

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 2006). One stranding from the island of Hawaii was reported in 1950 (Richards 1952) and 21 additional sightings or strandings were reported around the main Hawaiian Islands, French Frigate Shoals, and offshore of the Hawaiian islands (Baird *et al.* 2006).

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. (2006) report a sighting of this species off the island of Hawaii in 2003 and also note analyses of genetic results from two samples collected, indicating a haplotype similar to the Gulf of Alaska "transient" killer whales and one similar to that of mammal eating killer whales in coastal Alaska. For the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) stock assessment reports, eight killer whale stocks are recognized within the Pacific U.S. EEZ: 1) the Eastern North Pacific Alaska Resident stock - occurring from southeastern Alaska to the Aleutian Islands and Bering Sea, 2) the Eastern North Pacific Northern Resident stock - occurring from British Columbia through part of southeastern Alaska, 3) the Eastern North Pacific Southern Resident stock - occurring mainly within the inland waters of Washington State and southern British Columbia, but also in coastal waters from British Columbia through California, 4) the Eastern North Pacific Gulf of Alaska, Aleutian Islands, and Bering Sea Transient stock - occurring mainly from Prince William Sound through the Aleutian Islands and Bering Sea, 5) the AT1 Transient stock - occurring in Alaska from Prince William Sound through the Kenai Fjords, 6) the West Coast Transient stock - occurring from California through southeastern Alaska, 7) the Eastern North Pacific Offshore stock - occurring from California through Alaska, and 8) the Hawaiian stock (this report). The Hawaii stock includes animals found both within the Hawaiian Islands EEZ and in adjacent international waters; however, because data on abundance, distribution, and human-caused impacts are largely lacking for international waters, the status of this stock is evaluated based on data from U.S. EEZ waters of the Hawaiian Islands (NMFS 2005). Stock assessment reports for the Southern Resident, Eastern North Pacific Offshore, and Hawaiian stocks can be found in the Pacific Region stock assessment reports; all other killer whale stock assessments are included in the Alaska Region stock assessments.

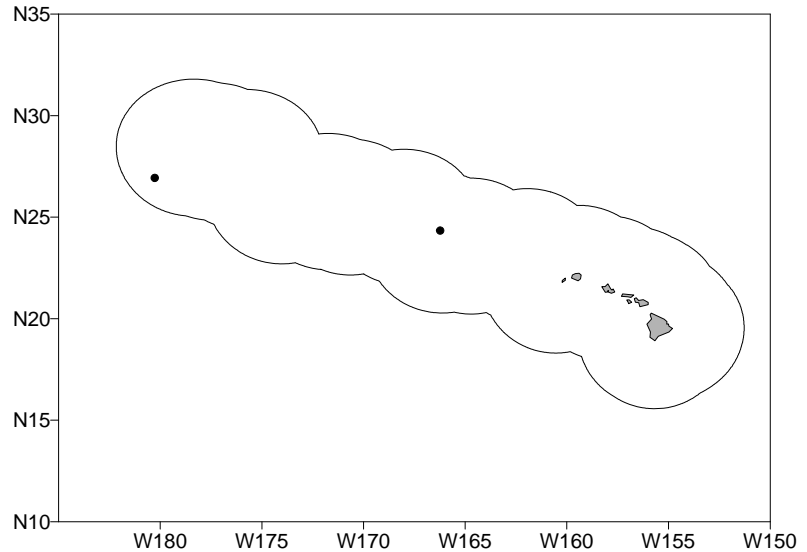


Figure 1. Killer whale sighting locations during the 2002 shipboard survey of U.S. EEZ waters surrounding the Hawaiian Islands (Barlow 2006; see Appendix 2 for details on timing and location of survey effort). Outer line represents approximate boundary of survey area and U.S. EEZ.

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). A 2002 shipboard line-transect survey of the entire Hawaiian Islands EEZ resulted in an abundance estimate of 349 (CV=0.98) killer whales (Barlow 2006). This is currently the best available abundance estimate for this stock.

Minimum Population Estimate

The log-normal 20th percentile of the 2002 abundance estimate (Barlow 2006) is 175 killer whales within the Hawaiian Islands 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 within the U.S. EEZ of the Hawaiian Islands (175) times one half the default maximum net growth rate for cetaceans (½ 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 1.8 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 cetaceans (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). There are currently two distinct longline fisheries based in Hawaii: a deep-set longline (DSL) fishery that targets primarily tunas, and a shallow-set longline fishery (SSL) that targets swordfish. Both fisheries operate within U.S. waters and on the high seas. Between 2004 and 2008, no killer whales were observed hooked or entangled in the SSL fishery (100% observer coverage) or the DSL fishery (20-28% observer coverage) (McCracken & Forney 2010). 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 stock. This species is not listed as “threatened” or “endangered” under the Endangered Species Act (1973), nor as “depleted” under the MMPA. Given the absence of recent fishery-related mortality or serious injuries, the Hawaiian stock of killer whales is not considered strategic under the 1994 amendments to the MMPA, and the total fishery mortality and serious injury can be considered to be insignificant and approaching zero.

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