

SCIENTIFIC AND STATISTICAL COMMITTEE STATEMENT ON  
PACIFIC SARDINE HARVEST GUIDELINE FOR 2002

Dr. Ray Conser briefed the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) on the stock assessment results for Pacific sardine and the 2002 U.S. harvest guideline. The assessment model and data analysis are identical to those used in previous years. The analysis incorporates the most recent fishery and survey data.

The data shortcomings identified last year have not been rectified. The First Trinational Sardine Forum (U.S.A., Mexico, and Canada), which was convened in 2000, was not successful in building the coastwide database (British Columbia through Baja, California) needed for sardine stock assessment. Thus the only option available to the Coastal Pelagic Species Management Team (CPSMT) for 2002 was to update the previous assessment model, which is based on that portion of the sardine population off the southern half of California, and extrapolate the results to include Mexico and the northern areas. The Second Trinational Sardine Forum will be convened in San Diego during November 29-30, 2001. If successful, the data thus obtained will provide a basis for developing a new coastwide assessment in 2003. The SSC views the Forum as the most promising venue for the Trinational collaboration needed to improve the assessment, and encourages the U.S. state agencies (Washington, Oregon, and California), federal agencies, and the Council family (CPSMT, Coastal Pelagic Species Advisory Subpanel (CPSAS), SSC, and Council staff) to fully participate in the Forum. For now, the SSC recommends the current assessment be accepted, as it is based on the best available information.

A year ago the SSC recommended that a peer review (similar to the groundfish Stock Assessment Review (STAR) process) be scheduled for Pacific mackerel and Pacific sardine in early 2002. The CPSMT is optimistic that the upcoming Second Trinational Sardine Forum will be more successful than the 2000 Forum in assembling a coastwide data base. If progress is made, the SSC recommends the peer review that we requested last year be rescheduled for spring of 2003, so the new coastwide sardine assessment can be reviewed, in addition to the Pacific mackerel assessment.

The SSC notes that Pacific sardine is now, along with Pacific whiting, the most abundant fish resource off the West Coast; at one time sardine was the largest single-species fishery in the world. Yet the research program for supporting sardine assessment is seriously underfunded. The current fishery independent surveys are restricted to the southern half of California and only provide indices of sardine egg abundance and daily egg production. The aerial fish spotter index only covers the nearshore areas of the southern California Bight. The adult parameters used in recent biomass estimates are computed on the basis of biological data collected in 1994, at a time when the population was one-tenth of the 2002 biomass. The SSC strongly urges the National Marine Fisheries Service at both the regional and national levels to develop and fund a resource survey plan and budget with a specific time line, including ship time that will sample the sardine population over its range, with the objective of estimating spawning biomass and age composition of the sardine population.