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COASTAL PELAGIC SPECIES ADVISORY SUBPANEL REPORT ON
PACIFIC SARDINE STOCK ASSESSMENT AND HARVEST GUIDELINE FOR 2003

The Coastal Pelagic Species Advisory Subpanel (CPSAS) met October 8, 2002 in Long Beach, California. At the meeting, the CPSAS heard a presentation from Dr. Ray Conser reviewing the current Pacific sardine stock assessment and the recommended harvest guideline of 110,908 metric tons. The CPSAS unanimously agreed the stock assessment is as complete as the best available science and the current model allows. The CPSAS supports the recommended harvest guideline which is based on the formula defined in the Coastal Pelagic Species (CPS) Fishery Management Plan (FMP). The CPSAS is anxious to transition to the new model which will more completely incorporate fishery dependent and fishery independent data from the Pacific Northwest fisheries. Furthermore, the CPSAS voices unanimous support for the proposed coast wide survey and would recommend to the Council that they encourage National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) to fund that survey.

On the issue of allocation for the 2003 season, the CPSAS finds that language in the FMP and implementing regulations for Amendment 8 (the CPS FMP) published in the *Federal Register* are not clear on whether the annual allocation of sardine is a discretionary or mandatory action. There seems to be some flexibility in both the FMP language and the implementing regulations on this issue. If setting the annual allocation is a discretionary action, a majority of the CPSAS recommends to the Council that they recommend that NMFS not implement the two-thirds, one-third allocation system for the 2003 season. The majority of the CPSAS agreed that for 2003 the harvest guideline is of a sufficient amount that no one sector will be hurt by a coast-wide harvest guideline. While the CPSAS recognizes that a parallel process determining future allocation management for the sardine fishery is ongoing, it is likely that either a full FMP amendment or regulatory amendment will not be in effect prior to the 2003 season getting started in the Pacific Northwest. If the status quo allocation system is implemented again for the 2003 season, the fisheries in Washington, Oregon, and northern California will face the same shut-downs and economic hardships as they faced in 2002. A majority of the CPSAS wishes to avoid a repeat situation of what occurred in 2002 and encourages the Council to take whatever action necessary to avoid this same problem from occurring during the 2003 season.

A minority of the CPSAS recommends the Council exercise precaution at this time and not encourage further expansion of the sardine fishery in the Pacific Northwest until research is done on that segment of the stock to determine its relationship to the resource as a whole, in light of the following:

- The degree of uncertainty and lack of knowledge expressed in the current stock assessment. Assessment limitations include lack of understanding of stock structure and migration rates; further, current fishery independent data are limited to central and southern California.
- The finding that sardine population growth appears to have leveled off. Precaution is important at this time, considering the natural decline of the resource in cold-water cycles.
- The fact that scientists do not know the impact of increasing the harvest of large fish in the Pacific Northwest and what harm, if any, that will cause to the biomass.

PFMC
10/16/02