

STRIPED DOLPHIN (*Stenella coeruleoalba*): California/Oregon/Washington Stock

STOCK DEFINITION AND GEOGRAPHIC RANGE

Striped dolphins are distributed world-wide in tropical and warm-temperate pelagic waters. On recent shipboard surveys extending about 300 nmi offshore of California, they were sighted within about 100-300 nmi from the coast (Figure 1). No sightings have been reported for Oregon and Washington waters, but striped dolphins have stranded in both states (Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, unpublished data; Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, unpublished data). Striped dolphins are also commonly found in the central North Pacific, but sampling between this region and California has been insufficient to determine whether the distribution is continuous. Based on sighting records off California and Mexico, striped dolphins appear to have a continuous distribution in offshore waters of these two regions (Perrin et al. 1985; Mangels and Gerrodette 1994). No information on possible seasonality in distribution is available, because the California surveys which extended 300 nmi offshore were conducted only during the summer/fall period. Although striped dolphins are not restricted to U.S. waters, 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, striped dolphins within the Pacific U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone are divided into two discrete, non-contiguous areas: 1) waters off California, Oregon and Washington (this report), and 2) waters around Hawaii.

POPULATION SIZE

Two summer/fall shipboard surveys were conducted within 300 nmi of the coasts of California, Oregon and Washington in 1996 (Barlow 1997) and 2001 (Barlow 2003). The abundance of striped dolphins in this region appears to be variable between years and may be affected by oceanographic conditions, as with other odontocete species (Forney 1997, Forney and Barlow 1998). Because animals may spend time outside the U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone as oceanographic conditions change, a multi-year average abundance estimate is the most appropriate for management within U.S. waters. The 1996-2001 weighted average abundance estimate for California, Oregon and Washington waters based on the above two ship surveys is 13,934 (CV = 0.53) striped dolphins (Barlow 2003).

Minimum Population Estimate

The log-normal 20th percentile of the 1996-2001 weighted average abundance estimate is 9,165 striped dolphins.

Current Population Trend

Prior to a 1991 shipboard survey (Barlow 1995), striped dolphins were not thought to be common off California (Leatherwood et al. 1982), and two surveys extending approximately 200 nmi offshore of California and Baja California

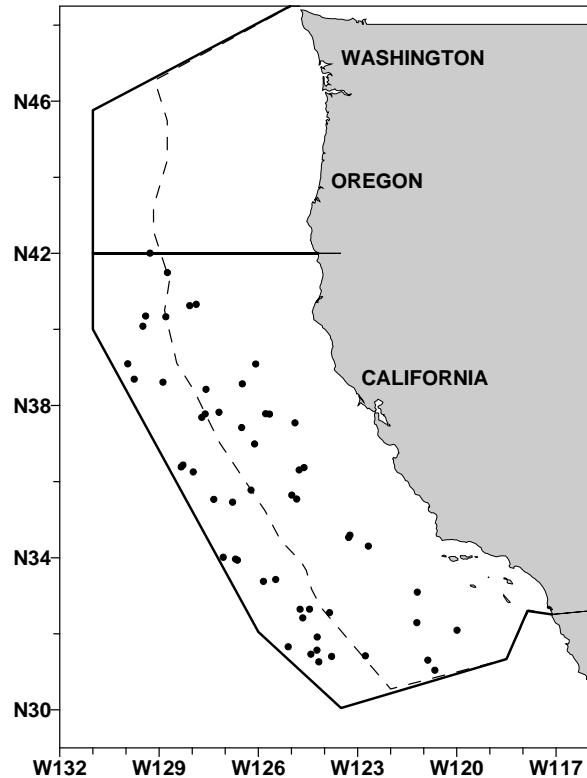


Figure 1. Striped dolphin sightings based on aerial and shipboard surveys off California, Oregon, and Washington, 1991-2001 (see Appendix 2 for data sources and information on timing and location of survey effort). Dashed line represents the U.S. EEZ, thick line indicates the outer boundary of all surveys combined.

in 1979 and 1980 resulted in only one sighting of three striped dolphins (Smith et al. 1986). Thus it is possible that striped dolphin abundance off California has increased over the last decade (consistent with the observed warming trend for these waters; Roemmich 1992); however, no definitive statement can be made, because statistical estimates of abundance were not obtained for the earlier surveys. Estimates of abundance from surveys conducted in 1991/93, 1996, and 2001 in California waters were 28,396 (CV = 0.31); 5,489 (0.48); and 22,316 (0.65) striped dolphin, respectively (Barlow 2003). Currently, there is no evidence of a trend in abundance for this stock.

CURRENT AND MAXIMUM NET PRODUCTIVITY RATES

No information on current or maximum net productivity rates is available for striped dolphins off California.

POTENTIAL BIOLOGICAL REMOVAL

The potential biological removal (PBR) level for this stock is calculated as the minimum population size (9,165) times one half the default maximum net growth rate for cetaceans (½ of 4%) times a recovery factor of 0.50 (for a species of unknown status with no known fishery mortality; Wade and Angliss 1997), resulting in a PBR of 92 striped dolphins per year.

HUMAN-CAUSED MORTALITY AND SERIOUS INJURY

Fishery Information

A summary of recent fishery mortality and injury for this stock of striped 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, 1997-2001 (Cameron and Forney 1999, 2000, Carretta 2001; 2002). No striped dolphin were observed killed in the most recent five-year period. One striped dolphin was observed killed in the drift gillnet fishery in 1994. 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 striped dolphin entanglements, additional years of data will be required to fully evaluate the effectiveness of pingers for reducing mortality of this particular species. Mean annual takes in Table 1 are based on 1997-2001 data. This results in an average estimate of zero striped dolphins taken annually.

Table 1. Summary of available information on the incidental mortality and injury of striped dolphins (California/Oregon/Washington Stock) in commercial fisheries that might take this species. Coefficients of variation for mortality estimates are provided in parentheses. Mean annual takes are based on 1997-2001 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 data	1997	23.0%	0	0	0
		1998	20.0%	0	0	
		1999	20.0%	0	0	
		2000	22.9%	0	0	
		2001	20.4%	0	0	
Minimum total annual takes						0

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).

STATUS OF STOCK

The status of striped dolphins in California relative to OSP is not known, and there are insufficient data to evaluate potential 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. Including driftnet information only for years after implementation of the Take Reduction Plan (1997-98), the average annual human-caused mortality in 1997-2001 is zero. Because recent mortality is zero, striped dolphins are not classified as a "strategic" stock under the MMPA, and the total fishery mortality and serious injury for this stock can be considered to be insignificant and approaching zero.

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