

KILLER WHALE (*Orcinus orca*): Hawaiian Stock

STOCK DEFINITION AND GEOGRAPHIC RANGE

Killer whales have been observed in all oceans and seas of the world (Leatherwood and Dahlheim 1978). Although reported from tropical and offshore waters (Heyning and Dahlheim 1988), killer whales prefer the colder waters of both hemispheres, with greatest abundances found within 800 km of major continents (Mitchell 1975). They are considered rare in Hawaiian waters. No killer whales were seen during 1993-98 aerial surveys within about 25 nmi of the main Hawaiian Islands, but one sighting was reported during subsequent surveys (Mobley et al. 2000, 2001). Two sightings of killer whales were made during a 2002 shipboard survey of waters within the U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of the Hawaiian Islands (Figure 1; Barlow 2003). One stranding from the island of Hawaii was reported in 1950 (Richards 1952) and another in 2004 (R.W. Baird, pers. comm.). Except in the northeastern Pacific where "resident", "transient", and "offshore" stocks have been

described for coastal waters of Alaska, British Columbia, and Washington to California (Bigg 1982; Leatherwood et al. 1990, Bigg et al. 1990, Ford et al. 1994), little is known about stock structure of killer whales in the North Pacific. Baird et al. (2003) report a sighting of this species off the island of Hawaii in 2003, and also note analyses of genetic results from one sample collected, indicating a haplotype similar to the Gulf of Alaska "transient" killer whales. For the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) stock assessment reports, five killer whale stocks are recognized within the Pacific U.S. EEZ 1) the Eastern North Pacific Northern Resident stock - occurring from British Columbia through Alaska, 2) the Eastern North Pacific Southern Resident stock - occurring within the inland waters of Washington State and southern British Columbia, 3) the Eastern North Pacific Transient stock - occurring from Alaska through California, 4) the Eastern North Pacific Offshore stock - occurring from Southeast Alaska through California, and 5) the Hawaiian stock (this report). Stock Assessment Reports for the Eastern North Pacific Northern Resident stock and the Eastern North Pacific Transient stocks can be found in the Alaska Region stock assessment reports; all other killer whale stock assessments are included in the Pacific Region stock assessments.

POPULATION SIZE

Population sizes for killer whales in the coastal waters of British Columbia and Washington are known from photo-identification studies (Bigg et al. 1990). The population of killer whales in the eastern tropical Pacific has been estimated from shipboard sightings surveys (Wade and Gerrodette 1993). 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), but no sightings of killer whales were made. A 2002 shipboard line-transect survey of the entire Hawaiian Islands EEZ resulted in an abundance estimate of 430 (CV=0.72) killer whales (Barlow 2003). This is currently the best available abundance estimate for this stock.

Minimum Population Estimate

The log-normal 20th percentile of the 2002 abundance estimate is 250 killer whales.

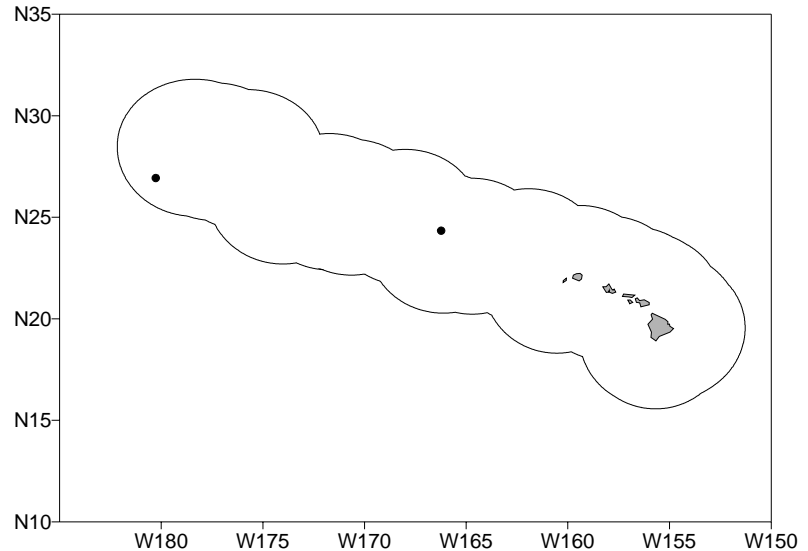


Figure 1. Killer whale sighting locations during the 2002 shipboard survey of U.S. EEZ waters surrounding the Hawaiian Islands (Barlow 2003; see Appendix 2 for details on timing and location of survey effort). Outer line represents approximate boundary of survey area and U.S. EEZ.

Current Population Trend

No data are available on current population trend.

CURRENT AND MAXIMUM NET PRODUCTIVITY RATES

No data are available on current and maximum net productivity rate in Hawaiian waters.

POTENTIAL BIOLOGICAL REMOVAL

The potential biological removal (PBR) level for this stock is calculated as the minimum population size (250) times one half the default maximum net growth rate for cetaceans ($\frac{1}{2}$ of 4%) times a recovery factor of 0.50 (for a stock of unknown status with no known fishery mortality or serious injury within the Hawaiian Islands EEZ; Wade and Angliss 1997), resulting in a PBR of 2.5 killer whales per year.

HUMAN-CAUSED MORTALITY AND SERIOUS INJURY

Fishery Information

Information on fishery-related mortality and serious injury of cetaceans in Hawaiian waters is limited, but the gear types used in Hawaiian fisheries are responsible for marine mammal mortality and serious injury in other fisheries throughout U.S. waters. Gillnets 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 killer whale interactions appear to be rare. In 1990, a solitary killer whale was reported to have removed the catch from a longline in Hawaii (Dollar 1991). None were observed hooked or entangled in the Hawaii-based longline fishery between 1994 and 2002, with approximately 4-25% of all effort observed (Forney 2004). 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 that steal bait and catch are increasing. It is not known whether these interactions result in serious injury or mortality of dolphins, nor whether killer whales are involved.

STATUS OF STOCK

The status of 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. The Hawaiian stock of killer whales is not considered strategic under the 1994 amendments to the MMPA given the absence of reported fisheries related mortality or serious injury. Insufficient information is available to determine whether the total fishery mortality and serious injury for killer whales is insignificant and approaching zero mortality and serious injury rate.

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