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LONG-BEAKED COMMON DOLPHIN (*Delphinus capensis*): California Stock

STOCK DEFINITION AND GEOGRAPHIC RANGE

Long-beaked common dolphins have only recently been recognized as a distinct species (Heyning and Perrin 1994; Rosel et al. 1994). Along the U.S. west coast, their distribution overlaps with that of the short-beaked common dolphin, and much historical information has not distinguished between these two species. Long-beaked common dolphins are commonly found within about 50 nmi of the coast, from Baja California (including the Gulf of California) northward to about central California (Figure 1). Stranding data and sighting records indicate that the relative abundance of this species off California changes both seasonally and inter-annually, with highest densities observed during warm-water events (Heyning and Perrin 1994). Although long-beaked common 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). Under the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA), long-beaked ("Baja neritic") common dolphins involved in eastern tropical Pacific tuna fisheries are managed separately as part of the 'northern common dolphin' stock (Perrin et al. 1985), and these animals are not included in the assessment reports. For the MMPA stock assessment reports, there is a single Pacific management stock including only animals found within the U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone of California.

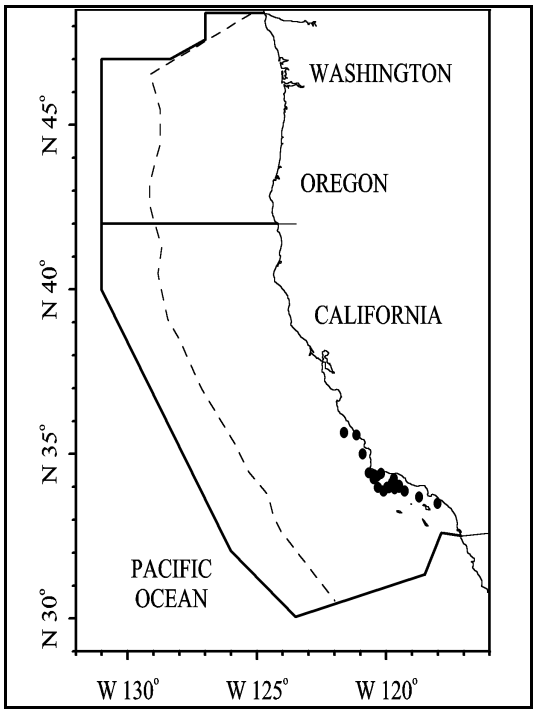

Figure 1. Long-beaked common dolphin sightings based on shipboard surveys off California, Oregon and Washington, 1991-96 (see Appendix 2, Figures 3-5, for data sources and information on timing and location of survey effort). No *Delphinus* sightings have been made off Oregon and Washington. Dashed line represents the U.S. EEZ, thick line indicates the outer boundary of all surveys combined.

POPULATION SIZE

Aerial line transect surveys conducted in winter and spring of 1991 and 1992 resulted only in a combined abundance estimate of 305,694 (CV=0.34) long-beaked and short-beaked common dolphins, because species-level identification was not possible from the air (Forney et al. 1995). Based on sighting locations, the majority of these animals were probably short-beaked common dolphins. A better, species-specific abundance estimate is available based on three summer/fall shipboard surveys that were conducted within 300 nmi of the coasts of California (in 1991 and 1993; Barlow and Gerrodette 1996) and California, Oregon and Washington (in 1996; Barlow 1997). The distribution and abundance of long-beaked common dolphins off California appears to be variable on interannual and seasonal time scales (Heyning and Perrin 1994). As oceanographic conditions change, long-beaked common dolphins may spend time in Mexican waters, and therefore a multi-year average abundance estimate is the most appropriate for management within the U.S. waters. The 1991-96 weighted average abundance estimate for California, Oregon and Washington waters based on the three ship surveys is 32,239 (CV=0.18) long-beaked common dolphins (Barlow 1997).

Minimum Population Estimate

The log-normal 20th percentile of the 1991-96 weighted average abundance estimate is 27,739 long-beaked common dolphins.

Current Population Trend

Due to the historical lack of distinction between the two species of common dolphins, it is difficult to establish

trends in abundance for this species. In the past, common dolphins have been shown to increase in abundance off California during the warm-water months (Dohl et al. 1986). Surveys conducted during both cold-water and warm-water conditions in 1991 and 1992 (Barlow 1995, Forney et al. 1995) resulted in overall abundance estimates (for both types of common dolphins combined) which were considerably greater than historical estimates (Dohl et al. 1986). The combined abundance estimate for the 1991-96 summer/fall surveys (Barlow 1997) is the highest and most precise to date. An ongoing decline in the abundance of 'northern common dolphins' (including both long-beaked and short-beaked common dolphins) in the eastern tropical Pacific and along the Pacific coast of Mexico (IATTC 1997) suggests a possible northward shift in the distribution of common dolphins during this period of gradual warming of the waters off California (Roemmich 1992). However, it is unclear how much of this increase reflects an increase in the abundance of the long-beaked common dolphin. Heyning and Perrin (1994) have detected changes in the proportion of short-beaked to long-beaked common dolphins stranding along the California coast, with the short-beaked common dolphin stranding more frequently prior to the 1982-83 El Niño (which increased water temperatures off California), and the long-beaked common dolphin more commonly observed for several years afterwards. Thus, it appears that both relative and absolute abundance of these species off California may change with varying oceanographic conditions.

CURRENT AND MAXIMUM NET PRODUCTIVITY RATES

There are no estimates of current or maximum net productivity rates for long-beaked common dolphins.

