

**PACIFIC WHITE-SIDED DOLPHIN (*Lagenorhynchus obliquidens*):  
North Pacific Stock**

**STOCK DEFINITION AND GEOGRAPHIC RANGE**

The Pacific white-sided dolphin is found throughout the temperate North Pacific Ocean, north of the coasts of Japan and Baja California, Mexico. In the eastern North Pacific the species occurs from the southern Gulf of California, north to the Gulf of Alaska, west to Amchitka in the Aleutian Islands, and is rarely encountered in the southern Bering Sea. The species is common both on the high seas and along the continental margins, and animals are known to enter the inshore passes of Alaska, British Columbia, and Washington (Ferrero and Walker 1996).

The following information was considered in classifying Pacific white-sided dolphin stock structure based on the Dizon et al. (1992) phylogeographic approach: 1) Distributional data: geographic distribution is continuous; 2) Population response data: unknown; 3) Phenotypic data: two morphological forms are recognized (Walker et al. 1986, Chivers et al. 1993); and 4) Genotypic data: preliminary genetic analyses on 116 Pacific white-sided dolphin collected in four areas (Baja California, the U.S. west coast, British Columbia/southeast Alaska, and offshore) do not support phylogeographic partitioning, though they are sufficiently differentiated to be treated as separate management units (Lux et al. 1997).

This limited information is not sufficient to define stock structure throughout the North Pacific beyond the generalization that a northern form occurs north of about 33°N from southern California along the coast to Alaska, a southern form ranges from about 36°N southward along the coasts of California and Baja California while the core of the population ranges across the North Pacific to Japan at latitudes south of 45°N. Data are lacking to determine whether this latter group might include animals from one or both of the coastal forms. Although the genetic data are unclear, management issues support the designation of two stocks; because the California and Oregon thresher shark/swordfish drift gillnet fishery (operating between 33°N and approximately 47°N) and, to a lesser extent, the groundfish and salmon fisheries in Alaska are known to interact with Pacific white-sided dolphins, two management stocks are recognized: 1) the California/Oregon/Washington stock, and 2) the North Pacific stock (Fig. 26). The California/Oregon/ Washington stock is reported separately in the Stock Assessment Reports for the Pacific Region.



**Figure 26.** Approximate distribution of Pacific white-sided dolphins in the eastern North Pacific (shaded area).

**POPULATION SIZE**

The most complete population abundance estimate for Pacific white-sided dolphins was calculated from line transect analyses applied to the 1987-90 central North Pacific marine mammal sightings survey data (Buckland et al. 1993). The Buckland et al. (1993) abundance estimate, 931,000 (CV = 0.90) animals, more closely reflects a range-wide estimate rather than one that can be applied to either of the two management stocks off the west coast of North America. Furthermore, Buckland et al. (1993) suggested that Pacific white-sided dolphins show strong vessel attraction but that a correction factor was not available to apply to the estimate. While the Buckland et al. (1993) abundance estimate is not considered appropriate to apply to the management stock in Alaskan waters, the portion of the estimate derived from sightings north of 45°N in the Gulf of Alaska can be used as the population estimate for this area (26,880). For comparison, Hobbs and Lerczak (1993) estimated 15,200 Pacific white-sided dolphins in the Gulf of Alaska based on a single sighting of 20 animals. Small cetacean aerial surveys in the Gulf of Alaska during

1997 sighted one group of 164 Pacific white-sided dolphins off Dixon entrance, while similar surveys in Bristol Bay in 1999 made 18 sightings of a school or parts thereof off Port Moller (R. Hobbs, NMFS-NMML, pers. comm.).

### **Minimum Population Estimate**

The minimum population estimate ( $N_{\text{MIN}}$ ) for this stock would be 26,880, based on the sum of abundance estimates for 4 separate  $5^\circ \times 5^\circ$  blocks north of  $45^\circ\text{N}$  ( $1,970+6,427+6,101+12,382 = 26,880$ ) reported in Buckland et al. (1993). This is considered a minimum estimate because the abundance of animals in a fifth  $5^\circ \times 5^\circ$  block (53,885) which straddled the boundary of the two coastal management stocks were not included in the estimate for the North Pacific stock and because much of the potential habitat for this stock was not surveyed between 1987 - 1990. However, because the abundance estimate used in this calculation is more than 8 years old, the minimum population estimate for this stock is unknown.

### **Current Population Trend**

At present, there is no reliable information on trends in abundance for this stock of Pacific white-sided dolphin.

