

## **PYGMY KILLER WHALE (*Feresa attenuata*): Hawaiian Stock**

### **STOCK DEFINITION AND GEOGRAPHIC RANGE**

Pygmy killer whales are found in tropical and subtropical waters throughout the world (Ross and Leatherwood 1994). They are poorly known in most parts of their range. Small numbers have been taken directly and incidentally in both the western and eastern Pacific. Most knowledge of this species is from stranded or live-captured specimens. Pryor et al. (1965) stated that pygmy killer whales have been observed several times off the lee shore of Oahu, and that "they seem to be regular residents of the Hawaiian area." Although all sightings up to that time had been off Oahu and the Big Island, Shallenberger (1981) stated that this species might be found elsewhere in Hawaii, as well. No pygmy killer whales were seen during 1993-98 aerial surveys within about 25 nmi of the main Hawaiian Islands (Mobley et al. 2000; see Appendix 2 for detailed information on timing and location of effort), suggesting that they are uncommon in these nearshore regions. Nitta (1991) documented five strandings from Maui and the island of Hawaii. For the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) stock assessment reports, there is a single Pacific management stock including only animals found within the U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone of the Hawaiian Islands.

### **POPULATION SIZE**

A population estimate has been made for this species in the eastern tropical Pacific (Wade and Gerrodette 1993), but no data are available to estimate population size in any other area of the North Pacific. As part of the Marine Mammal Research Program of the Acoustic Thermometry of Ocean Climate (ATOC) study, a total of twelve aerial surveys were conducted within about 25 nmi of the main Hawaiian Islands in 1993, 1995 and 1998 (Mobley et al. 2000). No sightings of pygmy killer whales were made, and therefore no abundance estimate for nearshore Hawaiian waters is presently available. It is likely that pygmy killer whales occur primarily in pelagic waters greater than 25 nmi from the main Hawaiian islands.

### **Minimum Population Estimate**

No data are available for a minimum population estimate.

### **Current Population Trend**

No data are available on current population trend.

### **CURRENT AND MAXIMUM NET PRODUCTIVITY RATES**

No data are available on current or maximum net productivity rate.

### **POTENTIAL BIOLOGICAL REMOVAL**

No PBR can be calculated for this species at this time.

### **HUMAN-CAUSED MORTALITY AND SERIOUS INJURY**

#### **Fishery Information**

No estimate of annual human-caused mortality and serious injury is available as there are no reports of direct or incidental takes of pygmy killer whales in Hawaiian waters. However, mortality of other cetacean species has been observed in Hawaiian fisheries, and the gear types used in these fisheries are responsible for marine mammal mortality and serious injury in other fisheries throughout U.S. waters. Gillnets are used in Hawaiian waters and appear to capture marine mammals wherever they are used, and float lines from lobster traps and longlines can be expected to occasionally entangle whales (Perrin et al. 1994).

Interactions with cetaceans have been reported for all Hawaiian pelagic fisheries (Nitta and Henderson 1993), but no interactions with pygmy killer whales have been documented. None were observed hooked in the Hawaiian longline fishery between 1994 and 1998, with approximately 4.4% of all effort (measured as the number of hooks fished) observed (Kleiber 1999). Interaction rates between dolphins and the NWHI bottomfish fishery have been estimated based on studies conducted in 1990-1993, indicating that an average of 2.67 dolphin interactions, most likely involving bottlenose and rough-toothed dolphins, occurred for every 1000 fish brought on board (Kobayashi and Kawamoto 1995). Fishermen claim interactions with dolphins who steal bait and catch are increasing. It is not known whether these interactions result in serious injury or mortality of dolphins, nor whether pygmy killer whales are involved.

### **Other Removals**

Three specimens were live-captured by Sea Life Park between 1963 and 1971 (Pryor et al. 1965; Pryor 1975; Shallenberger 1981).

### **STATUS OF STOCK**

The status of pygmy killer whales in Hawaiian waters relative to OSP is unknown, and there are insufficient data to evaluate trends in abundance. No habitat issues are known to be of concern for this species. This species is not listed as “threatened” or “endangered” under the Endangered Species Act (1973), nor as “depleted” under the MMPA. Although information on pygmy killer whales in Hawaiian waters is limited, this stock would not be considered strategic under the 1994 amendments to the MMPA given the absence of reported fisheries related mortality. Insufficient information is available to determine whether the total fishery mortality and serious injury for pygmy killer whales is insignificant and approaching zero mortality and serious injury rate.

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