

PYGMY SPERM WHALE (*Kogia breviceps*): California/Oregon/Washington Stock

STOCK DEFINITION AND GEOGRAPHIC RANGE

Pygmy sperm whales are distributed throughout deep waters and along the continental slopes of the North Pacific and other ocean basins (Ross 1984; Caldwell and Caldwell 1989). Along the U.S. west coast, sightings of this species and of animals identified only as *Kogia* sp. have been very rare (Figure 1). However, this is probably a reflection of their pelagic distribution, small body size and cryptic behavior, rather than an indication of true rareness. Strandings of pygmy sperm whales in this region are known from California, Oregon and Washington (Roest 1970; Caldwell and Caldwell 1989; NMFS, Northwest Region, unpublished data; NMFS, Southwest Region, unpublished data). Available data are insufficient to identify any seasonality in the distribution of pygmy sperm whales, or to delineate possible stock boundaries. For the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) stock assessment reports, pygmy sperm whales 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) Hawaiian waters.

POPULATION SIZE

Although pygmy sperm whales have been sighted along the U.S. west coast on several line transect surveys utilizing both aerial and shipboard platforms, sightings have generally been too rare to produce reliable population estimates. Previous abundance estimates have been imprecise and biased downward by an unknown amount because pygmy sperm whales spend a large proportion of time submerged and are very difficult to detect at the surface unless seas are calm. Furthermore, the ship survey covered only California waters, and thus could not observe animals off Oregon/Washington. Recent analyses (Barlow and Gerrodette 1996, Barlow and Sexton 1996) have resulted in improved estimates of abundance by 1) combining data from three surveys 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), and 2) estimating a correction factor for animals missed because they are submerged, based on dive-interval data collected for *Kogia simus* in 1993-95 (about 19% of all groups are estimated to be seen). Because animals probably spend time outside the U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone, a multi-year average abundance estimate is the most appropriate for management within U.S. waters. The 1991-96 weighted average abundance estimate for California, Oregon and Washington waters based on the above analyses is 2,933 (CV=0.54) pygmy sperm whales plus an estimated 1,813 (CV=1.53) pygmy or dwarf sperm whales, based on sightings that could only be identified to the genus *Kogia* (Barlow 1997, with corrected CV). Because there have been no reported sightings, strandings, or entanglements of dwarf sperm whales along the U.S. West coast since the early 1970s, it is almost certain that these additional *Kogia* were pygmy sperm whales, bringing the total abundance estimate to 4,746 (CV=0.67).

Minimum Population Estimate

Based on the above abundance estimate and CV, the minimum population estimate (defined as the log-normal 20th percentile of the total *Kogia* abundance estimate) for pygmy sperm whales in California, Oregon, and Washington is 2,837 animals.

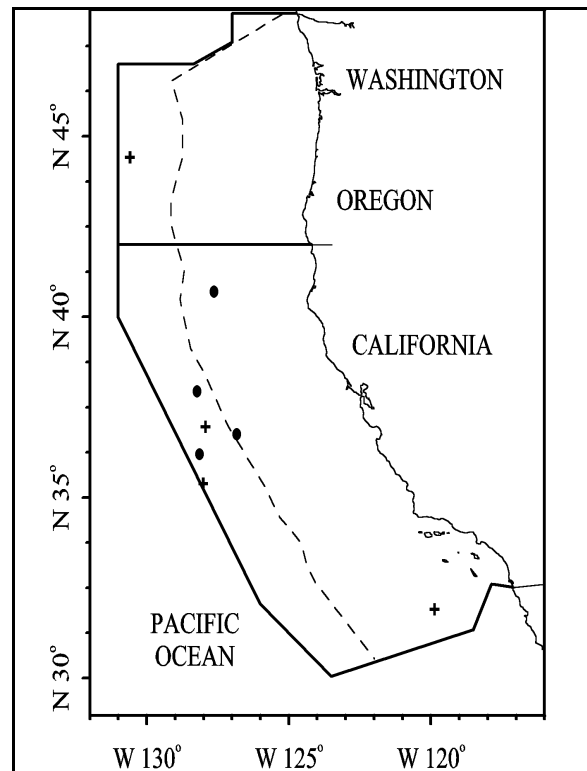


Figure 1. *Kogia* sightings based on aerial and shipboard surveys off California, Oregon and Washington, 1991-96 (see Appendix 2, Figures 1-5, for data sources and information on timing and location of survey effort). Key: ● = *Kogia breviceps*, + = *Kogia* spp. Dashed line represents the U.S. EEZ, thick line indicates the outer boundary of all surveys combined.

Current Population Trend

Due to the rarity of sightings of this species on surveys along the U.S. West coast, no information exists regarding trends in abundance of this population.

CURRENT AND MAXIMUM NET PRODUCTIVITY RATES

No information on current or maximum net productivity rates is available for this species.

POTENTIAL BIOLOGICAL REMOVAL

The potential biological removal (PBR) level for this stock is calculated as the minimum population size (2,837) 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 species of unknown status with no known recent fishery mortality; Wade and Angliss 1997), resulting in a PBR of 28 pygmy sperm whales per year.

HUMAN-CAUSED MORTALITY AND SERIOUS INJURY

Fishery Information

A summary of recent fishery mortality and injury for pygmy sperm whales and unidentified *Kogia*, which may have been pygmy sperm whales, is shown in Table 1. More detailed information on the drift gillnet fishery is provided in Appendix 1. In the California drift gillnet fishery, no mortality of pygmy sperm whales or unidentified *Kogia* was observed during the most recent five years of monitoring, 1994-98 (Julian 1997; Julian and Beeson 1998; Cameron and Forney 1999). 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 1999). However, because of interannual variability in entanglement rates and the rarity of *Kogia* entanglements, additional years of data will be required to fully evaluate the effectiveness of pingers for reducing mortality of pygmy sperm whales. 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 estimated annual mortality of zero pygmy sperm whales.

Drift gillnet fisheries for swordfish and sharks exist along the entire Pacific coast of Baja California, Mexico and may take animals 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.).

STATUS OF STOCK

The status of pygmy sperm whales in California, Oregon and Washington waters 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, but in recent years questions have been raised regarding potential effects of human-made sounds on deep-diving cetacean species, such as pygmy sperm whales (Richardson et al. 1995). 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 is zero. Because recent mortality is zero, pygmy sperm whales 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.

Table 1. Summary of available information on the incidental mortality and injury of pygmy sperm whales and unidentified *Kogia* sp. (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 1994-98 data unless noted otherwise.

Fishery Name	Data Type	Year(s)	Percent Observer Coverage	Observed Mortality <i>K. breviceps</i> / <i>Kogia</i> sp.	Estimated Annual Mortality of <i>K. breviceps</i> / <i>Kogia</i> sp.	Mean Annual Takes (CV in parentheses)
CA/OR thresher shark/swordfish drift gillnet fishery	observer data	1994	17.9%	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 ¹
		1995	15.6%	0 / 0	0 / 0	
		1996	12.4%	0 / 0	0 / 0	
		1997	23.0%	0 / 0	0 / 0	
		1998	20.0%	0 / 0	0 / 0	
Minimum total annual takes						0

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 (pingers).

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