### **CURRENT AND MAXIMUM NET PRODUCTIVITY RATES**

A reliable estimate of the maximum net productivity rate is not currently available for the North Pacific stock of Pacific white-sided dolphin. Recent life history analyses by Ferrero and Walker (1996) suggest a reproductive strategy consistent with the delphinid pattern on which the 4% cetacean maximum net productivity rate ( $R_{\text{MAX}}$ ) was based. Thus, it is recommended that the cetacean maximum net productivity rate ( $R_{\text{MAX}}$ ) of 4% be employed for this stock (Wade and Angliss 1997).

### **POTENTIAL BIOLOGICAL REMOVAL**

Under the 1994 reauthorized Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA), the potential biological removal (PBR) is defined as the product of the minimum population estimate, one-half the maximum theoretical net productivity rate, and a recovery factor:  $\text{PBR} = N_{\text{MIN}} \times 0.5R_{\text{MAX}} \times F_R$ . The recovery factor ( $F_R$ ) for this stock is 0.5, the value for cetacean stocks of unknown status (Wade and Angliss 1997). The estimate of abundance for Pacific white-sided dolphins is now more than 8 years old; Wade and Angliss (1997) recommend that abundance estimates older than 8 years no longer be used to calculate a PBR level. In addition, there is no corroborating evidence from recent surveys in Alaska that provide abundance estimates for a portion of the stock's range or any indication of the current status of this stock. Thus, the PBR for this stock is undetermined (NMFS 2005).

### **ANNUAL HUMAN-CAUSED MORTALITY AND SERIOUS INJURY**

#### **Fisheries Information**

Between 1978 and 1991, thousands of Pacific white-sided dolphins were killed annually incidental to high seas fisheries. However, these fisheries have not operated in the central North Pacific since 1991.

Until 2003, there were six different federally-regulated commercial fisheries in Alaska that could have interacted with Pacific white-sided dolphins. These fisheries were monitored for incidental mortality by fishery observers. As of 2003, changes in fishery definitions in the List of Fisheries have resulted in separating these six fisheries into 22 fisheries (69 FR 70094, 2 December 2004). This change does not represent a change in fishing effort, but provides managers with better information on the component of each fishery that is responsible for the incidental serious injury or mortality of marine mammal stocks in Alaska. There were no serious injuries or mortalities incidental to observed commercial fisheries reported between 2002 and 2006 (Perez 2006, Perez unpubl. ms).

The Prince William Sound salmon drift gillnet fishery was also monitored by observers in 1990 and 1991. In 1990, observers boarded 300 (57.3%) of the 524 vessels participating in that fishery, monitoring a total of 3,166 sets, or roughly 4% of the estimated number of sets made by the fleet (Wynne et al. 1991). In 1991, observers boarded 531 (86.9%) of the 611 registered vessels and monitored a total of 5,875 sets, or roughly 5% of the estimated sets made by the fleet (Wynne et al. 1992). No incidental takes of Pacific white-sided dolphins were recorded in the Cook Inlet salmon driftnet and setnet fisheries (1999-2000), the Kodiak Island salmon set gillnet fishery (2002 and 2005), and Yakutat salmon setnet fishery (2007 and 2008) by the Alaska Marine Mammal Observer Program, and Pacific white-sided dolphins were not among the species spotted in the area of operations (Manly et al. 2003; Manly 2006, 2007).

Note that no observers have been assigned to several of the gillnet fisheries that are known to interact with this stock, making the estimated mortality unreliable. However, because the stock size is large, it is unlikely that unreported mortalities from those fisheries would be significant.

#### **Subsistence/Native Harvest Information**

There are no reports of subsistence take of Pacific white-sided dolphins in Alaska.

#### **Other mortality**

From 2006-2010, there were no human-caused mortalities or serious injuries reported to the Alaska Region Stranding Program (NMFS Alaska Regional Office, unpublished data).

#### **STATUS OF STOCK**

Pacific white-sided dolphins are not listed as “depleted” under the MMPA or listed as “threatened” or “endangered” under the Endangered Species Act. The level of human-caused mortality and serious injury (0) is not known to exceed the PBR, which is undetermined as the most recent abundance estimate is more than 8 years old. Because the PBR for Pacific white-sided dolphin is undetermined, the level of annual U.S. commercial fishery-related mortality that can be considered insignificant and approaching zero mortality and serious injury rate is unknown. The North Pacific stock of Pacific white-sided dolphins is not classified as a strategic stock. Population trends and status of this stock relative to OSP are currently unknown.

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