

COASTAL PELAGIC SPECIES ADVISORY SUBPANEL COMMENTS ON
PACIFIC MACKEREL HARVEST GUIDELINE AND OTHER SPECIFICATIONS FOR 2001

The Coastal Pelagic Species Advisory Subpanel (CPSAS) held a joint meeting with the Coastal Pelagic Species Management Team (CPSMT) on May 11, 2001 to discuss the Pacific mackerel harvest guideline for the 2001-2002 season. This statement reflects decisions and recommendations for two issues regarding pacific mackerel: 1) the CPSMT recommended harvest guideline, and 2) allocation of the guideline.

2001-2001 Pacific Mackerel Harvest Guideline

The CPSAS and CPSMT had a lengthy discussion regarding the recommended harvest guideline of 13,837 mt for the 2001-2002 season. Most of the CPSAS members were surprised at the estimated decrease in biomass and resulting 33% decrease in the harvest guideline. The CPSAS was not privy to assessment results prior to the joint meeting so many of the subpanel members were shocked at the perceived decline in mackerel abundance. The majority of the CPSAS were not prepared to simply endorse the CPSMT's recommendation and proceed. The CPSAS agreed that while the maximum sustainable yield control rule for mackerel is set out in the fishery management plan, the mackerel assessment itself is limited in scope and is lacking additional data due to monetary constraints. The missing data include recruitment data and age composition data for the Ensenada, Mexico fishery. The CPSMT "guesstimated" that the results of the mackerel assessment have a +/- 40% accuracy. The CPSAS found this very troubling, especially following a season where the harvest guideline had been cut by over 50%, resulting in combined cuts of just under 70% in the last two years. Anecdotal evidence suggests mackerel are abundant and available to the traditional fishery. Fishery-dependant data also suggests mackerel are abundant and available to the traditional fishery as the fishery was closed on March 27th after having reached the 20,740 mt harvest guideline.

The CPSAS recommends the Council consider setting the 2001-2002 harvest guideline at a level consistent with the 2000-2001 season of 20,740 mt. There was hardship caused as a result of the 50% decrease in the 2000-2001 season. There will be increased hardships if a decrease of another 33% is enacted. The majority of the CPSAS does not believe there is adequate science to justify this additional cut. While the CPSAS understands the CPSMT has done the best they can with the information available to them, we would like the Council to consider the situation as outlined above and use their discretion when setting the 2001-2002 harvest guideline. Another approach would be to set the harvest guideline somewhere in between the CPSMT's recommendation and the previous year's quota so as to allocate the declines less drastically.

Allocation of 2001-2002 Harvest Guideline

The CPSMT and CPSAS spent the main part of their meeting discussing how to allocate the recommended harvest guideline. While the subpanel does not support the team's recommendation of 13,837 mt, it seemed most appropriate that the allocation discussion revolve around this potential number. During the 2000-2001 season there was no specific set aside allocated for incidental catch of mackerel. Mackerel is caught frequently as incidental catch in the sardine fishery. Due to the lack of foresight, after the directed mackerel fishery closed in March, fishers were allowed to only land up to 1 mt of incidentally caught mackerel with their sardine catch. This can and has created a serious problem as the sardine fishery can be severely curtailed due to the lack of incidental mackerel catch set-aside. For the 2001-2002 season the CPSAS would recommend that the allocation be set prior to the season to include a set-aside for incidental catch of mackerel in the sardine fishery. The recommendation by the CPSAS would hold true for either the CPSMT's recommended harvest guideline of 13,837 mt or a larger harvest guideline similar to the 2000-2001 season.

If the Council chooses to adopt a harvest guideline of 13,837 mt for the 2001-2002 season, then the CPSAS recommends allowing a directed fishery for 6,000 mt beginning in July. This leaves a set-aside of 7,837 mt to be caught incidentally throughout the season at a rate of up to 45% per directed landing of sardine. The landings should be monitored closely, and if it appears a large number of fish could be potentially left on the table, the CPSMT and CPSAS could recommend to the Council at their April meeting that they establish a directed fishery or mop-up fishery for the remaining mackerel at the end of the 2001-2002 season.