

COASTAL PELAGIC SPECIES MANAGEMENT TEAM REPORT ON
PACIFIC SARDINE STOCK ASSESSMENT AND HARVEST GUIDELINE FOR 2004

The Coastal Pelagic Species Management Team (CPSMT) recently met with Dr. Ray Conser, National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) to review results from the latest Pacific sardine stock assessment, which will be used to set a harvest guideline for the 2004 season. The CPSMT concurs with the stock assessment team's analyses, and recommends the Council adopt a harvest guideline of 122,747 mt for the 2004 season.

The CPSMT discussed planning for a stock assessment review (STAR) Panel in Spring 2004. At the STAR Panel, the Pacific sardine and Pacific mackerel stock assessment data and models will be reviewed. The results would be available for management of the 2005 sardine fishery and the 2005-2006 Pacific mackerel fishery. Currently, the schedule calls for a May 2004 meeting. However, because of conflicting meetings during May, the CPSMT recommends the STAR Panel be held the week of June 21 in La Jolla, California at the NMFS-Southwest Fisheries Science Center facility. Pending Council approval of this recommendation, tentative arrangements have been made to secure meeting space the week of June 21.

While the CPSMT considers the current sardine assessment to be based on the best available information, more data on this species are clearly needed, particularly, regarding biology and distribution habits, both within year and year-to-year. That is, development of an improved, coastwide sardine assessment model will depend on gathering fishery-dependent and fishery-independent data for the offshore and northern portions of the stock. In this context, the initial phase of a proposed, long-term survey off the Pacific Northwest was completed in July 2003. This survey focuses on obtaining biological data from adult sardines and conducting exploratory evaluations of the northern extent of egg and larval distribution. Data from this research cruise will be summarized and presented at the upcoming STAR meeting in 2004. The information will facilitate model development, e.g., the stock structure assumptions used in the overall modeling work. The next phase of the research project is scheduled for February 2004. Continuation of such research and data collection initiatives is critical to the development of stock assessment models appropriate to Pacific sardine.

Fishery sampling by the states of Oregon and Washington is ongoing, but fishery-independent data for the Pacific Northwest region are sparse. More recently, budget constraints have limited the ability of Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife to employ at-sea observers for the sardine fishery. While Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife continues to employ at-sea observers, budget limitations are also affecting their management programs. In California, budget constraints have severely impacted staffing levels and support of the fishery sampling program. The CPSMT recommends the Council urge state and federal management agencies and the fishing industry to actively pursue funding, which will be vital to improving the sardine assessment and future management of the coastwide sardine fishery.

Beyond U.S. waters, Mexican harvest of CPS has rapidly increased in recent years. To ensure fishery sustainability, this increased activity in Mexican CPS fisheries necessitates close coordination

of both fishery management and science. This should include, at the very least, the availability of complete Mexican catch statistics for inclusion in CPS assessment models. The CPSMT recommends the Council and NMFS continue to pursue cooperative arrangements with Mexican fishery management agencies.

One very positive example of collaboration among scientists and industry representatives from Mexico, the U.S., and Canada (British Columbia) has been the series of Tri-National Sardine Forum meetings. The next Sardine Forum is scheduled for December 4-5, 2003 in San Pedro, California. The Sardine Forum provides an opportunity for industry representatives and fishery scientists from the three nations to share information on the status of their respective fisheries, participate in workshops to improve scientific methods, and garner the perspective of the industry representatives about current fishery trends and the concerns of industry. The CPSMT recommends the Council continue their involvement in the Sardine Forum.

PFMC
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