POTENTIAL BIOLOGICAL REMOVAL

The potential biological removal (PBR) level for this stock is calculated as the minimum population size (27,629) times one half the default maximum net growth rate for cetaceans (½ of 4%) times a recovery factor of 0.45 (for a species of unknown status with a mortality rate CV$0.60 and #0.80; Wade and Angliss 1997), resulting in a PBR of 250 long-beaked common dolphins per year.

HUMAN-CAUSED MORTALITY AND SERIOUS INJURY

Fishery Information

A summary of recent fishery mortality and injury for long-beaked common dolphins is shown in Table 1. More detailed information on these fisheries is provided in Appendix 1. Mortality of common dolphins primarily has been observed in California drift gillnet fisheries (Julian 1997; Julian and Beeson 1998; Cameron and Forney 1999). Because of the difficulty in distinguishing short-beaked and long-beaked common dolphins in the field, tissue samples have been collected for most of the animals observed killed. These tissue samples have enabled positive identification using genetic techniques for all except two of the common dolphins killed (NMFS, unpublished data). Based on past patterns (Barlow et al. 1997), these two animals are likely to have been a short-beaked common dolphin, and they have not been included in the mortality calculations below for long-beaked common dolphins. 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, common dolphin entanglement rates in the drift gillnet fishery dropped considerably (Barlow and Cameron 1999). However, because of interannual variability in entanglement rates additional years of data will be required to fully evaluate the effectiveness of pingers for reducing mortality of this species in the long term. Because of the changes in this fishery after implementation of the Take Reduction Plan, mean annual takes in Table 1 are based only on 1997-98 data. This results in an average estimate of 13 (CV=0.74) long-beaked common dolphins taken annually.

Additional common dolphin mortality has been reported for set gillnets in California (Julian and Beeson 1998); however, because of a 1994 ban on gillnets in nearshore areas of Southern California, the size of this fishery decreased by about a factor of two (see Appendix 1), and the observer program was discontinued. No observer data are available for the set gillnet fishery after 1994, but Marine Mammal Authorization Permit (MMAP) fisher self-reports for 1994-98 indicate that at least four common dolphins (type not specified) were killed between 1995 and 1998. Although these reports are considered unreliable (see Appendix 4 of Hill and DeMaster 1998) they represent a minimum mortality for this fishery.

Two common dolphins (type not specified) stranded with evidence of fishery interaction (NMFS, Southwest Region, unpublished data); one animal had a hook and line in its mouth and a slit ventrum, and the other animal had its flukes cut off. It is not known which fisheries were responsible for these deaths.

Table 1. Summary of available information on the incidental mortality and injury of long-beaked common dolphins (California Stock) and prorated unidentified common dolphins in commercial fisheries that might take this species. All

observed entanglements resulted in the death of the animal. The observer program for the set gillnet fishery was discontinued during 1994. Coefficients of variation for mortality estimates are provided in parentheses, when available. Mean annual takes are based on 1994-98 data unless noted otherwise.

Fishery Name	Data Type	Year(s)	Percent Observer Coverage	Observed	Estimated Annual Mortality	Mean Annual Takes (CV in parentheses)
CA/OR thresher shark/swordfish drift gillnet fishery	observer data	1994 1995 1996 1997 1998	17.9% 15.6% 12.4% 23.0% 20.0%	1 6 1 4 0	6 (0.91) 39 (0.65) 12 (0.96) 25 (0.74) 0	13 (0.74)[1]
CA angel shark/ halibut and other species large mesh (>3.5in) set gillnet fishery	observer data	Common dolphins, species not determined				n/a
		1994 1995-98	7.7% 0%	0 n/a	0 n/a	
	MMAP self-reporting	1995 1996 1998	- - -	1 1 2	$1 $1 $2	$0.8 (n/a)
Undetermined	strandings	1994-98	2 common dolphins (species not determined) stranded with evidence of fishery interactions			$0.4 (n/a)
Minimum total annual takes						14 (0.74)

[1]Only 1997-98 mortality estimates are included in the average because of gear modifications implemented within the fishery as part of a 1997 Take Reduction Plan. Gear modifications included the use of net extenders and acoustic warning devices. Following these changes in the fishery, entanglement rates of long-beaked common dolphin declined.

Drift gillnet fisheries for swordfish and sharks exist along the entire Pacific coast of Baja California, Mexico and may take long-beaked common dolphins from the same 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. There are currently efforts underway to convert the Mexican swordfish driftnet fishery to a longline fishery (D. Holts, pers. comm.).

Other Mortality

In the eastern tropical Pacific, 'northern common dolphins' have been incidentally killed in international tuna purse seine fisheries since the late 1950's. Cooperative international management programs have dramatically reduced overall dolphin mortality in these fisheries during the last decade (Joseph 1994). Between 1994 and 1998, annual mortality of northern common dolphins (potentially including both short-beaked and long-beaked common dolphins) ranged between 9 and 261 animals, with an average of 91 (IATTC, in prep). Although it is likely that the long-beaked common dolphins included in the 'northern common dolphin' stock are part of the same population as those found off California, they are managed separately under a section of the MMPA written specifically for the management of dolphins involved in eastern tropical Pacific tuna fisheries.

STATUS OF STOCK

The status of long-beaked common dolphins in California waters relative to OSP is not known, and there are insufficient data to evaluate potential trends in abundance of this species of common dolphin. 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 mortality only for years after implementation of the

Take Reduction Plan (1997-98), the average annual human-caused mortality in 1994-98 (14 animals) is estimated to be less than the PBR (250), and therefore they are not classified as a "strategic" stock under the MMPA. The average total fishery mortality and injury for long-beaked common dolphins is less than 10% of the PBR and, therefore, can be considered to be insignificant and approaching zero mortality and serious injury rate.

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