

SCIENTIFIC AND STATISTICAL COMMITTEE REPORT ON PACIFIC SARDINE
STOCK ASSESSMENT AND HARVEST GUIDELINE FOR 2004

Dr. Ramon Conser presented the results of the Pacific sardine stock assessment and the U.S. harvest guideline (HG) for 2004. The assessment considers Pacific sardine from Baja California to British Columbia, and estimates the biomass of animals aged one and older in this region. The assessment model and data analysis are similar to those used in previous years. The model is designed around indices of abundance for central and southern California and accounts for catches off Oregon, Washington, and Canada by allowing for migration from central and southern California to the northern areas. The analysis included the most recent fishery and survey data. The sardine stock biomass on July 1, 2003 was estimated to be approximately one million mt, and the recommended 2004 HG is 122,747 mt. This HG is higher than the 2003 HG of 110,908 mt because two of three 2003 indices are higher than those for 2002. The SSC endorses the use of this HG of 122,747 mt for the 2004 Pacific sardine fishery.

The catch by the U.S. is not likely to reach the harvest guideline in the short-term. However, if the U.S. catch increases, and Mexico and Canada continue to harvest at current levels, the total mortality on the stock may exceed that expected under the maximum sustainable yield (MSY) control rule.

A new sardine model and assessment are being developed. This revised assessment will consider landings and catch-at-age data as well as the results of fishery-independent surveys for Mexico, California, Oregon, Washington, and Canada. A stock assessment review (STAR) panel to review this model is currently planned for May 2004. However, the Coastal Pelagic Species Management Team (CPSMT) recommends that this STAR panel occur during the week of June 21, 2004. The SSC will participate in the STAR panel through its coastal pelagics species subcommittee according to the Terms of Reference for CPS STAR panels developed during 2003. Further, because the SSC CPS Subcommittee chairmanship is in transition, the SSC requests that the NMFS Southwest Fisheries Science Center provide assistance in providing reviewers and logistical support for this STAR panel meeting.

The SSC notes that a significant source of uncertainty in the Pacific sardine assessment is the sparseness of the data for Mexico and the Pacific northwest. In this regard, it strongly supports the increased collaboration among scientists and industry representatives from Mexico, the U.S., and Canada.