" under the MMPA. Because average annual fishery takes (0.2/year) are less than the calculated PBR (5.5), offshore bottlenose dolphins are not classified as a "strategic" stock under the MMPA. The total fishery mortality and serious injury for this stock is less than 10% of the PBR and thus can be considered to be insignificant and approaching zero.

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